Assessment of Children in Early Childhood Centres

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Assessment of Children in Early Childhood Centres

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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

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Assessment of infants and young children has been an area where there have been many difficulties because of the special nature of learning in these early years. Infants and young children *cannot demonstrate how much they know or understand through formal or informal measures involving tasks and standardised tests.* (Irwin and Bushnell, 1980, in Wortham, 1990: 89.)

Young children cannot use language well enough to explain themselves therefore a different means of assessment is needed.

Educators of young children have been challenged by the present Government's policy calling for accountability to show that valuable learning is taking place. As no national systematic assessment procedures have been in place, responses have been varied with little consistency in approaches.

Following the report from Assessment for Better Learning (Ministry of Education, 1989), primary schools and secondary schools have been given a focus for using assessment to promote learning and for reporting information to parents about their children's progress.

Research has not yet taken place to determine the focus or uses to which assessment will be put in early childhood.

This study focused on gathering information about what assessment of children is currently taking place in kindergartens and childcare centres. The information was obtained by questionnaires, structured interviews and an observation exercise.

Questionnaires were used to gather information on assessment practices in a large number of kindergartens and childcare centres from throughout New Zealand. This approach also allowed a diversity of centres to be used including urban and rural centres, two and three teacher kindergartens, full

childcare, sessional care and casual care as well as large and small centres. Children from a diversity of ethnic groups were represented from within the range of centres used. From this sample many differing approaches to assessment were examined.

Structured interviews were used with a smaller number of centres to give some staff the opportunity to elaborate on the information provided in the questionnaire. Those interviewed were given the opportunity to justify why they use the approaches and methods of assessment that they practice.

The observation exercise provided data on who is observed in the daily work within centres and looked at the areas of development that these observations covered. Observations, as one means of assessment, were able to be put into perspective along with the other methods used for assessing young children.

By understanding more about how, when and why young children are assessed and by knowing the use to which assessment information is put, we will have a clearer picture about the assessment practices being carried out in kindergartens and childcare centres within New Zealand.

It is apparent from the literature that assessment only became an important issue in early childhood education in New Zealand in recent years. There are still concerns regarding assessment, and a fear that it may lead to the development of harmful practices within early childhood programmes. Examples of both harmful practices and beneficial developments are evident when overseas trends are examined.

By combining the results of this present study with the information from the international literature, the benefits of assessment will be highlighted and the components needed to carry out assessment in a positive way will be

emphasised. The special needs for assessment relevant to the diversity of early childhood centres found within New Zealand can be identified. This information could then be used to develop general principles pertaining to sound assessment practices and specific recommendations.

If early childhood educators have a clear set of guidelines on assessment, as found in the primary and secondary sector, they too will be able to work confidently, reflect upon and analyse their work with young children. Teachers will be able to communicate about children's strengths with colleagues, parents/whanau and the community, so they can all work co-operatively for the good of each child.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

(a) Assessment takes a new direction

In recent years assessment has taken a new direction and focus. With the
introduction of new government policies [Department of Education, 1989;
Ministry of Education, 1990; Ministerial Working Party, 1990; Ministry of
Education, 1991a] and the resulting debate on the issue of accountability, a
significant outcome has been ... *the call from governments for closer monitoring of
their education systems and more effective assessment of educational performance and
outcomes and how these compare internationally* [Irving, 1991a: 1].
Accountability was to cover two distinct elements of assessment, one
involved the monitoring of the education system while the other covered the
assessment of student performance [Irving, 1991a].

When discussing the Achievement Initiative [Ministry of Education, 1991a]
Codd, McAlpine and Poskitt [1991] pointed out the tension between
assessment that aims to improve learning in individuals, and assessment used
for centralised control and accountability. They described the tension
between educational assessment essential to effective classroom practice and
political assessment concerned with achievement standards and national
monitoring.

The policy documents put out by the Ministry did not give directives for
assessment in the early childhood sector. At this time early childhood
educators were unclear as to whether they would be included in closer
monitoring and assessment of educational performance. When the following
statements on national monitoring were made which clearly showed that the
focus would not be on national monitoring in the early years, early childhood
staff assumed that they would not be involved. *In the New Zealand context*

there is good information and experience, well supported by overseas and New Zealand research which suggests that national performance testing below age 7, and possibly 8, would be too early [Irving, 1991b: 8].

This left the second element of assessment, that of educational performance to be looked at. The focus on educational performance was on the individual with its aim being to improve teaching and learning [Department of Education, 1989]. The early childhood sector believed they would be included in this second element of assessment, however it was still unclear how this would be carried out in the early childhood setting.

The first call specifically for assessment of children in early childhood came in the Approved Charter Document [Ministry of Education, 1990: 10] which stated ... *staff will regularly observe and assess children's developmental stages and needs and plan and evaluate the programme accordingly. And ... there will be an established procedure enabling parents/whanau to find out about their children.*

It is not known how early childhood teachers in New Zealand responded to this call to carry out assessment of children. Recommendations were made that this needed to be investigated [Ministerial Working Party, 1990].

It has been argued that there is a lack of sufficiently rigorous and comprehensive procedures and practices for assessment or for reporting to parents in the primary sector [Irving, 1991a]. Therefore it is possible that the same situation applies in the early childhood sector.

Although current assessment practices for young children have not been reported in New Zealand, a study of programme planning and evaluation may be of relevance. Meade [1985] concluded that some children find themselves in a far from ideal learning environment because many staff are

too haphazard in their programme planning and evaluation. It will be interesting to see if the charter requirements [Ministry of Education, 1990] have made a difference to the way planning and evaluation take place.

Now that the charter has been in place for three years, it is time to consider what is happening regarding assessment of children. If necessary appropriate procedures and practices can be developed to enable effective assessment of children to be carried out. Although early childhood educators firmly believe that valuable learning takes place in their centres, they have now been challenged to ... *satisfy themselves as well as parents, the community they serve and the funding agencies, that early childhood centres are having a favourable effect on children* [Smith, 1989: 39].

Everyone who teaches has a professional obligation to assess performance. It is necessary to monitor the effectiveness of teaching as well as to inform learners and others of the success of the learning [McGaw, 1988]. Bell and Harris [1990] also see assessment as essential to education because it assists the learning process by providing feedback to learners and teachers. It also facilitates quality assurance and control and provides a means by which education can be attuned to the needs of the individual and society.

In Tomorrow's standards: The Report of the Working Party on Assessment for Better Learning [Ministerial Working Party, 1990: 7], found that there was widespread agreement that ... *where the objective of the assessment of children is improved teaching and learning, and where this is part of the learning cycle, it could have strong positive influences on the quality of learning.* Because of this many educators have needed to look at how they will include assessment in the planning cycle of their work with young children and their families. As partnership with parents is valued staff will need to listen to what parents

want and clearly articulate to family and whanau what they believe are the important things about early childhood care and education to see that children benefit from assessment [Carr, 1989].

With the current change in beliefs which sees the possibility of assessment being used to bring about improved learning and teaching, teachers have needed to rethink their beliefs and explore ways available for assessing children in this positive way. The new broadened view which sees assessment as having a positive influence on the quality of learning highlights the use of assessment as part of the process of working with children rather than as an end product or measure. It is necessary for teachers to recognise the importance of children learning in an interactive way and for the assessment procedure to be a part of this learning process rather than a separate exercise [Department of Education, 1989].

The new direction of assessment challenges teachers to view assessment positively as a way to :
(i)   improve teaching and learning
(ii) promote learning
(iii) show others that valuable learning is taking place,
(iv) be a natural part of the process of working with young children, and
(v)   share information with parents / whanau and the community.

(b) Concerns about assessment

Although the many important benefits of assessment have been highlighted over recent years there has been a history of concerns and worries regarding assessment of young children. There are also fears that assessment will lead to inappropriate practices in early childhood.

One major concern has been that testing will be introduced to New Zealand. It has been criticised by the National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC and NAECS/SDE, 1991] on the basis that:

(a) tests are being used for purposes other than for which they have been designed

(b) tests have led to the focus on academic skills too early, and inappropriate ways of teaching being adopted

(c) tests produce practices harmful to young children as people teach to a test

(d) the predictive validity of assessment instruments for young children is extremely low

(e) labelling and categorising children can be a self fulfilling prophecy

(f) the pressure for accountability has had a conservative and restrictive impact on early childhood education.

Problems with lack of validity and reliability in tests have also been raised along with the problem of instruction becoming distorted as the focus of teaching turns to raising the test score [Shepard, 1989]. In the United States salaries and promotions are being based on test scores, and standardised tests are being criticised for not covering the full range of instructional objectives [Shepard, 1989]. Katz [1985] also believes that important content areas are omitted from tests such as social competence, self esteem and creativity. Test construction has been constrained by the emphasis on basic skills, limiting the "height" as well as the depth and breadth of the content [Shepard, 1989]. As well as concerns arising as a result of the tests themselves there are concerns about what is being measured and the use to which the information is put. At times test scores have had the power to shape a young child's future. Numerous child development experts have warned of the dangers of utilising developmental screening and readiness tests to determine the academic placement of young children [Meisels and Anastasiow, 1982; Meisels, 1988; in Raver and Zigler, 1991].

Educators have become more and more proficient at developing precise measuring instruments. However, what is being measured and what use is being made of the information from tests does not seem to be well advanced [Rowley and MacPherson, 1983]. Careful consideration therefore needs to be given as to what is being measured and the use to which the information is being put.

As well as fears about placement or categorisation and labelling there has been the concern that assessment information will be used to make judgments or for making comparisons between children. There is a strong consensus among educators ... *that assessment for judgmental and comparative purposes can be very damaging* [Department of Education, 1989: 4].

Kamii [1990] opposes the use of achievement tests as they are not valid measures of accountability. She is also concerned about them producing practices harmful to young children's development. Kamii [1990] believes that test driven instruction would not dominate if more people were educated about the inappropriateness of achievement tests. Therefore teachers need to study how children learn and insist on providing what is appropriate for young children's development.

There have been concerns that assessment will change the direction or shape the curriculum. Learning and the process of learning must not be widely influenced by what is assessed and the process of assessment [Barker, 1991]. The measurement of learning must not determine the learning itself. The New Zealand Qualifications Authority [1991] also stresses the importance of the content of what is learnt and the process of learning not being unduly influenced by what is assessed and the process of assessment. They emphasise the importance of the outcome of any programme being defined

before the programme can be constructed. The Qualifications Authority asks for achievement and valid assessment of achievement to be given a high profile in curriculum development. The relationship between curriculum development and assessment has again been given attention.

In a study of assessment practices in primary schools [Black, Devine and Turner, 1989] it appeared that teachers had discarded formal assessment. They equated assessment with written tests which they saw as incompatible with the present philosophy of education. No system has yet been developed to take its place.

Early childhood educators are urged to retain confidence in children's ability to choose activities that are appropriate to their own learning and abilities, rather than provide a preplanned, adult-controlled style of education with carefully graded objectives where achievement can be evaluated by quantitative testing [Carr and Claxton, 1989]. Kennedy [1991: 5] also encourages those in early childhood to retain a developmental approach and *... create learners who want to know, not children who know what we want.* The importance of children being oriented towards learning goals rather than performance goals was also stressed by Dweck [1986].

As well as concerns that assessment will drive the curriculum, there are concerns that practices will be introduced that focus on academic skills too early and in inappropriate ways [Bredekamp, 1989; Kamii, 1990]. Educators are concerned that appropriate goals for early childhood will be lost at the expense of other outcomes that are more easily measurable.

Australia's pattern of interest in assessment in early childhood has taken a similar direction to New Zealand with a moving away from the formal testing as found in the United States, and with a current move towards assessing children as part of the learning process. In Victoria the Early

Childhood Curriculum Guidelines 3-5 Years [MacNaughton *et al* , 1991]
recognise the importance of children having general competence socially,
physically, emotionally and intellectually. The curriculum guidelines
encourage teachers to look at children holistically rather than focussing on
specific abilities. General competence is regarded as being more important
for successful learning in preparation for school rather than specific abilities
such as being able to recite colours, write their name or tie shoelaces
[MacNaughton *et al*, 1991]. It is claimed that children learn skills more
effectively through play than through formalised instruction [Bredekamp,
1989]. The Victorian Early Childhood Curriculum Guidelines stress that
formalised instruction in specific skills at an early age can be detrimental to
children's future learning.

The Assessment for Better Learning document [Department of Education,
1989] reminds us that many countries have been down a similar track before
New Zealand in reviewing assessment. It is important to remember that
there are "significant differences" between New Zealand's education system
and those of other countries. This must be taken into account when
evaluating the assessment procedures of others. The ABLE document takes a
critical view of recent developments in Britain, suggesting that they may be
attempting to serve too many purposes in assessing the national system,
schools and students.

New Zealand has the opportunity to learn from the mistakes and
developments of others, but also to keep in mind the diversity and
uniqueness of the early childhood services it offers.

(c) What is assessment?

The multifaceted nature of assessment becomes apparent when comparing the following definitions of assessment. Some highlight the value or use of assessment while others point out important aspects of the process.

The value and uses of assessment

Assessment and evaluation are essential to education. They assist the learning process by providing feedback to "learners" and "teachers" and allow education to be attuned to the needs of individuals and society [Bell and Harris, 1990].

Assessment is measuring or making professional observations on the extent or quality of performance. It can be used for two main purposes - to guide the development and improvement of the educational process [for instance, by identifying strengths and areas which require further attention], and to describe performance or achievement at a particular point in time [Department of Education, 1989: 5].

Important aspects of the process of assessment

Assessment is the process in which various strategies are used to evaluate child learning and development and it must include evaluation of the cultural, social and physical context within which learning and development occur [Ballard, 1991]. The importance of using ecological assessment which involves taking data across environments, persons, curricular areas and instructional conditions to evaluate the variety of responses under varying circumstances is also stressed [Bradley and Howe, 1980].

Assessment is the process of observing, recording and otherwise documenting the work children do and how they do it, as a basis for a variety of educational decisions that affect the child. Assessment is integral to curriculum and instruction. It is used:

1. *to plan for individuals and groups and for communicating with parents*
2. *to identify children who may be in need of specialised services or intervention, and*
3. *to evaluate how well the program is meeting its goals.*

[NAEYC and NAECS / SDE, 1991: 32].

While some definitions focused on important aspects of the process of assessment others concentrated on its use or purpose. By combining the definitions many special benefits of assessment and important elements of the process can be noted.

1. Assessment is essential for good teaching as it assists both teachers and learners.
2. Assessment covers the extent and quality of learning.
3. Assessment can be used to guide development and improve the educational process as well as provide information from which to describe performance.
4. Assessment allows individual needs to be catered for and community needs to be taken into consideration.
5. Content goals and learning processes can be evaluated.
6. The process of assessment requires various strategies to be used.
7. Assessment needs to include all contexts within which development and learning occurs.
8. Assessment involves the regular use of a variety of people, places and conditions.

(d) Who benefits from assessment?

It is hard to justify assessment which has no benefits. However often little thought is given to the benefits which accrue from assessment [Crooks, 1991]. Children, teachers, parents/whanau and the community can all benefit from sound assessment. Harlen [1982] recognised four main benefits of assessment in early childhood:

1. To cater for and promote the learning of **all children.**
2. **To help teachers** in their understanding of children, and to assist the planning to cater for the specific needs and interests of individuals.
3. To share information with **parents** about their child's interests, abilities and progress.
4. To be able to show **the community** that valuable learning is taking place in early childhood by providing specific information on children's learning.

Assessment will benefit children if it results in a developmentally appropriate programme being provided based on the child's interests, strengths and abilities. Good curriculum needs to be individually appropriate for the needs and interests of children. Teachers need to design curriculum by observing, thinking, planning and putting many different skills and information together. Since the curriculum is developed for each individual, its effectiveness must be identified and assessed individually [Wilson, 1990].

Children can also benefit from assessment where discrepancies between the child's behaviour and "accepted" developmental norms suggest further investigation or perhaps referral to a specialist agency is warranted. Assessment takes place to see if young children are in good health, then to see if development is progressing normally. When problems are detected plans are made to help the child and facilitate the child's development to help her achieve her full potential [Beaty, 1986]. When discussing

requirements for remediation Ballard [1987] suggests that the results of assessment should maximise the chances of effective remediation for each child. They should be useful and relevant for effective programming and data must be communicated in terms that reflect optimism for the child's learning.

All assessment should benefit the child in some way. Assessment information can be used for individual programme planning and can be shared with parents and whanau in such a way that all can work together for the good of the child.

Early childhood professionals have ... *neglected or shunned* ... assessment for individual children. It is necessary to make informed decisions about what are interesting, challenging and developmentally appropriate experiences for all children in centres [Henricksen, 1992: 51].

Teachers also stand to benefit from sound assessment.

Assessment benefits teachers because in the process they come to know the child in a systematic and comprehensive way which will allow them to plan a programme based on appropriate experiences for individual children. Carr [1989] notes that the primary purpose of assessment is for staff to plan and evaluate the programme.

The NAEYC [1988] favours ongoing assessment of children's development and learning as essential for appropriate curriculum planning and individualising instruction. Teachers must be accountable for providing high quality instruction and for adapting it to suit individual needs.

It is important to recognise the value of assessment and the link between assessment and learning ... *enlightened teachers value the way that evaluation is*

integral to learning and teaching cycles. More commonly, however, teachers do not perceive the vital link between assessment and achievement and fill in forms in booklets for reasons of accountability [Codd, McAlpine and Poskitt, 1991: 31].

Observation needs to be seen as a primary tool for preschool teachers, as it can provide an input to help formulate goals and select appropriate teaching procedures for working with a specific child [Teale, Hiebert and Chittendon, 1987 in Wortham, 1990]. Teachers must learn how to design and use informal measures of assessment for them to be effective in evaluation and instructional planning. Observation, like other informal strategies, requires informed, well prepared teachers who will use it effectively [Wortham, 1990]. By using assessment information well teachers can be helped to plan for and provide an appropriate curriculum for all individuals.

As well as being beneficial to children and teachers, assessment is important to parents.

Teachers in early childhood need to understand the important role of parents as the primary caregivers of their children and need to include families in the assessment process.

The New Zealand Childcare Association [1987] in their conference affirmed that parents have the right to honest and objective information about their child's programme, development and routines in the centre. It is now a requirement of Chartered Early Childhood Centres in New Zealand to inform parents about their child's day and progress [Ministry of Education, 1990]. Ultimately it is the teacher's responsibility to show sensitivity to their relations with parents, using their professionalism to link the two environments [Bruce, 1987].

Recommendations were made about reporting to parents within the primary sector saying that it should be formal and informal, oral and in writing. It should be a concise appraisal of cumulative records, presented in clear simple language, brief and constructive, and easily understood by parents [Ministerial Working Party, 1990]. No guidelines have yet been formulated for appropriate practices relating to reporting to parents of children from the early childhood sector. However as the nature of learning is different at this early age it is suggested that the process of assessment and process of reporting to parents will also need to differ.

In a study of assessment The Scottish Council for Research in Education [1988] asked parents what information they wanted from the assessment of their children. Parents wanted both cognitive and non-cognitive areas addressed. Under non-cognitive they wanted factors influencing performance and general development including:
- information about attitudes [effort, interest and co-operation]
- information about personality [shyness, friendliness]
- information about behaviour [conformity etc.].

Parents were looking for something that was individual. Most parents saw school as partners in the total education of their children and not merely institutions for imparting knowledge and skills [Dockrell, 1988]. This study related to the Scottish education system in the primary years. However it is important to find out from early childhood parents in New Zealand what they would like as a form of assessment and reporting for their children.

Teachers in early childhood need to understand the importance of including families in the assessment process and recognise the value in reporting information in a way that is beneficial to the child. Teachers also need to be able to show the community that valuable learning is taking place in early childhood.

Confident teachers should have the ability to communicate children's strengths to colleagues, the child's family and those in the wider community, to explain effectively what they are doing and to gain external cooperation [Bruce, 1987]. Teachers need to be able to reflect accurately on what they are actually doing and achieving, as well as on what they hope and intend to achieve. They also need professional knowledge to enable them to articulate their philosophy [Carr and Claxton, 1989]. The accountability of showing that valuable learning is taking place in early childhood has been emphasised so that the wider community can contribute to the education of its children.

Recent research [Wiley and Smith, 1992] has shown that there is still a reluctance to pass on information from early childhood centres to schools. When looking at assessment and reporting practices they found that junior school teachers took an ambivalent attitude to cumulative individual records on children. Teachers sometimes sought information about behaviour, attitudes and achievements from early childhood colleagues. On the other hand, they did not want to prejudge a child or prejudice the next teacher in their relationship with a child [Wiley and Smith, 1992].

Similar findings came from the survey of school entry practices [Thackery, Syme and Hendry, 1992: 18] ... *in most instances, information on a child's experiences before coming to school was retained in the teacher's head but not formally recorded.* Teachers showed a concern for the ethics of collecting information, and were careful about confidentiality. They did not want to label or prejudge children.

There seems to be agreement that early childhood educators need to inform others from the wider community about the valuable learning that takes place in early childhood, showing that assessment procedures are based on clear educational principles. Early childhood centres need to satisfy themselves, the parents and community they serve and the funding agencies that they

have a favourable effect on children [Smith, 1989]. The sharing of information upon the child's entry to school remains an unresolved issue because there are still concerns over confidentiality and the labelling of children. Many teachers prefer to make their own assessment of children.

(e) Principles and guidelines for assessment to be beneficial to children, teachers, parents/whanau and the community

1. The interests of the students shall be paramount

Principle One from Tomorrow's Standards [Ministerial Working Party, 1990: 8]. The purpose of all assessment must be to benefit children's future learning. Assessment has a critical role in systematically evaluating the progress and learning needs of individual children [Broadfoot *et al*, 1991]. Teachers and caregivers need to know the importance of assessing children's abilities and the importance of socio-cultural background for planning experiences for all individuals.

It is suggested that teachers need to:
- observe, record and assess young children's behaviour for the purpose of planning appropriate programmes, environments and interactions
- develop and implement an integrated curriculum that focuses on children's developmental needs and interests; incorporating culturally valued contents and background experiences
- assist other professionals in developing and implementing individual educational plans for young children with special needs
- adapt the curriculum to meet the needs of all children, including those who may be gifted, or have a special need.

[adapted from ATE and NAEYC, 1991]

The important role of assessment as a means of working with others in gathering information, and using it to plan to meet the specific needs of individuals has been outlined. If people work together in using assessment

procedures to evaluate progress and learning and then use the information to cater for the needs and interests of all individuals then the interest of the children will be paramount in the assessment process. Currently an important focus on student achievement is found in the government's Achievement Initiative Policy [Ministry of Education, 1991a]. It is being developed in ways that acknowledge:

- that individuals learn at different rates, at different stages, and in different ways

- that sound learning builds on the learner's current knowledge and previous experience

- that some students need extra help at stages of their schooling,

- that the prime role of classroom assessment is to improve learning,

- that most school classes include learners with a range of achievement and needs,

- that classroom teachers must be given professional freedom and trust to take into account the particular needs of their students.

[Ministry of Education, 1991a]. The focus of this policy related to primary schools however many of the ideas acknowledged are also very relevant to early childhood.

Although there is disagreement about what students should achieve and debate about how goals should be reached most people in education agree that a prime goal of our education system is the best possible educational achievement for all students [Ministry of Education, 1991b]. Assessment recognises individual diversity of learners and allows for differing styles and rates of learning [NAEYC and NAECS/SDE, 1991].

Te Whariki: National Early Childhood Curriculum Guidelines, Draft [Carr and May, 1992] states that assessment needs to provide useful information so that adults can use it to improve the curriculum. It should build on special strengths and talents and contribute to children's sense of self worth.

Educators need to see the importance of assessment being used to promote the learning of all children, and put into place mechanisms that will support teachers to carry out this vital component of their work. *Teachers need accurate measures of their students' capabilities and achievements in order to provide appropriate learning challenges* [Codd, McAlpine and Poskitt 1991: 31].

2. *Assessment needs to be an integral and ongoing part of the teaching and learning process.*

[Combined Colleges of Education Assessment Working Party, 1991: 2]. Teachers need to be clear about the importance of children learning in an interactive way, and for the assessment procedure to be seen as a part of the process of working with young children, not as a separate exercise. Assessment needs to be directly related to the goals, objectives and content of the programme. Teachers are reminded about how children learn and the importance of using this as a starting point for both curriculum and assessment. *Thinking in young children is directly tied to their interactions with people and materials. Young children learn best and most by actively exploring their environment, using hands-on material in building upon their natural curiosity and desire to make sense of the world around them* [Kamii, 1990: 35].

It is suggested that curriculum content and assessment should reflect ideals such as personal autonomy, decision making, equality and social justice. It needs to be culturally salient, locally relevant and meaningful in the context of a specific community [NAEYC and NAECS/SDE, 1991]. They suggest that an interactive process is needed where children feel safe and secure, construct their own knowledge and learn through social interaction.

Children are continually changing in their early years therefore the assessment needs to be ongoing. "... *young children develop rapidly and their level of development changes continually. By observing frequently, teachers can track the child's development and respond to changes and advances in development, with new opportunities and challenges*" [Wortham, 1990: 90].

Ballard [1987] points out the need for assessment to be based on an adequate sampling of behaviour. He believes that observation of a child's behaviour on a single occasion may not be representative of the child's performance at other times or in other settings. This idea is supported by the NAEYC and NAECS/SDE [1991] who state that regular, periodic observation is needed. The observer should know how to use observation to gather data and should have a background knowledge of child development and learning so they can provide experiences that will further the child's development [Wortham, 1990]. Ballard [1987] agrees that assessment of performance on a single occasion is generally a poor predictor of future behaviour for both non-handicapped and handicapped individuals and cannot be seen as an accurate estimate of a child's present or eventual performance on the tasks in question. Assessment should therefore involve repeated measures and be ecologically valid [Ballard, 1987]. An ecological approach stresses the complex interrelationships and interdependencies between children and their environments [Gump, 1975; Willems, 1974 in Ballard, 1987]. The NAEYC and NAECS/SDE [1991] concur that assessment should reflect ongoing typical activities of children and that assessment relies on demonstrated performance during real activities.

Teachers are required to assess all the time to be effective. More than that, they are required to evaluate as a consequence. Stressing assessment as an end product diminishes the importance of more effective professional decision-making that occurs during daily assessment and feedback. A recommendation was made that assessment be an integral part of the learning

cycle and be aimed at enhancing the teaching-learning process [Combined Colleges of Education Working Party on Assessment, 1991]. The importance of teaching and assessment being closely related in the learning process and the need for assessment to be conducted progressively and to cover a variety of situations is recommended [NZQA, 1990].

Assessment needs to consider cultural context and the special needs of "Te Iwi Maori O Aoteoroa" need to be considered in the process and reporting of assessment [Combined Colleges of Education Working Party on Assessment, 1991].

3. *Assessment and evaluation will reflect the aims and goals of the curriculum.*
[Carr and May, 1992: 103].

There are concerns that the curriculum will be added to for assessment purposes rather than additions being made based on sound principles. Crooks (1988) warns of the dangers of attempting to squeeze too much into the curriculum and then endeavour to assess it frequently. If we do this we are only further promoting surface learning and actually **diminishing** real learning.

In a submission on National Curriculum by the Education Policy Group, Department of Education, Massey University [1991] it was argued that ... *"fragmentation of the curriculum into a host of specific learning outcomes will inevitably lead to a narrowing of context to conform with predetermined assessment requirements. This approach is likely to lead to a very limiting conception of objectives which overlook important learning experiences related to critical and creative thinking"* [in Codd, McAlpine and Poskitt, 1991: 18]. This same concern is present within the early childhood sector where staff are worried that assessment will not reflect the value placed on processes in learning and at the same time will not contain clearly defined curriculum objectives for individuals.

Carr and May [1991] when looking at the emphasis to be placed on process and content of the curriculum suggested that the curriculum guidelines "....
might contemplate a two-way matrix: areas of experience and learning and skills and knowledge attached to them on one axis, learning strategies and attitudes [or developmental principles on the other" [Carr and May, 1991: 11].

It would seem appropriate that assessment follow similar lines to curriculum as the two will become a joint process of working with children with the aim of both to promote the learning of individuals. Assessment therefore will need to reflect experience, learning, skills and knowledge as well as learning strategies and attitudes.

It is suggested that there is a need for formative and summative assessment with a balance between the experiences children have and the activities they are involved in, and their output - the evidence in terms of work done [Bruce, 1987]. She suggests that the emphasis should be on children's progress and whether the learning environment is challenging the child and planning should take place beginning with what the child can manage. The starting point clearly needs to be "where the child is at". The NAEYC and NAECS/SDE [1991], in their guidelines for appropriate assessment say that assessment needs to show what children can do independently as well as what they can do with assistance. This clearly reflects the role of assessment in recognising exactly what a child can do as a basis from which to plan curriculum to promote specific development accordingly.

4. *Assessment should reflect children's development and learning in all domains.*

[NAEYC and NAECS / SDE, 1991].

Ballard [1987] says the purpose of educational assessment is to obtain a description of the child's learning and development in terms of cognitive, social, emotional, academic or other variables. He points out the need to look at meaningful data in terms of the child's real life experiences and needs including recognition of cultural background and experience.

A major purpose of observing children is to evaluate development and determine the child's progress in physical, cognitive, social or emotional development. The observer needs background information on how children develop and learn so they can convert the child's behaviours into information that can be used to understand the child's level of development and the need for experiences that will further that development [Wortham, 1990]. It has been identified that, in the past, staff within early childhood have been hesitant about promoting cognitive development [Meade, 1991]. She suggests that there is a need for a more skillful approach to handling children's growth in the cognitive area. An awareness of some valuable directives for cognitive development, as well as social, language and physical is needed [Smith, 1989].

Systematic assessments need to be carried out that enable teachers to identify children's interests and needs. These will help teachers to plan long-term projects designed to increase children's observations and representational skills and enhance their creative, communicative and intellectual development [Katz, 1990].

Assessment should be holistic and in the same contexts as the meaningful activities and relationships that have provided the focus for curriculum [Carr and May, 1992].

5. *Assessment records should always convey useful and comprehensible information to students, parents and the community....*

[Combined Colleges of Education Assessment Working Party, 1991: 2].

It is important for teachers and parents to examine assessment instruments and procedures for themselves, and to make their own judgments on how sensible and relevant the strategies are for their child and their needs [Ballard, 1987]. Assessment and the means of reporting information needs to suit the particular philosophy of the centre and the community which it serves [Smith, 1989]. It also requires consultation and input from parents and the community so it can meet the specific needs of its clients. Information then needs to be reported in such a way that it will be beneficial to the child so all can work together for the good of the child.

It seems imperative that assessment data only be collected if it is going to be put to good use. It can be used for planning to meet individual needs or for sharing information with parents/whanau and the community. However the purpose must always be to benefit the child. The information needs to be meaningful to all involved.

Teachers collect a lot of assessment information each day. There was found to be a need for further research into the quantity and quality of assessment information that teachers collect in the normal course of their teaching day some of which is not necessarily recorded. This research could reveal the extent to which the assessment data actually influences teaching [Codd, McAlpine and Poskitt, 1991: 33].

The extent of the assessment information collected either formally or informally within the early childhood sector is not known, nor is it known how this assessment influences teaching. This information would be very valuable to all who teach young children.

One of the principles of good assessment listed in Tomorrows Standards [Ministerial Working Party, 1990] states that the choices made in reporting assessment and evaluation information largely determine the benefit or harm resulting from that information. Teachers therefore need to decide, before reporting to parents, how a child will benefit from the information. Another principle from the same document emphasises the need to identify and report educational progress and growth. If educators take a positive look at children's development it will provide a firm base from which to build.

- We need to start from what children can do and demonstrate their overall strengths and progress.
- We must convey information in a narrative form which is descriptive and meaningful.
- Assessment needs to support parents' relations with their children.

[NAEYC and NAECS/SDE, 1991].

Assessment needs to be positive and should build on special strengths and talents and contribute to children's sense of self-worth [Carr and May, 1992]. If assessment data reflects a positive view on children and is reported with optimism for future development, children and parents will benefit from the process and be in a position to work together to promote further development.

6. *Assessment information about growth, development and learning needs to be systematically collected and recorded at regular intervals.*
[NAEYC and NAECS / SDE, 1991].

Together with observation we are reminded that developmental assessment can involve documenting the work that a child does over a period of time and things they have said, ideas that they have had and activities they have enjoyed [Kennedy,1991]. Assessment utilises an array of tools and a variety of processes eg. collections of children's work, records of systematic observations, records of conversations etc. Teachers make informal assessments of children's achievements all the time. This type of assessment

is an essential element of all good teaching and should not be undervalued simply because it is not structured and formal. *To use it well requires considerable professional skill and to use it wisely requires that it not be the only form of assessment used* [McGaw, 1988: 3]. A range of methods are needed with assessment. Formative methods, where the process of evaluation and assessment is continual (eg. collecting paintings or photographing models) and summative methods, which take one point in time and compare the results to national norms, are both important [Bruce, 1987]. One problem of summative assessment is that it measures what children ought to know rather than what they actually know. However, only using formative methods, focuses too much upon processes and ignores the product.

It is suggested that assessment be an integrated part of practice and that there needs to be:
-   multi-professional approaches to record keeping
-   assessment which shows the processes [eg initiation of something, motivation]
-   details of the child's stage of development to help the teacher make appropriate provision,
-   a record of what the child can achieve, both aided and unaided,
-   a continual record of the way links are made from the child to the areas of knowledge, by noting the way provision is manipulated [Bruce, 1987[.

Teachers need knowledge of a wide range of assessment methods and devices to be able to make judgments about the appropriateness of each in a given teaching situation [Palmerston North College of Education Assessment Working Party, 1991].

7. *Assessment is a collaborative process involving children and teachers, teachers and parents, school and community*

[NAEYC and NAECS / SDE, 1991: 33]

Children, teachers, parents and the community all need to work together to make assessment relevant to individual and community needs. Self assessment can be an important component of assessment as young children can provide information about their own strengths and interests as a basis for future planning. *Assessment encourages children to participate in self evaluation* [NAEYC and NAECS/SDE, 1991: 33]. In early childhood, teachers need to allow children to have input into decisions regarding their learning. *Self assessment is the appropriate starting point for assessment* [Ministerial Working Party, 1990: 8].

Early childhood centres need to give more attention to directions for learning in consultation with family and community [NAEYC, 1991]. Children's experiences at home can be used in planning and evaluating children's learning. A recommendation was made that the community be involved in information sharing and decisions regarding teacher development in assessment in primary schools [Educational Assessment Secretariat, 1992]. It is important that the community also be included in decision making about assessment in the early childhood sector. It is important that families be seen as a part of the assessment process. Information needs to be shared between teachers and parents about children's growth, development and performance. Assessment should be responsive and reciprocal and opportunities should exist for assessment to be a two-way process.

[Carr and May, 1992].

Summary

From the literature review it is apparent that very little attention has been given to research in the area of assessment of children in early childhood in New Zealand. Directives have been given and recommendations made about

assessment in both the primary and secondary sectors. As interest in assessment has been heightened with moves towards accountability, which stress the importance of being able to show that valuable learning is taking place, it is time that attention is given to assist teachers in implementing assessment procedures for the children they are working with.

The previous seven principles provide a starting point on which to build when the specific needs of early childhood in New Zealand have been identified through research into assessment practices. If guidelines are provided there will be consistency in approaches. A recommendation was made that Colleges of Education establish a national common core in the courses offered in educational assessment and also that teachers nationwide receive teacher development in assessment [Educational Assessment Secretariat, 1992]. These recommendations were pertaining to the primary sector, however the early childhood sector have the same need for uniformity in courses and for teacher development in assessment.

This thesis describes a study which was carried out to determine what are the current assessment practices being used in kindergartens and childcare centres throughout New Zealand and compares the findings to recommended practices in literature on the topic.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This study utilized questionnaires, structured interviews and an observation exercise to provide information on the assessment of children from birth to five years old in kindergartens and childcare centres.

Quantitative information gathered from a postal questionnaire was combined with the qualitative information provided by the structured interviews and the verifying exercise which was conducted to gain an appreciation of the scope of the general observations that take place in these centres.

Phase I - Questionnaire

A.   *Selection of Sample for Questionnaire Distribution*

B.   *Construction of Questionnaire*

C.   *Pilot Questionnaire (revise questionnaire as needed)*

D.   *Distribution of Questionnaires*

E.   *Collation of Questionnaire Information*

Phase II - Structured Interviews

A.   *Selection of Sample for Structured Interviews*

B.   *Design of Structured Interview*

C.   *Pilot Structured Interviews*

D.   *Structured Interviews*

E.   *Collation of Structured Interview Information*

Phase III - Observation Exercise

A.   *Selection of Sample for Observation Exercise*

B.   *Design of Observation Exercise*

C.   *Pilot Observation Exercise*

D.   *Observation Exercise*

E.   *Collation of Information from the Observation Exercise*

Phase IV

Integration of information from questionnaires, structured interviews and observation exercise with literature on assessment of children.

Phase I - Questionnaires

Questionnaires were posted to 269 centres.

A.   Selecting of Sample for Questionnaire Distribution

The study focused on kindergartens and childcare centres where staff, and not parents were involved in the running of programmes unlike playcentres, where the need for reporting and carrying out of procedures would be quite different. A different approach would have been required to cover assessment of playcentres because of their unique characteristics.

Nga kohanga reo were also not included in the sample of early childhood centres as they were not comfortable for a study of their assessment procedures to be carried out because many centres are just becoming established.

Kindergartens and childcare centres were selected as the sample to examine the methods used for assessing children in these two different services. The Ministry of Education lists of early childhood centres were used to define those centres identified as kindergarten and childcare centres. The sample covered both babies and young children to see if different methods of assessment and reporting were apparent. Literature suggested that a different focus is apparent when assessing babies when compared with older children and that the reporting of the information is handled differently

according to the age group studied. Katz (in Carr, 1989), suggests "sleeping habits, eating habits, toilet habits, range of effect; variations in play, curiosity; responses to authority, friendship; interest, spontaneous affection and enjoyment of the good things in life" provide a sufficient picture of whether a very young child's development is going well.

A cluster sample was used from one region, the Palmerston North College of Education catchment area and this was expanded by a sample of 100 centres from the other 5 College of Education regions. The cluster sample comprised 93 kindergartens and 76 childcare centres, all of the rural and urban centres in the region.

The cluster sample would provide an accurate representation of assessment in the Palmerston North College of Education region, and the samples from the other five regions would allow comparisons to be made between the cluster sample and other regions to see if generalisations could be made about assessment of children in kindergartens and childcare centres throughout New Zealand.

Letters were sent to the early childhood teaching practice co-ordinators of the five Colleges of Education requesting that they provide a representative sample of 20 centres in their catchment area made up of:
- 5 Childcare Centres from rural/semi rural areas;
- 5 Childcare Centres from urban areas;
- 5 Kindergartens from rural/semi rural areas;
- 5 Kindergartens from urban areas.

From the list of centres provided by the teaching practice co-ordinators a list was drafted of all the centres to be used in the study - 93 kindergartens and 76 childcare centres from the Palmerston North College of Education catchment area and 10 childcare centres and 10 kindergartens from each of the other five Colleges of Education catchment areas (ie 100 additional centres).

The total sample for distribution of the questionnaire was 269 centres which was expected to be large enough to ensure that the data could be categorised and analyzed to discern trends.

The initial method of data collection for the study was by way of postal questionnaires to all of the 269 centres. These were used to provide the means of describing what was happening in the area of assessment of children in kindergartens and childcare centres from samples throughout the country.

B. Construction of Questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed to gather facts from the respondents about:

(i)   *The main purposes of assessing children.*

(ii)   *The procedures used for assessing children.*

(iii)   *When assessment is carried out.*

(iv)   *The areas of development covered by assessment.*

(v)   *How the assessment information is used.*

Teachers were also asked about how they gained information on assessment and what they perceived as their current needs regarding assessment.

Draft I of the questionnaire was posted together with the draft of the letter of introduction to each of the following groups before it was sent to any of the 269 centres.

- Members of the Advisory Committee;
- The eleven Educational Review Offices;
- The six Colleges of Education (Early Childhood Education Departments);
- The Early Childhood National Curriculum Project Group (Waikato);
- A Computer Department staff member for comments on coding and structure of the questionnaire for computer analysis.

Feedback on Draft Questionnaire

Feedback on the first draft of the questionnaire was received from:

- Eight Education Review Offices
- Five Colleges of Education
- The Early Childhood Curriculum Project Group in Waikato

and the computer analysis staff member.

The feedback from all the above respondents was summarised for discussion with the Advisory Committee. The final questionnaire was then developed for piloting.

C. Pilot Questionnaire

Four pilot centres (two childcare centres and two kindergartens) were selected from a community in the Wellington College of Education catchment area that was within easy travelling distance from Palmerston North.

The four pilot centres were invited to participate in the study and were then sent letters explaining the input required of a pilot centre in responding to and evaluating the questionnaire along with providing feedback on the introductory letter. (See Appendix 1).

The questionnaire was piloted to see if the respondents interpreted the questions as intended, and to check for a shared understanding of meanings on the topic of assessment between the researcher and respondents. The questionnaire was modified to bring about greater clarity in the questions. The order of questions was also revised to provide a smoother flow from one question to another.

The questionnaires were collected personally to receive feedback and to enable a rapport to be established with staff to help when later studies would be carried out in their centres. The information from the four pilot questionnaires was collated and data organised to ensure that data from the main questionnaire could be collated smoothly.

Following the piloting of the questionnaire a third draft of the questionnaire was devised. The questionnaires were sent to the groups who provided feedback on the questionnaire to inform them of the changes that were made to the draft questionnaire.

Approval for use of kindergartens

Letters were drafted to all the Kindergarten Associations where Centres were to be used, seeking approval to use the kindergartens within their association. This involved:

- 11 Palmerston North Associations
- 5 Christchurch Associations
- 5 Auckland Associations
- 5 Dunedin Associations
- 3 Waikato Associations
- 4 Wellington Associations

Approval was received from the Associations and questionnaires were posted out.

D. Distribution of Questionnaire

Letters introducing the research project together with the questionnaires were posted to 269 centres and two clear weeks were left for the return of responses. As many staff as possible from each centre were asked to jointly respond to the questionnaire. (Appendix 2.)

E. *Collation of Questionnaire Data*

Questionnaire information was then collated according to the five main questions. Comparisons were then drawn between kindergartens and childcare centres, urban and rural centres and centres with differing ethnic compositions.

Phase II - Structured Interviews

Structured interviews were undertaken at 24 kindergartens and childcare centres.

A. *Selection of Sample for Structured Interviews*

24 centres were selected from those who completed the questionnaire in Phase I of the research.

The sample comprised four centres (two kindergartens and two childcare centres) from each of the six College of Education catchment areas, giving a total of 12 kindergartens and 12 childcare centres.

Centres were selected to represent a diverse range of assessment methods and procedures (see Results).

Care was also taken to ensure representation of centres based on many other variables such as age range of children, number of children, length of daily attendance, ethnic composition and number of staff.

Nine rural and semi-rural centres were selected and 15 located in urban centres.

Two teacher and three teacher kindergartens were equally represented in the sample.

The childcare centres comprised full day care, sessional care and casual care centres. Both large centres (over 100 children) and small centres (20 to 50 children) were used.

Age ranges in the sample covered centres with under 2's, under 2's and 2-5 year olds, 2-3½ year olds, 2-5 year olds and 3-5 year olds.

The sample represented centres comprising a variety of ethnic backgrounds (predominantly Maori, predominantly European, European and Maori and multicultural).

B. Design of Structured Interview

An interview schedule was devised comprising six open-ended questions (Appendix 3). These questions were to provide qualitative data to extend the quantitative responses received from the postal questionnaires. One new question was added to the information gained from the questionnaire which asked what the centre charter or policy said about assessment of children and if they felt the charter represented what they were actually doing.

The remainder of the questions were very similar to those asked in the questionnaire, however there was opportunity provided for staff to give more detailed responses.

The structured interview allowed the respondents to qualify what they meant by particular terms and to discuss the variety of circumstances in which assessment was carried out. Respondents had the chance to elaborate on ideas or justify thoughts.

The interviews were used to go more deeply into the motives of the respondents for assessing children and to give additional information on the methods used in their assessment and the purposes to which the assessment information was put.

Interviews were carried out face-to-face to establish a rapport between the researcher and interviewee. Little restraint was placed on the answers and expression of the respondent.

All questions asked had a bearing on one of the areas of interest in the assessment study. Interview questions were printed with room under each question to transcribe responses (See Appendix 3). A tape recorder was organised to use for back up on the writing done for responses during the interviews.

C. *Pilot Structured Interviews*

The structured interviews were piloted at the same four centres that were used to pilot the questionnaires. As a result question 3 had the second part added to it (who is the information shared with?) in case this important area did not come up for discussion elsewhere in the interview.

D. *Structured Interviews*

The researcher travelled throughout New Zealand from Whangarei to Balclutha undertaking the structured interviews at 24 centres.

Six questions were asked regarding assessment of children.
1. How do you assess children?
2. What areas of development are covered by assessment?
3. How is the assessment information used?

4. Who is the assessment information shared with?
5. What does your charter say about assessment of children?
6. What would you find most helpful to aid you in carrying out your assessment procedures?

Responses were recorded in writing. It was intended to tape responses however when the first few centres visited preferred not to be taped it was decided to write responses as accurately as possible then to check back with those being interviewed that the words written represented fairly what had been said.

In many centres the interview responses came from a group of people rather than an individual. These groups of staff, who worked together as a team, believed this was a fairer way to represent what was happening in their centre regarding assessment of children.

E. Collation of Structured Interview Information
The information gathered from the structured interviews was then collated according to the six questions asked and trends identified and interfaced with information from the questionnaires.

Phase III - Observation Exercise
An exercise to verify if valuable observations were taking place in early childhood centres was carried out in 12 centres.

Most staff who responded to the questionnaire and were involved in structured interviews for the project commented that their main source of assessment information came from general observations. This final phase of data gathering therefore aimed to identify the scope of the general observations that were taking place in centres.

A. Selection of Samples for Observations Exercise

The 12 centres to be used for the observation exercise were selected from the 24 centres in which structured interviews were undertaken. This enabled centres to be used where the researcher had already developed a rapport with the staff. Two centres (one kindergarten and one childcare centre) were selected from each of the six College of Education regions to continue to use centres from a range of different geographical areas.

Only one centre approached was not able to be a part of the observation exercise due to a change of staff, so this kindergarten was replaced by another that had participated in the structured interview.

Care was taken to ensure that the 12 centres continued to reflect the diversity of centres represented in the larger sample. Two and three teacher kindergartens were represented, large and small childcare centres as well as urban and rural centres with a range of ethnic compositions.

B. Design of Observation Exercise

An exercise was devised for the researcher to record all the observations that a staff member, or group of staff, had made following one morning of working with children. The researcher spent the morning in the centre in the hope of putting into context any particular observations that the staff discussed.

Staff were asked:

"Can you tell me about any observations of children that you have made this morning?"

Responses were recorded and when the staff had finished talking about one child they were asked if they knew anything else about this child and how they had gathered their information.

The observation exercise was designed to gather information on:

(a) The number of children observed.

(b) Who was observed.

(c) What areas of development were covered by the observations.

C. *Pilot Observation Exercise*

One childcare centre and one kindergarten were selected to trial the observation exercise. They were taken from the four centres used to pilot the questionnaire and the structured interview.

Following the pilot observation exercise it became apparent that it was important to identify along with the observations, whether the children being talked about were males or females.

D. *Observation Exercise*

One morning was spent in each of the 12 centres, one kindergarten and one childcare centre from each of the Auckland, Hamilton, Palmerston North, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin College of Education catchment areas.

Staff were involved in their usual activities with children as the observation exercise did not require anything different or special to take place. The staff received a letter, prior to the visit, informing them of how the observation exercise would be carried out. (Appendix 4.)

The number of observations made, the quality of observations, who and what was observed was recorded.

E. Collation of Information from the Observation Exercise

The observation information was collated according to who and what was observed. The data was then integrated with the information obtained through the questionnaires and structured interviews.

Phase IV - Integration of Information and Literature

Data from the questionnaires, structured interviews and the observation exercise were then closely compared with the literature on assessment of children in early childhood and recommendations for worthwhile assessment practices highlighted.

Chapter 4: Results

Phase I - Questionnaires - General Information

Questionnaires were returned from the following regions.

Figure 1 - Regions of Questionnaire Return

Postal questionnaires were returned from 145 centres. Centres are not specifically identified here because confidentiality was promised. The returns comprised 93 urban centres and 52 rural and semi-rural centres. These responses came from 88 centres (52%) in the Palmerston North College of Education catchment area and 57 centres (57%) from the other five College of Education regions.

The returns were from 79 kindergartens (55%) and 66 childcare centres (52%).

Both full childcare and sessional care were represented in the returns with 98 centres offering sessional care, 42 centres offering full day care and five centres offering both full day care and sessional care.

Both three teacher and two teacher kindergartens were represented:

1 kindergarten had one teacher full-time and two teachers part-time.

31 kindergartens had two teachers.

8 kindergartens had two teachers full-time and one part-time teacher.

2 kindergartens had two teachers full-time and two part-time teachers.

28 kindergartens had three teachers.

6 kindergartens had three teachers and one part-time teacher.

3 kindergartens had three teachers and two part-time teachers.

Ethnic Composition of Centres

67 centres were classified as predominantly European.

10 centres were classified as predominantly Maori.

50 centres were classified as multicultural.

8 centres were European and Maori; and

10 centres were not able to be classified due to lack of specific information being given on ethnicity.

Classification was made according to the following:

- Predominantly European centres were those with 80% or more of their children identified as European.
- Predominantly Maori centres were those with 80% or more of their children identified as Maori.
- Multicultural centres were those where more than 20% of the children came from groups not identified as Maori or European. At least two additional ethnic groups needed to be identified.

- European and Maori centres were those where there was not 80% of either group present. The groups were usually balanced such as 50%/50% or 60%/40%.

Staffing

The centres were staffed with 404 full-time staff and 190 part-time staff.

Age of Children Represented

Three centres catered for children under two years old. Thirty nine centres catered for under two's and two to five year olds, 16 centres catered for children with ages ranging from two to five years and 85 centres catered for children ranging in age from approximately three to five years.

Number of Children at the Centres

The number of children at the childcare centres ranged from less than 20 at two centres, 20 to 50 children at 30 centres, 51-80 children at 13 centres, 81-100 children at three centres and more than 100 children at six centres.

Of the 79 kindergartens, four centres had over 80 on the roll, 67 centres had 71-80 children on the roll and eight kindergartens had 60-70 children on the roll.

Staff Input into Answering the Questionnaire

Responses to the questionnaire had input from 397 staff (210 childcare staff and 187 kindergarten staff).

The majority of centres had more than one staff member fill out the questionnaire. Only 19 centres had a single staff member respond and 126 centres had two or more staff members involved in the response. Most centres involved all their staff in the responses given.

Questionnaire Data

A. The Main Purposes of Assessment

The main purposes of assessment in the 145 centres were able to be categorised under the following five headings:

- for record keeping (accountability)
- to help plan a programme
- to be aware of and cater for individuals
- to meet special needs
- to work with parents.

The other purposes of assessment listed that did not fit into the above categories were 'for transition to school', mentioned by two centres, and 'to brief other professions', which was listed by five centres.
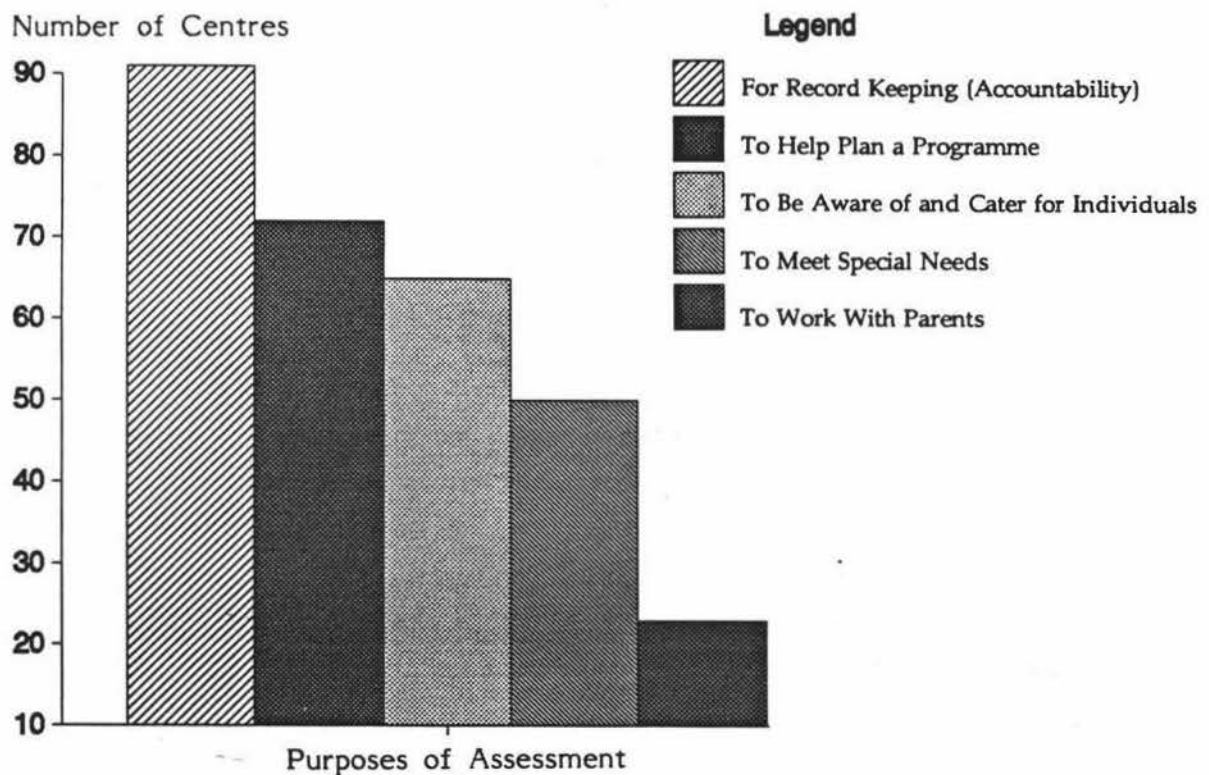
Figure 2 - Main Purposes of Assessment

Many centres listed several purposes for assessment of children. An example
of several purposes listed by one kindergarten was "to assess individuals to
see what they are learning. For parents to know accurately how their
children are progressing. For teachers to evaluate the programme needs via
children".

Record keeping or accountability was listed by the most centres as a purpose
of assessment with 92 centres mentioning it. Under this category a large
number of centres mentioned that they used assessment "to see what level or
stage a child was at". There was no mention of doing anything else with this
information other than using it to keep a record.

*Comparison of the Main Purposes of Assessment Listed by Kindergartens and
Childcare Centres*

Very similar purposes of assessment were listed by kindergartens and
childcare centres. A difference was evident under the purpose "to work with
parents". This was listed by 16 (24.2%) childcare centres and 7 (8.9%)
kindergartens.

Number of Centres

Purposes of Assessment
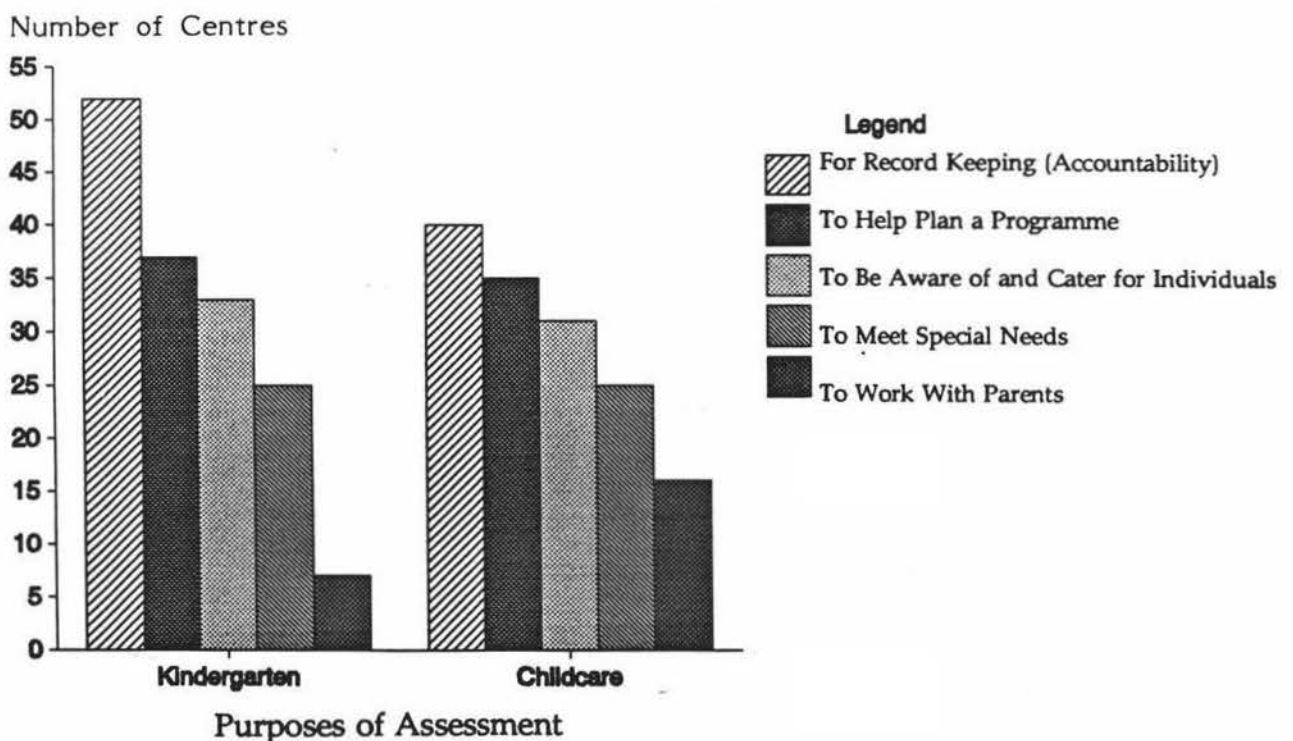
Figure 3 - Comparison of Purposes of Assessment
between Kindergarten and Childcare Centres

B. The Procedures Used for Assessing Children

Centres listed nine different procedures that they used to carry out
assessment of children. These were observations, staff discussion, checklists,
parent discussion, report books or daily records, programme evaluation and
planning meetings, individual educational programmes, developmental
profiles and tests.

Observations were the most commonly mentioned procedure used for
assessing children. Most centres used observations as one means of
assessment and combined this with several other procedures to develop a
picture of children. Forty kindergartens listed specific forms of assessment
that they used such as time sampling and event recording.

Total Number of Centres
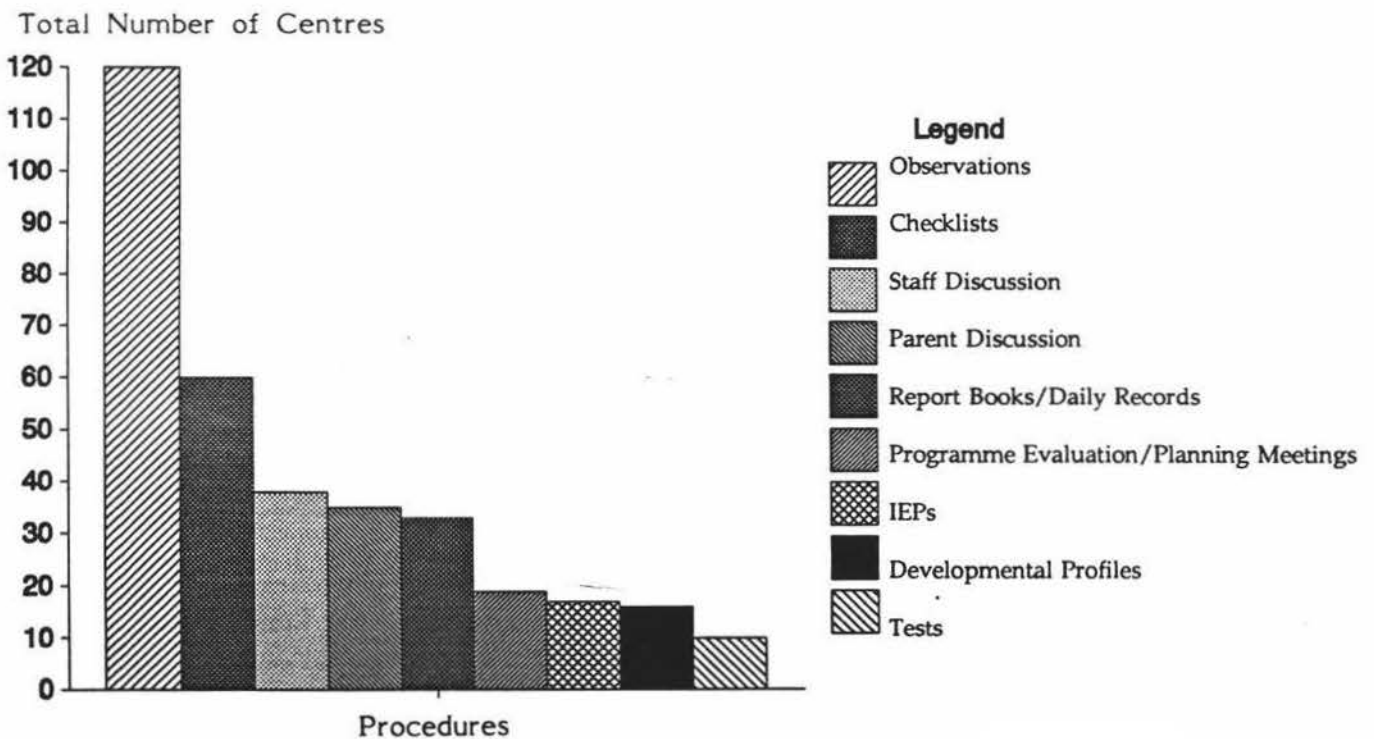
Figure 4 - Procedures Used for Assessing Children

Usually a variety of procedures were listed by centres for example one childcare centre wrote "we carry out both informal and formal assessment of children. Time is allowed once a week for discussion on the programme. Each meeting five different children are chosen and it is discussed whether the programme is meeting the needs of these individuals and ideas for improving areas of development for them".

Comparison of Assessment Procedures Used by Kindergartens and Childcare Centres

Variations occurred between kindergartens and childcare centres in their use of several procedures for assessing children.

Observations were mentioned by all 79 kindergartens compared with only 39 (59%) of the childcare centres. Staff discussion was also used more in kindergartens compared with childcare centres as a means of assessing children with 33 kindergartens (23%) and 4 childcare centres (3%) listing this form of assessment. Checklists were used by 44 (56%) kindergartens and 17 (26%) childcare centres.

Parent discussion was used more by childcare centres than kindergartens. Report books or daily records were also used more by childcare centres when compared with kindergartens 22 (33%) childcare centres used this form of and 12 (15%) kindergartens.

Number of Centres
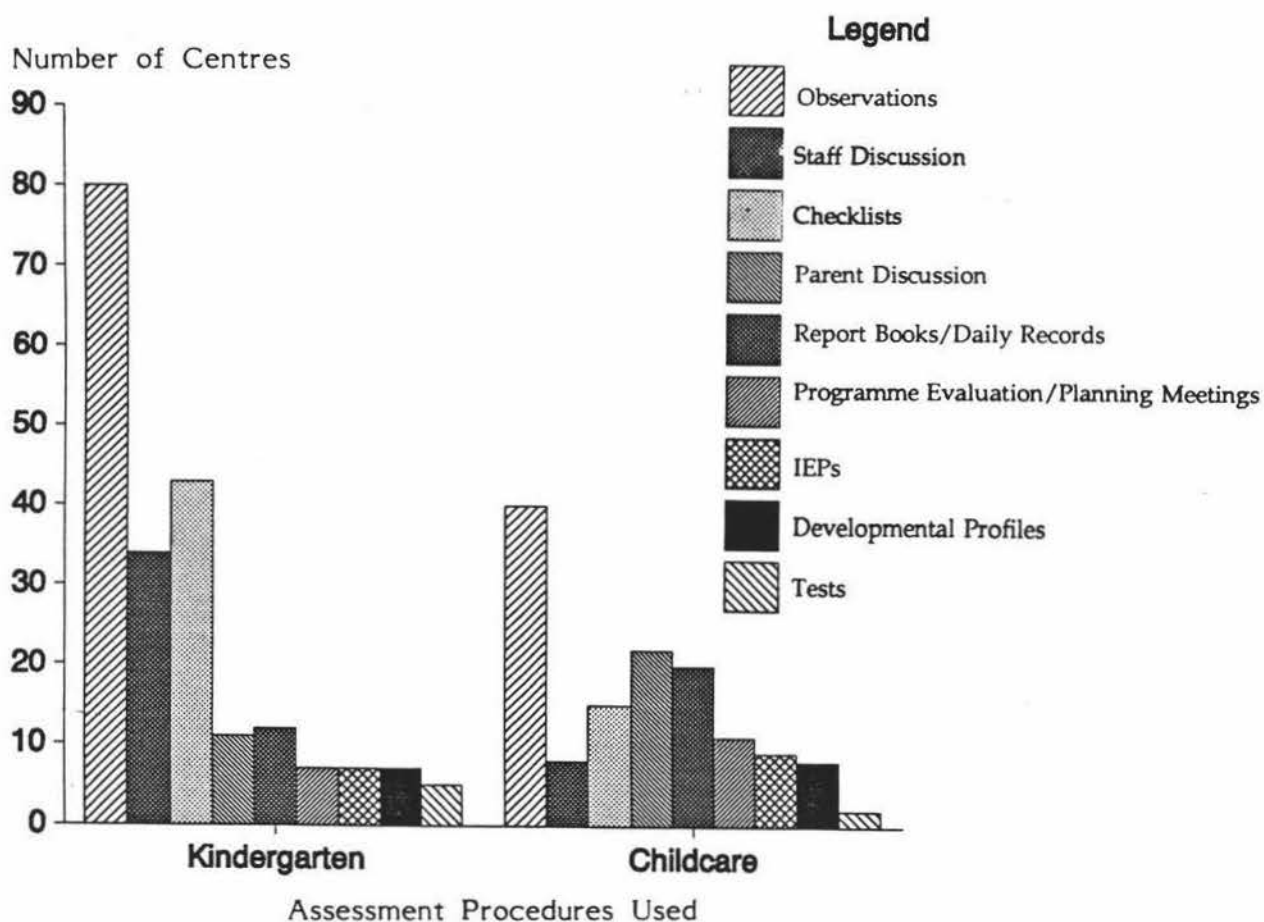
Figure 5 - Comparison of Assessment Procedures used by
Kindergartens and Childcare Centres

Written Assessment in Centres

Fifty nine (41%) centres had written assessment of all children while 86 (59%)
centres did not have written assessment of all children.

The centres that carried out written assessments of all children did so to plan
to meet the needs of all children and for programme planning, to check on all
children and follow their progress, to share information with other staff, to
share information with parents and to have an accurate account to meet ERO
expectations.

The centres that did not have written assessment of all children said they only used written assessment if there was a need or concern, or they only assessed the regular and full-time children. Some centres commented that they did not have the time to assess all children, other centres commented that they did not have enough staff to do a more thorough assessment. Several centres only assess the older children.

When asked how satisfactory their assessment system was:

38 centres said their system was adequate or satisfactory.

30 centres said it was too early to say how satisfactory their assessment system was because it was still being either formulated, revised or trialled.

25 centres said their system was a problem because of time or their system was too time consuming.

24 centres said their system was good.

15 centres said their system was limited because of adult child ratio, or not enough staff.

13 centres said their system was not entirely satisfactory.

 7 centres said they were looking for improvements.

Other difficulties experienced included too many interruptions, lack of time for parent discussion and the assessment system used was too lengthy or too complicated.

An approximately equivalent number of kindergartens and childcare centres were happy with their assessment system (27 [34%] kindergarten and 31 [47%] childcare centres) sixteen (20%) kindergartens were trialling or revising their procedures while only 2 (3%) childcare centres were doing so.

C. *When Assessment is Carried Out*

When asked when assessment of children is carried out responses included, during sessions, daily observations, ongoing and continuously, during staff meetings, during informal staff discussion, during non-contact time, when time permits, during lunch times, when children commence, when children enter morning sessions and at intervals such as weekly, each term, monthly, six monthly and yearly.

Number of Centres

Legend

1	Daily or during sessions
2	Staff meetings
3	Ongoing
4	Informal staff discussion
5	Non-contact time
6	When a problem or concern
7	Lunch time
8	When time permits
9	When children converse
10	Weekly
11	Monthly
12	Six monthly
13	Yearly
14	Termly
15	When children enter morning sessions

When Assessment is Carried Out
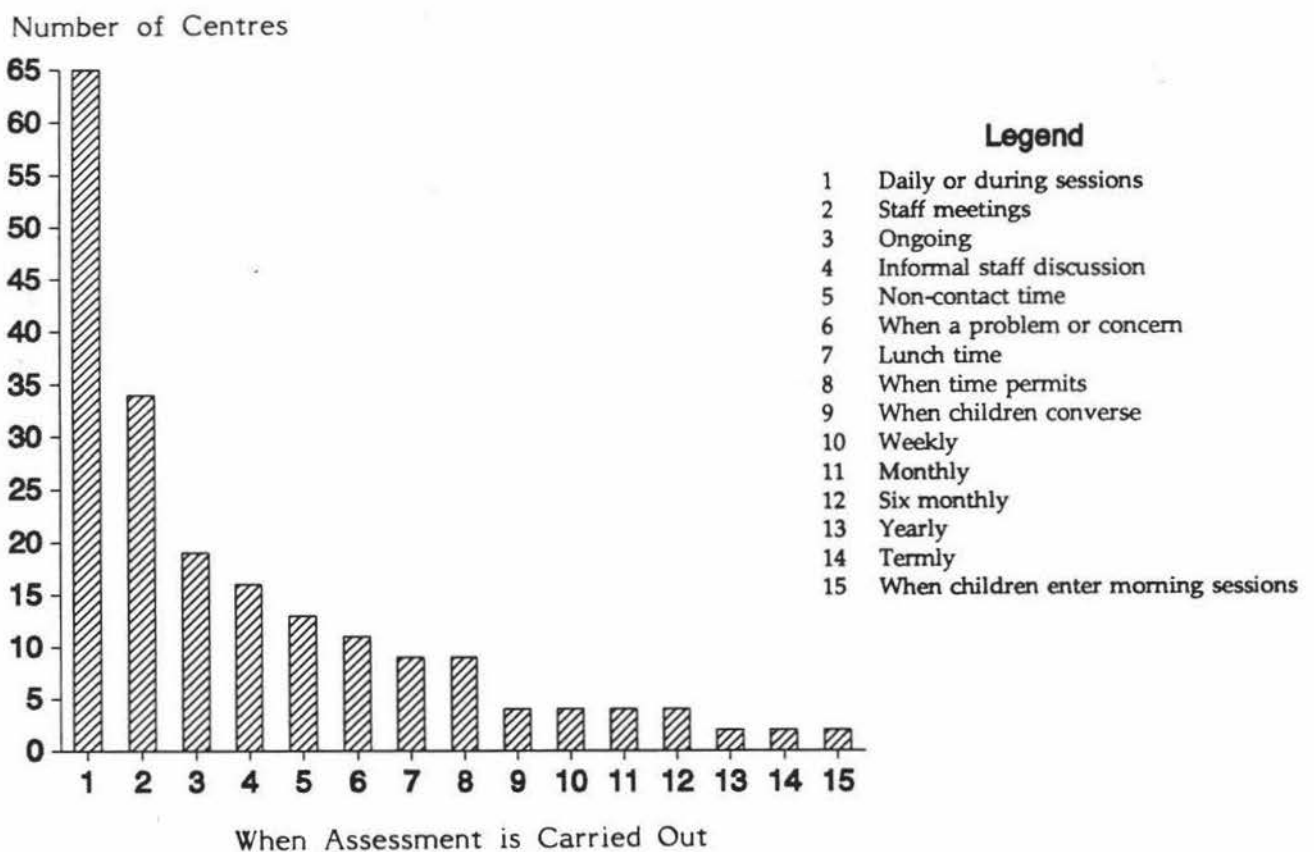
Figure 6 - Times When Assessment is Carried Out

D. *The Areas of Development Covered by Assessment*

When asked the areas of development covered by assessment:

141 centres covered physical development.

138 centres covered social development.

137 centres covered language development.

135 centres covered cognitive development.

130 centres covered emotional development.

102 centres covered aesthetic/creative development.

69 centres covered cultural development.

18 centres did not fill out this section.

Number of Centres

Legend
- Physical Development
- Social Development
- Language Development
- Cognitive Development
- Emotional Development
- Aesthetic/Creative Development
- Cultural Development
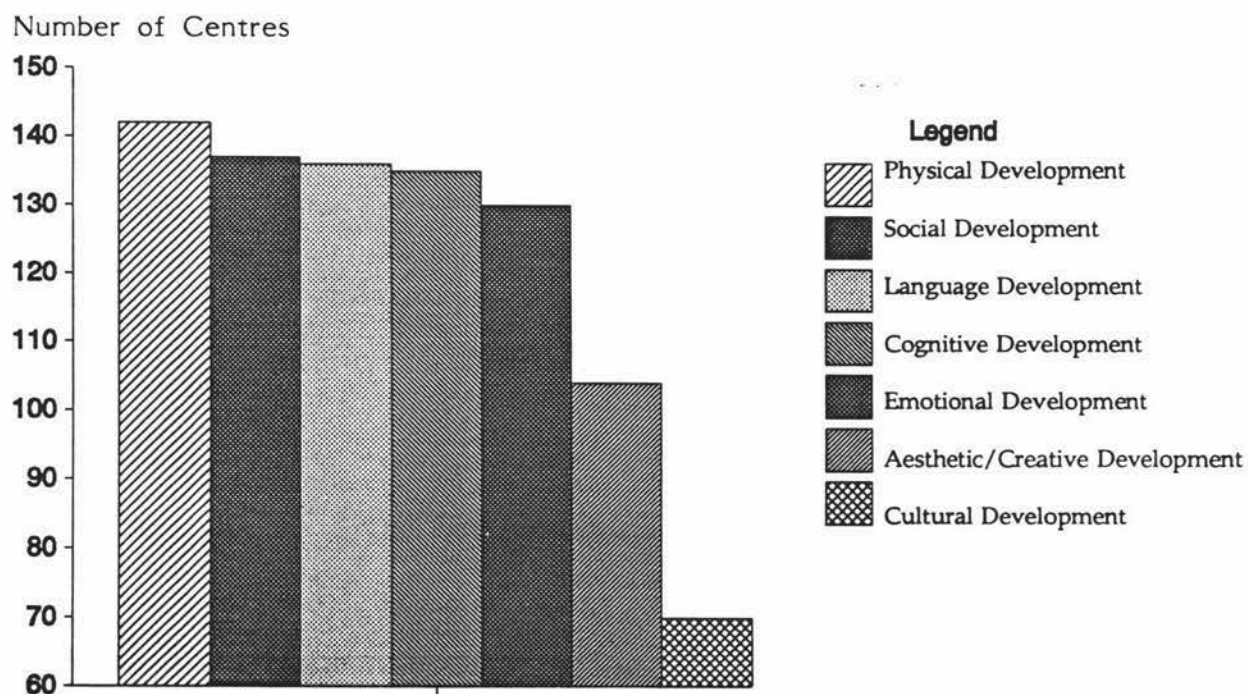
Figure 7 - Areas of Development Covered by Assessment

When asked if they concentrate on any areas of development more than others:

70 centres indicated that they concentrate on some areas more than others and the reasons why included.

56 centres said they did not concentrate on any areas more than others.

12 centres said it depended on the needs of the child which areas were covered more fully.

10 centres said they covered social and emotional development more than other areas because the children spend long hours at the centre, or because of low self-esteem in children.

9 centres concentrated more on language development.

5 centres concentrated most on social development because it seems to be needed today or it fitted with the philosophy of the centre.

4 centres concentrated on emotional development more than other areas because it forms the basis of their well being.

4 centres concentrated most on social and language because they believed these were important for life or because the centre had children from many cultures.

2 centres concentrated on language and emotional development as they believed these were good measures of how a child was going.

2 centres concentrated on physical, social, emotional cognitive and language to identify any problem areas and one centre said because they are easiest to assess in a limited time.

2 centres said they assess more generally not according to particular areas.

2 centres concentrated more on social, emotional and language development. One of these centres did so because 60% of their children were 2 - 3 year olds. 1 centre concentrated most on physical and social for infants.

1 centre concentrated on fine motor and language.

1 centre concentrated on physical and cultural as they were areas of greatest perceived needs.

1 centre concentrated on physical, cognitive and language because of parental concerns.

1 centre concentrated on social, physical, emotional and language because children came from a lower socio-economic background and are often referred.

1 centre concentrated on social, emotional and physical.

1 centre concentrated on language, social and physical.

1 centre said they concentrate on language and self-help skills for under 2's.

1 centre concentrated on aesthetic and creative development.

1 centre concentrated on physical and cognitive because of lack of parental stimulation.

1 centre concentrated on social and cognitive because of parental feedback.

1 centre concentrated on behaviour most as it affects the whole session.

1 centre concentrated on speech/language and cognitive because of parental expectations and ERO expectations.

1 centre concentrated on independence.

1 centre concentrated on physical and cognitive to pick up delays.

1 centre concentrated on language, social and creative development.

1 centre concentrated on physical, social, emotional, cognitive and creative more than language as there was easy access to speech/language.

1 centre commented they were gaining skills currently on how to assess cultural and aesthetic and creative aspects of children's development so it will soon be included, and

1 centre said they concentrate on movement and eating patterns and less on cultural and cognitive development.

There were no common areas of development that centres believed were most important to assess.

Comparison of the Areas of Development Covered Between Kindergartens and Childcare Centres

Differences in the responses when comparing childcare centres and kindergartens showed that of the 18 centres that did not fill out this section, 17 were kindergartens.

The other difference was in the concentration of language development by the 9 centres that concentrated most on language development; 8 were kindergartens.

Of the 10 centres that concentrated most on social/emotional 7 were childcare.

34 (52%) childcare centres said they did not concentrate on any areas of development more than others, while 22 (28%) kindergartens indicated that they did not concentrate on any area of development more than another.

30 (46%) childcare centres and 39 (49%) kindergartens indicated that they did concentrate on some areas more than others and many gave there reasons for doing so.

35 centres listed other areas that they specifically assess:

- 7 centres listed special needs and 1 centre special needs or abilities.
- 4 centres listed self help skills and independence abilities.
- 3 centres listed suspected child abuse.
- 2 centres listed behaviour.
- 1 centre which listed relationships with others.
- 1 centre listed temperament.
- 1 centre listed speech/hearing.
- 1 centre listed hearing/vision.
- 1 centre listed bonding/attachment to a friend.
- 1 centre listed specific skills.
- 1 centre listed pre-writing.
- 1 centre listed hygiene.
- 1 centre listed self-help and school readiness.
- 1 centre listed spiritual, taha wairua.
- 1 centre listed number work.
- 1 centre listed settling in.
- 1 centre listed the value of the programme, special needs and behaviour problems.
- 1 centre listed activity choices, gender choices and adult/child interactions.
- 1 centre listed self esteem, self help, inquiring mind, music exploration, verbal.
- 1 centre listed looking at ourselves.
- 1 centre listed family and living arrangements as it was a transient area.
- 1 centre listed family dynamics.
- 1 centre listed problem solving, conflict resolution also school skills closer to 5 year olds.

E. How Assessment Information is Used

Information gained from assessment was used in 15 different ways. Planning the programme to meet individual needs, sharing information with parents, staff consultation and discussion, to help and guide individuals, to evaluate and develop areas of the programme, to gear activities or necessary skills into the programme, to assess or follow up problems or difficulties, for other professionals or outside agencies, to check how children are progressing to extend support or encourage children, to familiarise teachers with each child's development, to promote development or challenge children, to communicate with school, to work with special needs prior to school entry and to ensure children reach their full potential.

Assessment information was used most for planning the programme to meet individual needs and secondly to share information with parents.

A total of 54 responses used their assessment information specifically for intervening with a special need or concern.

Numbers 4, 6, 7 and 14 'to help and guide individuals', 'to gear activities or necessary skills into the programme', 'to assess or follow up problems or difficulties' and 'to work with special needs prior to school entry' (see Figure 8) all focused on working on concerns or filling gaps in development.

Many centres used assessment information for a variety of reasons. An example of how one centre said they use assessment information shows how this might happen.

"Evaluate in staff meeting, use to plan programme, develop individual programmes, other suggestions or support to family. To have more comprehensive background information to offer other professionals should they be brought in."

Number of Centres

Legend

1   Planning the programme to meet individual needs
2   Sharing information with parents
3   Staff consultation and discussion
4   To help and guide individuals
5   To evaluate and develop areas of the programme
6   To gear activities or necessary skills into the programme
7   To assess or follow up problems or difficulties
8   For other professionals or outside services
9   To check how children are progressing
10 To extend, support or encourage children
11 To familiarise teachers with each child's development
12 To promote development or challenge children
13 To communicate with school
14 To work with special needs prior to school entry
15 To ensure children reach their full potential

How Assessment Information Was Used

Figure 8 - How Assessment Information is Used

The responses of kindergartens and childcare centres were remarkably similar in how assessment information is used. Kindergartens were represented more in 'planning the programme', whereas childcare centres had a higher representation under 'sharing information with parents'.

Sharing of Information

When asked if any of the assessment information was shared with others 121 centres did share their information with others and 22 centres did not share the information with others apart from their own staff. Two centres did not answer this question.

When asked who the information was shared with, some centres shared information with several groups while others only shared information if requested by parents.

Number of Centres

Who Assessment Information is Shared With
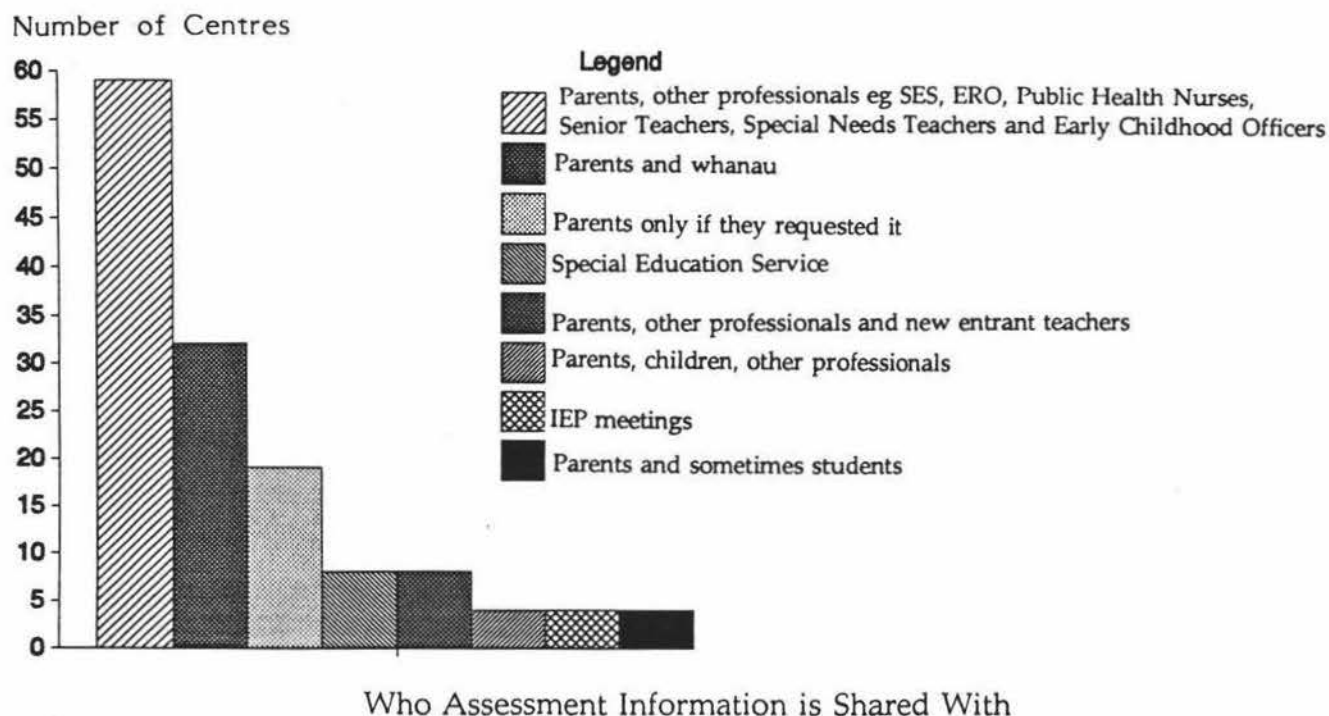
Figure 9 - Groups Whom Information is Shared With

Parent Involvement in Assessment Procedures

When asked about parent involvement in the assessment procedures of their children, 111 centres said parents were involved in the assessment procedures and 31 centres did not involve parents. (Three centres did not respond to this question.)

When asked at what stages of the assessment procedure parents are involved the responses were as follows.

23 centres responded by saying that parents became involved only if there was a problem or concern.

18 centres said parents were involved continuously and throughout their assessment procedures.

12 centres used parents to give background information or input initially.

8 centres involved parents after assessment when the conclusions or results were shared.

7 centres used parents for consultation and sharing information, eg interests and progress.

6 centres used parents in informal discussion.

6 centres involved parents in IEP meetings.

5 centres involved parents if there was a concern or if something was extremely well done.

5 centres used parents to check their observations were the same.

5 centres used parents in helping plan or goal set for their child's development.

5 centres involved parents at any stage they asked or requested to be involved.

4 centres involved parents through daily notebooks, books or folders.

4 centres used parents in helping make observations.

3 centres used parents in encouraging children at home.

2 centres said parents often initiated the assessment.

2 centres involved parents in interviews.

1 centre involved parents especially when children were 5 years old.

1 centre involved parents 6 weeks after entering at least once a year or more if a difficulty.

This shows that 21% of centres were not involving parents anywhere in the assessment procedure and many other centres only had very limited involvement.

F. How Teachers Gained Information on Assessment and What are their Current Needs Regarding Assessment

When asked about the provision of some guidelines or a set of procedures to assist with the assessment of children the following responses came:

116 centres said they would find some guidelines or set of procedures useful in assisting with their assessment of children.

24 centres said they would not find some guidelines or procedures useful.

1 centre said they did not know if they would find any guidelines useful and 4 centres did not respond to his section of the questionnaire.

Of the 116 centres that said they would find some guidelines or sets of procedures useful included in the list of things they would find useful were:

14 centres said they would find general guidelines for all early childhood centres useful.

13 centres said they would find any new information useful.

9 centres said they would find it useful to know what other centres do to assess children.

6 centres wanted guidelines on appropriate developmental stages for children (0-5 years, 2-5 years and 3-5 years).

5 centres wanted a simple method of observation, evaluation and recording findings.

4 centres said they would like to see a variety of procedures to evaluate them and select their own.

4 centres wanted a procedure that was easy to refer to so parents could be involved in assessment.

4 centres said they would find a set of procedures useful.

4 centres wanted general 'norms' in the areas of development and ways of testing these.

4 wanted a generalised checklist for all to be able to carry out.

3 centres commented there is always room for improvement.

3 centres wanted a standard assessment with provision for each centre to relate it to their character and/or culture.

3 centres wanted a simple not too detailed checklist.

3 centres wanted ideas on how to streamline their system.

3 centres wanted latest research information or literature on assessment.

3 centres wanted information on how to consult or involve parents.

3 centres wanted to know what ERO require. (1 centre said and ECDU.)

2 centres wanted ideas on how to set goals for children.

2 centres said they needed to know exactly what was required.

2 centres wanted a brief successful, tried and perfected procedure.

2 centres wanted something not too time consuming.

1 centre wanted a more comprehensive form to be completed entirely by parents.

1 centre wanted guidelines on using observations and assessment in planning developmentally appropriate programmes.

1 centre wanted to know the types of observations and appropriate situations to use them.

1 centre wanted to know how to make use of information found.

1 centre wanted a method suitable for 2 teachers.

1 centre wanted to know how other centres assess children, how they use their information and how they share it with parents.

1 centre wanted a simple, workable system.

1 centre wanted a comprehensive checklist, another wanted a less detailed checklist.

1 centre wanted a suitable checklist on children's dispositions to share with parents.

1 centre needed to know where to go following observation procedures.

1 centre wanted inservice courses.

1 centre wanted appropriate questions to ask parents about their children.

1 centre wanted a uniform, efficient format for recording.

Other comments included:

1 centre said they were unsure of the benefit or purpose of what they were doing.

1 centre said they had limited information at present.

1 centre said they didn't know if they were covering everything.

1 centre said they use portage as a set of guidelines.

1 centre felt checklists are too clinical.

1 centre said they devised their present system in conjunction with the new entrant teacher and principal.

Comparison of the Provisions of Guidelines or set of Procedures Requested by Kindergartens and Childcare Centres

116 centres wanted some guidelines or set of procedures similar proportions of kindergartens (77%) and childcare centres (83%) were reflected in these requests for guidelines.

It was noted that of the 13 kindergartens, 12 of these were from one specific district in a particular catchment area. Of the 11 childcare centres that did not want guidelines, 4 of these were from that same district.

Courses or Inservice Education Attended on Assessment of Children
84 centres had staff who had attended a course or in service education on assessment of children (48 kindergartens [61%] and 36 childcare centres [55%]).

203 staff had attended a course from these 84 centres. 100 staff from kindergartens and 103 staff from childcare centres.

Of the 61 centres where no staff had attended courses this sample represented 31 (39%) kindergartens and 30 (45%) childcare centres.

The courses attended included:

15 centres were involved in special needs courses. One of these was run by Social Welfare.

15 centres were involved in courses on writing IEP's.

14 centres were involved in courses run by ECDU not specifically named.

11 centres were involved in courses organised by senior teachers or run by senior teachers. Some of these were 'Observation in Kindergarten' and linking assessment to the centre philosophy.

8 centres were involved in Planning, Assessment and Evaluation.

7 centres were involved in the TRCC course "Using observations and assessment to develop appropriate programmes in EC".

6 centres were involved in Programme Planning and Evaluation' run by ECDU.

5 centres were involved in 'Assessment and Evaluation' run by ECDU.

5 centres were involved in courses run by SES not named.

2 centres were involved in 'Care and Educating Infants and Toddlers'.

1 centre was involved in Supervision and Leadership ECDU.

1 centre was involved in High Performance Leadership ECDU.

Although listed as courses on assessment of children it can be seen that many of these were not specifically for that purpose.

Aspects of the Course that were Useful in Assisting With Assessment of Children

From ECDU courses aspects of the courses that were useful from the replies included:

- Being assured that under 5's should not be tested and put through checklists of what they can and cannot do.
- Useful in programme planning and improving skills.
- Observation skills.
- Most areas covered (2 centres).
- Practical skills and hearing the views and experiences of others.
- Observation schedules.
- Observation methods 'on the run'.
- Encouragement to pursue assessment.
- Checklists (Care and Educating Infants and Toddlers Course).
- How to evaluate observations and incorporate them in your daily programme (Assessment & Evaluation Course).
- Promoted looking at the individual, but left a sense of confusion about using formal checklists and procedures. (Assessment & Evaluation Course).
- Practical guidelines on how to develop appropriate methods for our centre.
- Methods of observing. (2 centres). (Assessment and Evaluation Course).
- Sharing different methods with other centres (3 centres).
- One centre commented there was not a lot that was useful as the topic seems to be new to everyone. (There seems to be a general lack of knowledge.)

From SES courses aspects that centres found useful were:

- Up to date resource people.
- Good overview of IEP process.

Special Needs courses and IEP courses provided:

- New knowledge.
- Reinforcement of knowledge (2 centres).
- Observation techniques (4 centres).
- Format to follow when writing IEP's.
- Confidence in what you are doing is ok.
- Observation of the 'whole' child through assessment seeing the need to plan a programme to meet the child's needs.
- Checklist method (in 'Physical Education for Children with Special Needs' course).
- Portage and assessment guidelines.
- Knowing what to look for and who to contact.
- Information on task analysis.
- Assessment procedures.

From SES and/or ECDU course aspects listed that were useful included:

- Practical application and modelling of procedures.
- Clarifying reasons for different assessment methods.

From the TRCC course 'Using Observations to Develop Appropriate Programmes' useful aspects included:

- Observation techniques (3 centres) and setting objectives.
- Programme planning (3 centres) and parent interviews.
- Observation skills.
- Why observations? and how to use the information to make sure the programme works.

From courses run by senior teachers or organised by senior teachers useful aspects included:

- How to link assessment and programmes.
- Different types of assessment available to suit different children.
- Support that what we do is ok.
- Listening to views and ideas from other centres. (2 centres).
- Exchange of checklists and ideas.
- New knowledge.
- Methods of observation.
- Drawing up checklists and knowing from where to extend children.
- Looking at the individual needs of children (Planning and Assessment Course).
- Discussion and sharing resources (from Planning and Assessment Course).
- One centre found nothing useful (from Planning and Assessment Course).

From Teacher Appraisal and Assessment Course: Useful aspects included:

- Self assessment.

Other Sources of Information on Assessment

Other sources of information on the assessment process of children came from preservice training and from other professionals.

34 centres gained their information in training.

34 centres gained their information from discussion with other colleagues, staff and professionals.

29 centres gained their information by reading relevant books and other publications.

22 centres gained their information from senior teachers.

14 centres gained their information from special needs professionals or special needs information.

11 centres gained their information through further education and study.

8 centres gained their information from staff meetings or combined staff meetings.

7 centres specifically mention professional development spiral meetings.

8 centres gained their information from ERO staff.

Early intervention and Portage were listed by 2 centres specifically as being helpful.

14 centres said they gained their information through their practical experience. One centre specifically mentioned by producing and using record cards in the UK.

5 centres gained their information through trial and error.

5 centres followed an already established procedure.

4 centres listed ECDU staff.

2 centres gained their information from students while they were on section.

2 centres were guided by charter requirements and an interest in accountability and responsibility.

1 mentioned LAP developmental checklists.

1 centre gained its information through observations at other centres.

Other Comments Regarding the Assessment of Children

Both positive comments and concerns were listed by centres.

Many centres made positive statements about the value of assessment. These included the following:

'Felt assessment is a vital part of curriculum to help children individually.'

'We realise this is the most efficient and effective means to monitor our teaching and children's development but realise the theory of the idea is not practical - interested in results of survey.'

'We value assessment highly, would like to devise a system for a recorded written/sharing of assessment data with parents:

(a) to work in close partnership with family

(b) to meet ERO requirements.

'This is an area we are finding challenging, time consuming, but very worthwhile.'

'We need to do it in order for children and staff to develop. Our assessment procedures and techniques would improve with more staff help.'

'We all (3 staff) consider it a very important part of our programme. Helps us plan our programme. Helps us deal with special needs of some children.'

'Very necessary'.

'Now we have an effective system up and running it is the most valuable information we can use. Feedback - results!'

'We all realise that this is a very important aspect of ECE but we need time for a staff member to observe a small number of children at a time each session in order to run an effective Early Childhood session.'

'It is an important part of an early childhood centre and one that is always there. It would be very difficult to work with children and not to be making assessments.'

'We realise that assessment of children is of great importance and any help would be appreciated.'

'It is a necessary part of providing a responsible programme. Scientifically valid tools are necessary to do this objectively. It is too easy to make a biased judgement on any child. For us to provide for these children, we need a comprehensive assessment procedure.'

Concerns about Assessment

Some raised problems or concerns about carrying out assessment. These included problems with time, number of teachers, and high teacher/child ratio. They were also concerned that findings would be used to label children.

'Need time available for the purpose or a third teacher.'

'The task is difficult - with the high ratio of staff to children (→ difficult for detailed assessments therefore we target children with problems. However, we informally assess all children and plan programme for perceived needs) - with high turnover of children - time is a problem.'

'With a new team it takes time to develop a procedure together.'

'Would like to do more indepth assessments, difficult because - number of staff to children - time limitations.'

'Need more staff.'

'It's necessary but time consuming (the Ministry review suggested perhaps too structured and time consuming and not fair on all children).'

'Needs to be achievable. Time a problem. Concerned about using parents to do running records because a type of parent may be gossipy.'

'Not always time to carry out assessments with all the other tasks involved.'

'It is time consuming therefore only older children assessed with parent helper. Need an extra staff member.'

'It is a long process that is continuous - feel we will never get to the stage where every child will have a folder with written information. (If we do there will be a shout of joy and our long term goal will be met.)'

'Wish I had time to do a better job.'

'Time is the biggest factor. For years kindergarten teachers have kept assessment in their heads but now we are accountable on paper. We need extra hours to keep these records.'

'Information sharing is difficult with our .5 teacher.'

'Lack of time is our problem, often it is a bit of guesswork until we see them again, hard to carry anything on week to week. With 2 hour sessions, where is the time?'

'It is valuable to have information handy, but a concern that information must be kept confidential.'

'Wary of too much data being recorded and results being misused therefore very little is put in writing. We believe the measuring of achievement should be lower on the list of priorities than the simple joy of being free to 'play'.'

'It has to be an ongoing process to accommodate the changing needs of the children. Difficult through lack of time.'

'1. I feel that as children's development is extremely fluid and therefore volatile (ie highs, lows, plateaus) that it would not be desirous to institute formal assessment procedures that would peg a child at a level at a given

time. The child may be in a low or on a plateau and may suddenly progress within a very short time of assessment - thus labelling a child misappropriately which could have resounding implications for a considerable time.

2. As well as upsetting young mothers where no concern is necessary, should these reports be made available to parents.'

'Our centre is open for 33 hours per week. We have four permanent staff and allowed two hour staff meetings per month. The big question is when do you assess? We know we are not doing the task proficiently, so would like to know a quicker way so we can complete written records for each child.'

'It is not easy for staff as with all day care you are constantly busy. When they have time out I prefer staff to switch off and read a magazine etc in the staffroom. We have regular staff meetings where we always discuss children but I am aware that this is not enough. I am very aware that it is easy to burn staff out if more and more demands are put on them. This is already happening in childcare.'

'Individual assessment is very time consuming. With 80 children at a session, finding time is a problem especially when we are dealing with parents at the same time. Staff (availability) space is limited.'

'The reason why we do not formally assess all children is due to high turnover and erratic sessional attendance, high roll numbers and not all children attending full time makes formal assessment of all children impossible. However, informal assessment of all children is carried out in day to day running of the centre.'

'It is time consuming when one is extremely busy. We also have a large number of children through the centre in a week.'

'Here we do a lot of assessment - the children move on to kindy. It takes a lot of time then it is not carried through when they leave.'

'I think great care should be taken to ensure that we do not formally 'grade' pre-schoolers. Rates of growth and learning vary enormously.'

'Practicalities of time for observations and record writing present difficulties. Checklists which provide us with necessary information are invaluable. Some children absorb more staff time than others.'

'It must be handled carefully so parents don't feel their child has failed.'

'With assessment of children at an early age extreme care must be taken that a child is not given a 'label' that might be detrimental at a later stage in their development.'

'Our nursery staff feel nervous about a checklist type of assessment. Under 2's have such a wide range of 'norms'. Are we in a position to assess children when we are working so closely with them and their parents?'

Although many centres saw the value of assessment a large number of centres saw difficulties in carrying out appropriate procedures.

Some centres commented on guidelines or procedures for assessment:
Many kindergartens said they would like a copy of the findings and follow up information from the project. Other comments included:

'We need to know how much written assessment and how much depth we need to keep a balance.'

'We need National guidelines in place catering to the **whole** child to encourage consistency based on early childhood education philosophies. Must be workable!'

'We have found it very difficult to find a system in relation to observing without the help of guidelines and the difficulties of only having two teachers and little parent help. Guidelines and examples of systems relating observations to programmes would be a great help.'

'We would be grateful for guidelines on what is expected of us. What are we actually supposed to do with this information?'

'Need an easy way to do it in a kindergarten with two staff and a daily average attendance of 37 children in each session and a large group of multicultural children.'

'It would be good if there was one standard developmental assessment made for each child and only one chart used.'

'Need more courses for staff on Assessment and observing children.'

'It would be worthwhile having a simple and quick developmental checklist to use in the centre.'

The following comments were elicited when staff were asked if they had other statements they wished to make regarding assessment of children.

'Recorded information must be positive and available to parents.'

'Concerned children will be labelled or written assessments could be used as reports for schools.

'Each service should make their own assessment of individual children.'

'The process of filling out the survey has helped further clarify and evaluate our assessment stages. As a new team and with a new procedure we appreciate the opportunity to view a procedure from different perspectives.'

'Needs vary.'

'Assessment must be confidential, unobtrusive to the child and a reason for it. Unconsciously you are assessing children all the time.

'It is difficult without interruption during kindergarten sessions.'

'We do not wish to see written records of children who attend kindergarten to be a requirement of the infant school.'

'It has to fit the working philosophy of the centre.'

'Assessment should be relevant to the centre - not a focus. Streamline, concise, easy to operate.'

'Assessment made at this level is relevant for this particular point in development and should not be used as an indication of future development.'

'Parents are invited to take all written assessment of their child when the child leaves the kindergarten to start school or is transferred.'

'Must be confidential. Hope the rumour currently circulating that all children must be 'examined/tested' is untrue.'

'We regard this as an informal procedure though it is now being required by ERO. It is only for the staff's benefit and to assist with planning our programme. I do not feel we should make a big issue of it at pre-school.'

'I don't like the word 'assessment' - we just use the word 'record' for written.

'Contrary to your comment about being aware of the hot issue of assessment I have always been made to understand that assessment at pre-school was not accepted. Indeed, I have been told emphatically by ECDU people 'We do not assess children, we evaluate programmes.' I would be most interested to hear how and when this change of attitude came about.'

'I prefer not to do it in any formal sense where there appears to be a problem. I like to have an openness between me and parents so that they feel happy to ask if they are concerned about any aspect of a child's development, (this definitely is the case at present) competency or behaviour. I try to be aware of each child as an individual and deliberately do not set out to measure any against a norm, average or whatever.'

'We are in the process of upgrading our child developmental profile.'

'We think it is important to be spending quality time with the children rather than spending all the time writing notes. It is important to affirm children and parents and be available for parents to discuss their children's development rather than just their problems.'

'CECUA have passed a remit at their 1991 conference that they oppose assessment information being transferred from pre-school to school.'

'I have worked in different centres and so have some of my other staff, we feel that each centre is similar but also very different, we know ours is special in itself with the children and families we have. Our most important assessment is that all our children feel warm, secure, happy in our environment, home away from home. After we have assessed this then the children are on their own steam, able to reap the educational learning we offer through their play and activities.'

'Please keep the aims simple and not 'loaded', eg, child reaches goals at different times - in other words no pre-school dropouts - that's what I get worried about, too much pressure on children. With a well supervised play programme, children should have the choice and opportunity to extend and learn in a natural atmosphere.'

'Our staff feel relatively inexperienced in assessment practices therefore a guideline would be very helpful. We would be very interested in attending inservice courses if they were available.'

'We do not automatically assess every child in this centre (all under 2). We use assessment to answer concerns either of parents or staff about specific children's development.'

'Would like some information on what happens in other New Zealand centres instead of overseas which is mainly what I have at present.'

'We would like to have more time to discuss programme and meeting children's needs.'

'Although I know we need an assessment system in place, I feel that childcare centres exist primarily because parents use us and need us. The supervisor and staff work in these centres providing correct programmes and activities because they are trained to do so. Too much paper work - assessing and evaluating takes us away from the real reason we are there - the children.'

'I do not like our present system of checklisting. It seems useless information and a waste of precious staff time. What does it mean if Katie can cut when she 3? What does it mean if Nicky can't hop on one foot 3 times? Maybe they were having a bad day. I think too much emphasis is put on compartmentalising children and we need to look at them as a 'whole'. Also, how do we assess cultural? Surely that's the programme not the child? If centres have good appropriate programmes set up then the children should be having opportunities to progress in all areas of development. Thanks for the opportunity to discuss this. I look forward to hearing your results.'

'Workers in childcare come from a variety of backgrounds, not just early childhood. How do you up-skill people so that they all have the skills to observe and assess children and still retain their special interests with the children.'

'Assessments must be confidential, unobtrusive to the child and a reason for it. Unconsciously, you are assessing children all the time.'

'To be of any value, assessment must be a continuous process. It is good to use a variety of staff input, include parent information, lots of listening skills and other professional help.'

Urban and rural trends

Written assessment of all children was carried out in 42% of urban centres and 38% of the rural and semi-rural centres.

Checklists were used by 40% of rural centres compared with 15% of urban centres.

Programme evaluation was used as a procedure for assessing children in 16% of urban centres compared with 6% of rural centres.

When looking at the procedures used Developmental Profiles were used by 11% of urban centres and 4% of rural centres.

Tests were used in four urban centres and one rural centre.

Assessment information was used 'to plan the programme to meet individual needs' in 61% of urban centres compared with 50% of rural centres.

Assessment information was used 'to assess or follow up problems or difficulties' only in rural centres (12 centres).

The information was used 'to evaluate and develop areas of the programme' in 13% of urban centres and 6% of rural centres.

Trends found in centres with differing ethnic compositions

There was very little difference in the proportion of written assessment being carried out between the centres with differing ethnic compositions.

Purposes of assessment were also very similar between the centres.

There was high parental involvement in assessment in the Maori and Maori and European centres.

Parents were involved in assessment in eight of the 10 predominantly Maori centres, and seven out of the eight Maori and European centres.

Cultural development was an area of development covered in two out of the 10 predominantly Maori centres while six out of the eight European and Maori centres included cultural development as part of their areas of development assessed.

Thirty four out of 50 multicultural centres included cultural development in their assessment of children.

Trends found when comparing the Palmerston North College of Education catchment area with that of the other five College of Education regions
Written assessment of children was carried out by 59 centres. Thirty six of these centres were from the Palmerston North College of Education catchment area (21%) and 23 from the other five regions (23%). (Seven of the 12 Auckland centres, three of the nine Christchurch centres, four of the 11 Hamilton centres, five of the 14 Dunedin centres and four of the 11 Wellington centres.)

Checklists were used in 23% of centres (20 of the 88) in the Palmerston North College of Education region, compared with 71% of centres (41 of the 57 centres) from the other regions.

Summary

The data gathered from questionnaires has highlighted the diversity of approaches used for assessing children, the different purposes that assessment is used for and the differences in who assessment information is shared with.

The results showed that parents are involved to varying degrees and at different times throughout the assessment procedures.

Assessment is carried out on an ongoing basis by some centres while others had specific times when assessment was carried out. This ranged from daily to yearly. Some centres assessed all children, while others only assessed particular children.

Fifty seven percent of centres had some staff who had attended a course on assessment. These courses were run by various groups from within the early childhood field. The staff who had not attended courses mainly gained their information in training, from colleagues, or through literature and books.

The opportunity for centres to make comments regarding assessment of children showed that many centres see the value and need for assessment while others are concerned about how the assessment information will be used and how they can actually carry out assessment of children with their high teacher child ratios and all their other responsibilities. Most centres said they would value some guidelines or procedures to aid them in carrying out their assessment of children.

Phase II - Structured Interview

Six questions were asked in the 24 centres where interviews were carried out regarding the assessment of children. (See Appendix 3.)

1. How Do You Assess Children?

Five different forms of assessment were used in the 24 centres that were interviewed.

Number of Centres
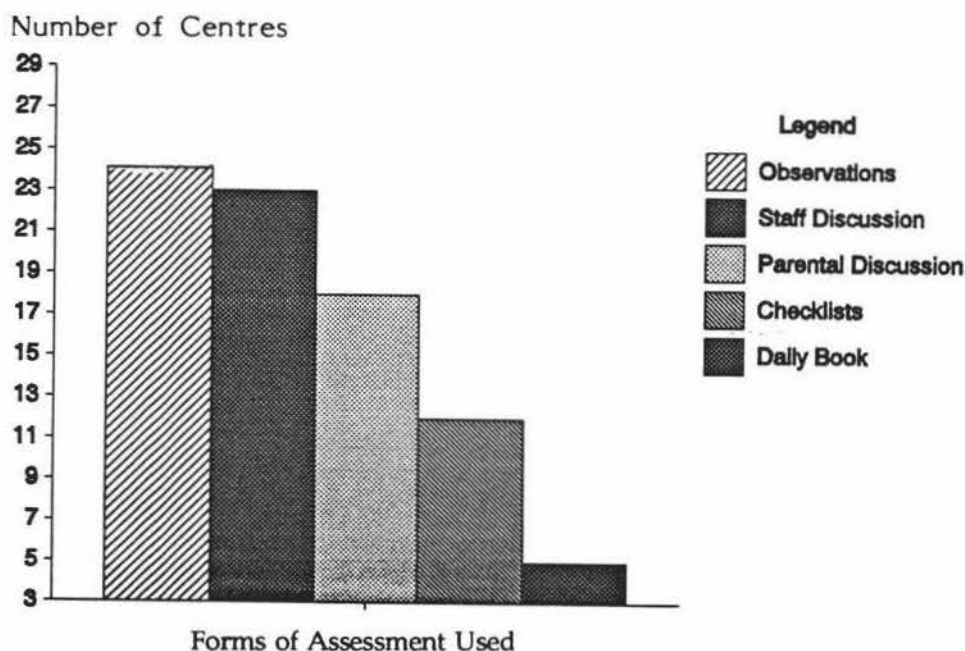
Figure 10 - Forms of Assessment Used by Interview Centres

All centres used 'general observations' as one form of assessment of children. This was combined with several other forms of assessment by most centres to develop a fuller picture of each child.

Parental discussion was used more in childcare centres compared with kindergartens. Checklists were used in eight kindergartens (33%) compared with four childcare centres (16%).

Daily books were used only in childcare centres (four of the 12 centres).

Forms of Assessment Used in the Interviewed Kindergartens

In the 12 kindergartens four main forms of assessment were found:
Observations, Staff Discussion, Checklists and Parental Discussion.

Number of Kindergartens
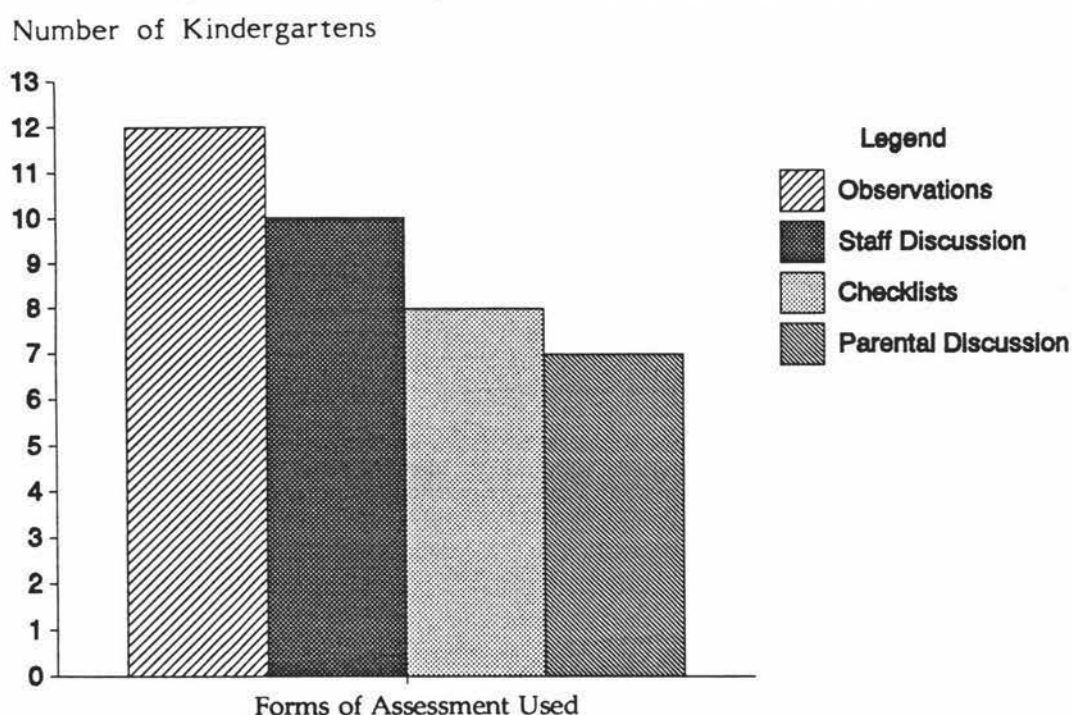
Figure 11 - Forms of Assessment Used in Kindergartens

(a) Observations

All 12 kindergartens carried out general observations while working with children.

Out of the 12 kindergartens no centre systematically observed all children that attended.

8 centres individually observed those children who were causing concern.

7 centres specifically mentioned systematic observations for IEP's of children with special teaching needs.

1 centre (a three teacher kindergarten) was working towards "broadening assessment to look at all children not just those with concerns" they commented that this was "to ensure at the end of the day those who had not had a specific need or have been a part of a concern will be spoken to and noticed".

1 centre (a three teacher kindergarten) individually observed all morning children systematically.

1 kindergarten (two teachers) commented "we only assess when a concern arises. There is no time to assess all children".

1 kindergarten (three teachers) were trying to target three or four children each session for systematic observations. However, had not yet systematically observed all children.

1 kindergarten (three teachers) has one teacher observe each child systematically in their first two weeks of entry.

(b) Staff Discussion

Staff discussion was mentioned by 10 out of 12 kindergartens as a means

of assessing children.

9 centres mentioned individual planning that would take place during staff meetings to support individuals.

5 kindergartens used ongoing discussion about children during the day and also systematically worked through the roll during staff meetings to discuss each child. One centre commented "we go through all the children on the roll, if we don't there are children who get left out. You tend to overlook the quieter children because of so many behaviour problems".

3 kindergartens used only everyday conversations as a means of using discussion for assessment purposes.

1 kindergarten discussed only those 'children causing concern' during staff meetings.

(1 kindergarten mentioned setting up mini IEP's for children another said they "add to notes or cross things off as children make progress".

1 kindergarten mentioned "they write individual programmes from what children can and can't do".

1 kindergarten said it "gives a focus" for planning. One said the information discussed is used for reinforcement at the centre and at home. One kindergarten used meetings every six weeks to draw up management plans of 'what outcomes they would like to see'. One kindergarten assigned the resource teacher to work with the children discussed.

Another centre commented that "every child is talked about every staff meeting but some children constantly need longer discussion".

(c) Checklists

8 out of 12 kindergartens used a checklist for some skills.

1 kindergarten used a basic skills checklist on all children.

3 kindergartens used a skills checklist with morning children only.

2 kindergartens used a skills checklist on most children.

1 kindergarten occasionally ran all children through an activity to do individual checks. (They commented that "individual checks are too time consuming".)

1 kindergarten had **parents** complete a skills checklist on their own child soon after they commenced morning kindergarten.

(d) Parental Discussion

7 kindergartens out of 12 mentioned that parental discussion was an important aspect of their assessment of children.

3 kindergartens used daily discussion and when specific observations or checklists were completed shared this information with parents. One of these centres also carried out home visits to some children.

1 kindergarten only involved parents if there was a problem (may discuss with parent or home visit).

1 kindergarten used occasional discussion with parents.

1 kindergarten used daily discussion and used non-contact time for consultation with parents.

1 kindergarten carried out home visits with all children (80) and discussed results of the child's skills checklist when they commenced morning kindergarten.

Forms of Assessment Used in Childcare Centres

In the 12 childcare centres five main forms of assessment were found: Observations, Staff Discussion, Checklists, Parental Discussion and Daily Books.

Number of Childcare Centres

Forms of Assessment Used
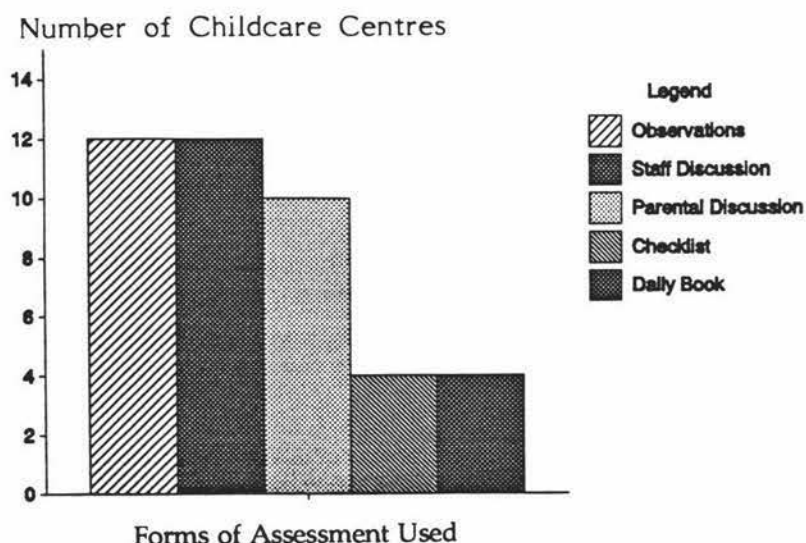
Figure 12 - Forms of Assessment Used in the Interviewed Childcare Centres

(a) Observations

All 12 childcare centres carried out general observations of children while they are working.

Systematic observations of all children were carried out by four centres by daily record books.

Another centre with two to three year olds made monthly comments on children.

Another centre kept general notes throughout the year for individual folders.

1 centre only kept notes if there was a 'real problem'.

1 centre was changing their observation system and hoped to observe one or two children until they worked through all children. (At present no system for observing all children.)

1 centre used written observations to check out something and twice a year set goals for each child.

1 centre used an ongoing checklist as a means of systematically observing all children.

1 centre commented they would like to have notes on each child unfortunately most time is spent with the children with problems.

1 centre used only informal observations and these were 'stored in the head'.

(b) Staff Discussion

All 12 childcare centres mentioned **staff discussion** as a means of assessing children.

This was done through discussion about children at the end of sessions informally by four centres. It may be a casual comment "Have you seen ...?" or it may be checking to see staff are getting the same messages.

2 centres talk about children causing concern and one of these also discusses children who are doing well.

2 centres used staff discussion to decide how to approach a problem with a child.

1 centre specifically discussed five children (after they had been observed for two weeks) at each staff meeting.

3 centres commented that they share information and plan for individuals at staff meetings. One of these did their planning for individuals twice a year.

1 centre commented that they make sure all children have time given to discussion during staff meetings.

(c) Parental Discussion

10 out of 12 childcare centres mentioned parental discussions as a form of assessment.

This included six centres who made casual comments about children as they were collected or asked parents in for discussion if there was a real concern.

1 centre conducted formal interviews as well as talked casually to parents. A full discussion on what the child does at the centre was carried out including social, work skills, motor skills, language, maths or any concerns. Information and comments from the parents were noted.

Sometimes these parents were given a video of their child to see them interacting at the centre.

2 centres matched the parents and special 'carer' or teacher to talk to the parent carefully to ensure good relations would develop. A lot of time was spent in discussion between carer and parent at this centre.

2 other centres also commented that the special carer chats daily to parents.

A special time was set up by two centres following observations or checklist for parents to talk about their child.

1 centre included parents 'where necessary'.

2 centres commented that parent feedback was valued and they aimed to have a friendship with parents. They encouraged parents to feel at home. One centre had social weekends with parents, the other monthly meetings. One of these centres provided many opportunities to chat right from the first visit to the centre. Parents were given lots of opportunity for involvement in decision-making at one of these centres.

(d) Checklists

1 centre had an ongoing checklist for all children. (They adapted a checklist to the special needs of the centre.) Staff were given time each week for one-to-one on checklists. This was about two hours each week.

1 centre devised their own basic observational checklist which was being trialled at the time of interview. (Each staff member was responsible for checking five or six children.)

Another centre used a playcentre checklist to trial one teacher observing one child for one week.

1 centre used checklists only on a few occasions 'to help point out what you may not know about some children'.

(e) Daily Book

A diary of daily happenings was kept by four centres.

In three of these cases a special carer kept a daily book with general comments about the child's day.

The other centre had a teacher record specific observational information on what a child was doing and what s/he could successfully complete.

These four centres that kept daily records for individuals included one under two centre, one centre with under two's and two to three year olds, one centre with under two's and two to five year olds and one centre with three to five year olds.

Case Study 1

Childcare Centre I - Comments On How They Assess Children

General observations were ongoing, they were constantly looking at what children could do.

All areas of development were covered by their assessment and were included within a checklist that the centre had compiled using 'Early LAP' and 'Good schools for young children' as a guide. After staff discussion items were added that they felt were appropriate for their particular centre.

Each staff member was responsible for children. They were given time during each week to work on the checklist or to work one-to-one with children (the time allocation was about two hours each week).

The staff are presently looking at using a notebook for observations so they can record things that come up and pass them on to the appropriate staff member.

Checklists were discussed with parents on enrolment and parents can see them at any stage. The parents know which staff member is responsible for their child's checklist.

Copies of artwork are kept for each child's file. Staff discussion takes place at lunch times and during monthly staff meetings regarding children. Concerns are put on the agenda and if a child hasn't been spoken about for a wee while they will be discussed.

Staff work with children to see that they will be able to cope at school. Social skills is the area most worked on.

The centre commented that they would like to hold regular parent/teacher meetings to give parents support informally and get feedback from parents about their children.

2. What Areas of Development Are Covered By Assessment?
All centres covered physical, social and emotional areas of development in
their assessment with most centres also assessing cognitive and language
development. Seventy one per cent assessed aesthetic and creative areas of
development and 54% of centres assessed cultural development.

Number of Centres
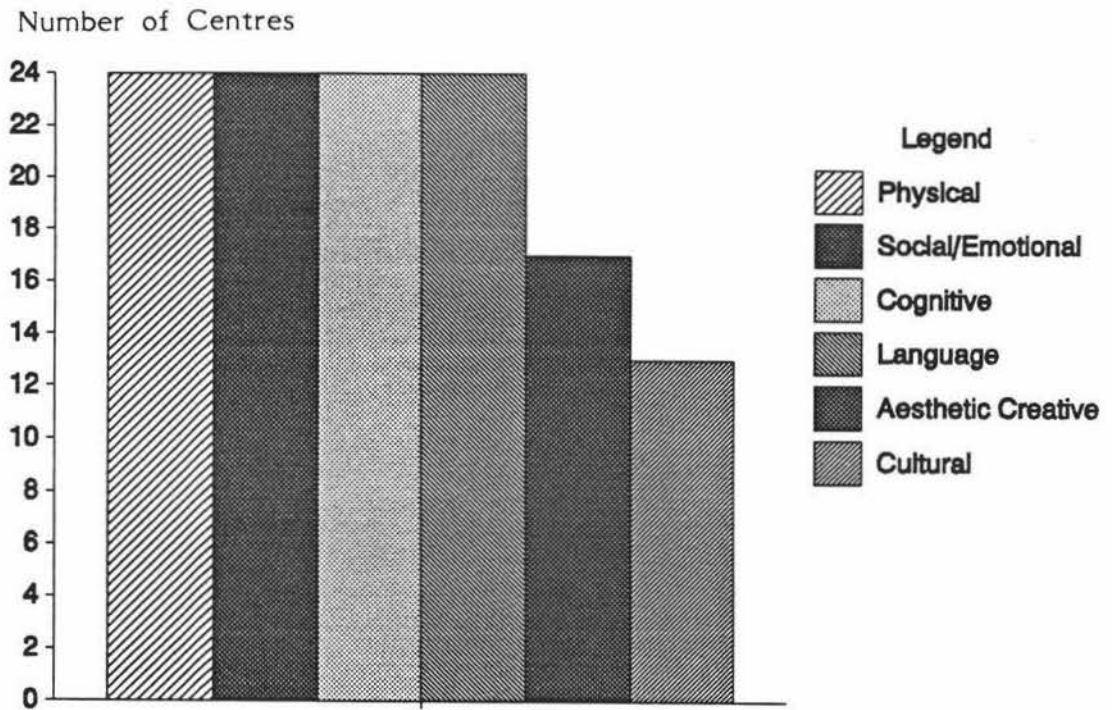
Areas of Development Covered by Assessment
Figure 13: Areas of Development Covered by Assessment

The following example from one kindergarten shows how these areas of development may be observed.

Case Study 2

Kindergarten I

Physical Development

The staff at the kindergarten believed they would notice children with physical 'differences'. They specifically set up obstacle courses and other outdoor activities to observe development. They also observed children during music and when they were working at fine motor activities to gauge physical developments.

Social and Emotional Development

There was a wide variety of social skills used as part of the programme so observations could be made readily of children interacting with others, sharing, co-operating etc.

Cognitive Development

Day to day observations were made of stages of art, puzzles, play etc. Concentration span and ability to sequence etc were also noticed. A checklist was used with a kit from which to observe children engaging in specific cognitive activities.

Language Development

Careful listening to children during conversations was used to pick up abilities with language. Language was one aspect of the checklist that was looked at to determine language competencies. They deliberately built in language extension activities into mat times in the form of songs, poetry, drama, stories, discussion etc to hear children's use of language.

Cultural Development

The kindergarten looked at the needs of ethnic minorities. A different and more flexible approach was used in assessment with different cultures.

Aesthetic/Creative Development

A scrapbook is used as a record of progress in art work. This book is used for discussion also.

This kindergarten commented that they concentrate most on social and cognitive areas of development because of parental feedback on what they would like emphasised.

They believed cognitive development was the most difficult area to assess because one-to-one is needed however physical development was the easiest to observe. They also commented that social development was easy to see if something was wrong however difficult to find the underlying cause.

Staff commented that they often know before they start a checklist how a child will go.

The kindergarten used general observations along with each of these procedures.

All other centres also relied heavily on general observations. However, many also observed along similar lines to Kindergarten I.

1 centre commented that they make sure their programme covers all areas of development then they observe children within the programme to assess development in these areas.

Another commented "these areas are in the whole environment. We pick it up rather than set about to test it".

2 centres (one kindergarten and one childcare centre) said they used only general observations within the programme to cover all areas of development and would only set things up if there was a specific concern.

1 centre commented that general observations were made of cognitive development and they often felt sorry for the 'pleasant' or 'busy' children because they are concentrating on those at the lower end of the scale.

1 centre acknowledged that when you make general observations 'you don't see all the children and what they can do'.

1 centre said they firstly look at children holistically to make sure they are settled, enjoying themselves and having fun. The importance is placed on the **doing**, trying, experimenting and exploring not on the product.

Another centre commented they assess children's abilities to work independently and use initiative.

1 kindergarten commented "time is a big thing. In a two teacher kindergarten children need to be assessed during session time. If one teacher does the assessing the other poor teacher is responsible for everyone else".

Most centres agreed that physical development was the easiest to assess and most felt that emotional development was the most difficult to assess.

1 centre commented "social and emotional development are the least measurable, they are the most difficult to establish what is the 'norm'. Physical, cognitive and language have benchmarks. The individual and cultural variations are enormous. We would feel most uncomfortable having expectations in these areas. The other areas are more rationally observed".

Some other centres felt that cognitive development was the most difficult to assess because of the need for careful one-to-one observations. High staff/student ratios and time were cited as problems in assessing children individually.

3. How Is The Assessment Information Used?

Assessment information was used for 12 purposes.

Most centres used their assessment information for a range of purposes, and included several uses from the legend below.

Legend

- To plan a programme
- To share with parents
- To check individual development
- To plan for individuals
- To share with staff
- To formulate a profile on the child
- To isolate concerns
- To pick up special needs
- To monitor progress
- To see what needs to be worked on
- To provide information for professionals
- To check something out

Number of Centres
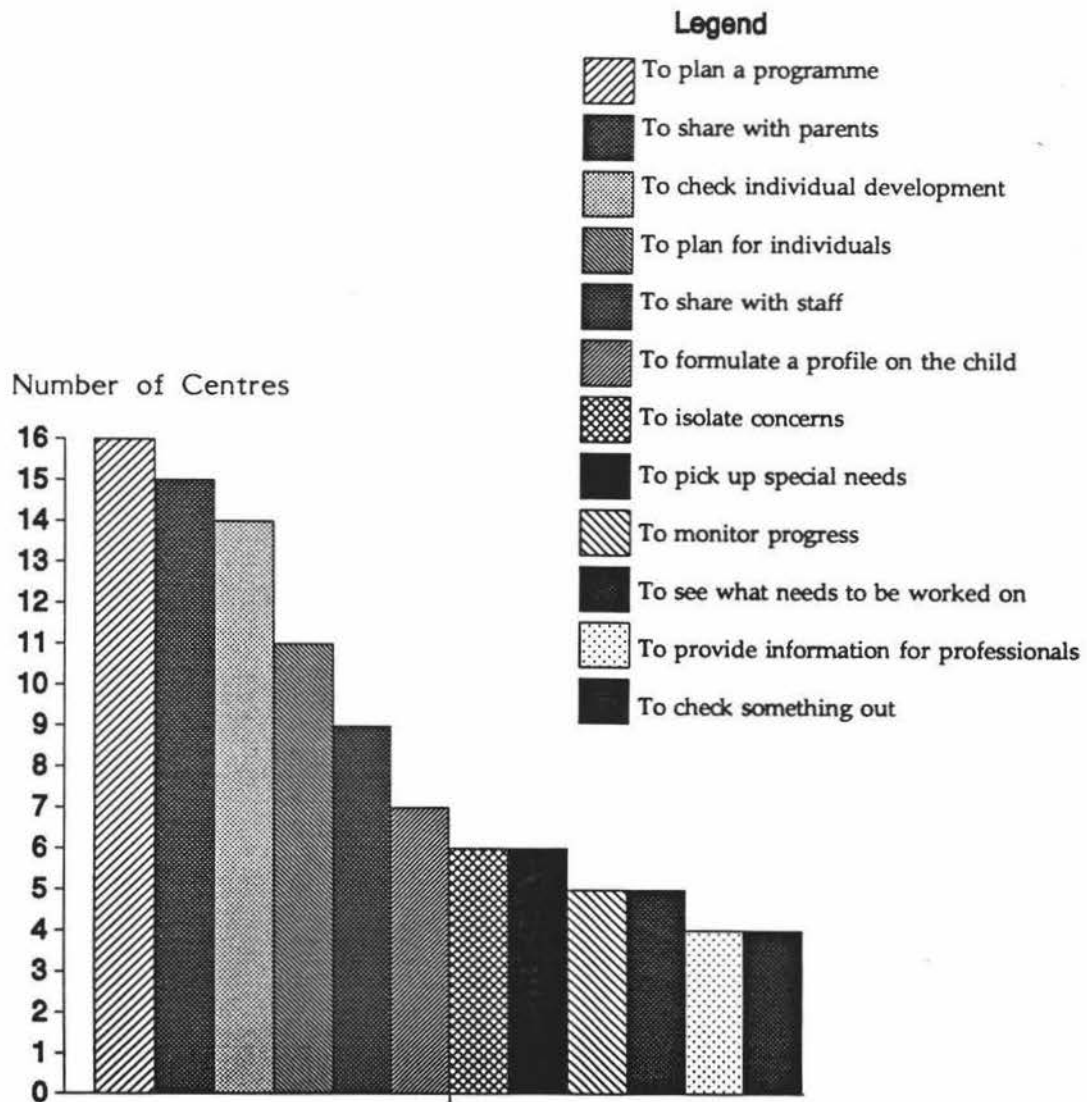
Uses of Assessment Information

Figure 14 - How Assessment Information is Used by Centres

Case Study 3

Childcare Centre II shows how the assessment information may be put to a range of uses.

They commented:

"Our assessment information is used:
- To build up a file of each child.
- To ensure all children are developing along recognised 'norms'.
- To target areas of delay or accelerated development and modify activities to meet their needs.
- To share objective information with parents with written information to support this.
- To share with parents to assist them as the prime caregiver.
- To increase the teachers awareness of children and help staff get to know each child.
- To show your teaching progression."

Several other centres also mentioned the use of staff discussion for 'unity in dealing with children' and for consultation to see 'that the other person thinks the same'.

4. *Who Is The Assessment Information Shared With?*

Staff discussion was the main avenue for sharing assessment information. Parents were included in the sharing of assessment information by some centres and others only included parents if there as a concern or problem.

The assessment information was shared with other professionals and specifically with senior teachers in a number of centres.

Number of Centres

Who Assessment Information is Shared With

Legend

Other staff

Parents

Parents if there is a concern or problem

Other professionals (SES, Speech Therapists, Public Health Nurse, Vision and Hearing)

Senior teachers

Students
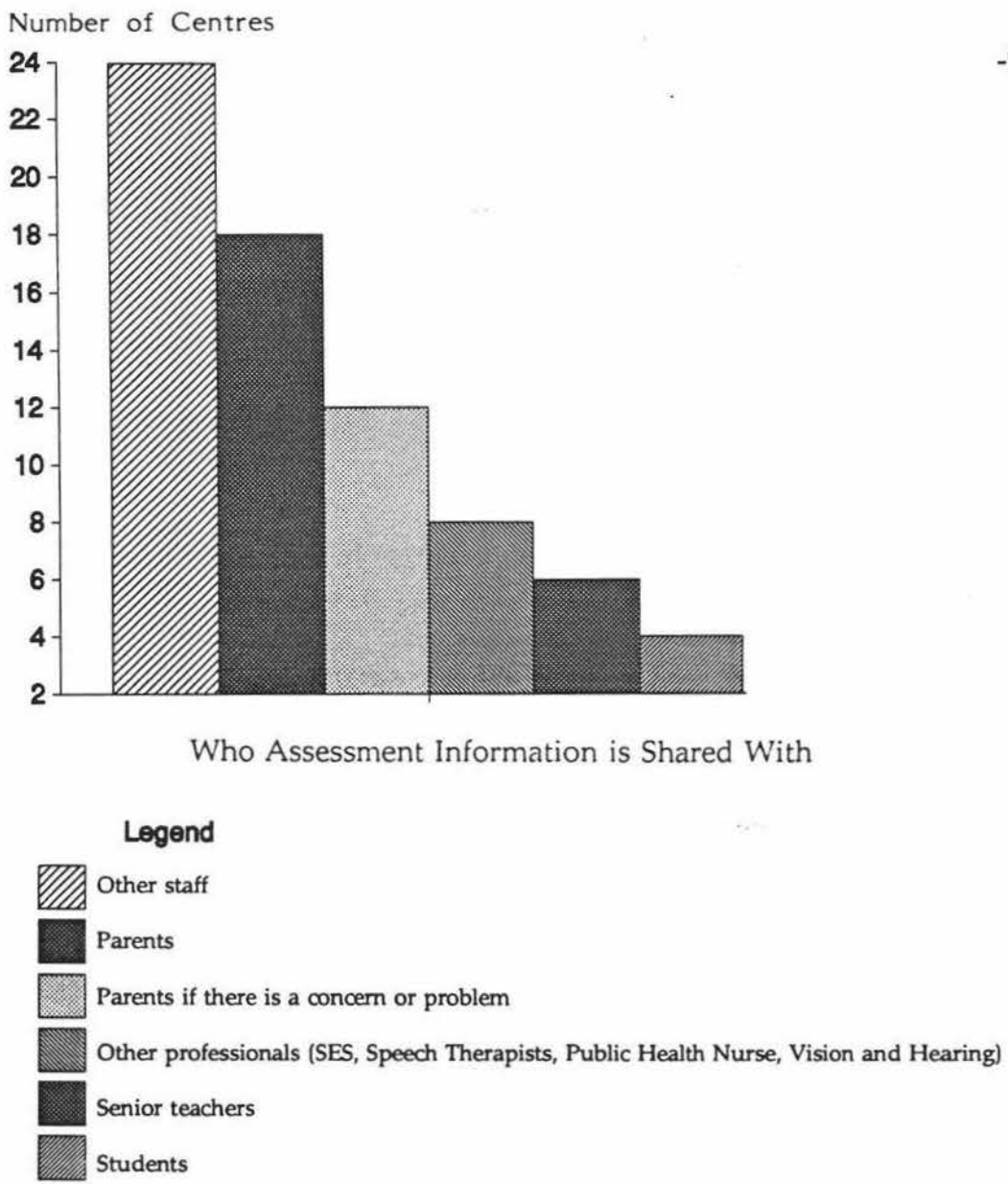
Figure 15 - Who Assessment Information is Shared With

Staff discussion varied from informal chats about children in some centres through to planned systematic discussions of all individuals in other centres.

Centres also varied in the amount of parental involvement in their assessment procedures.

Seventeen centres had a more systematic approach which involved all parents at their centre in the assessment process of their child.

Seven centres chatted to parents about their child at the end of the session or day however, apart from this, parents were only involved if:

- they asked
- there was a problem or concern
- they were a parent of a child with special needs.

Four centres conducted home visits as part of their programme.

Several centres commented that they target parents to catch up with.

One centre commented "more and more parents of children without concerns are wanting progress reports. Often the children with the most appropriate behaviours and skills are those that are the most overlooked".

Another centre commented that they have one teacher "float at the end of the session for talking to parents. It is difficult with everyone standing around to make confidential comments. Usually you make comments about something positive that has happened".

Case Study 4

Kindergarten II gives an example of how assessment information might be shared with parents.

Before and after sessions lots of casual comments are made to parents about their child's day. "It gives parents some ideas of how their children are going."

Parents are able to be involved at any stage. There is a parent helper roster and often this time is taken to talk about their child. Parents are able to be involved at any time.

We do home visits to find out where the child comes from. It gives you an opportunity to see the child in their own environment. Playgroup operates so staff can see children here before they start.

If a parent asks for support, information is there for them. If there is a concern by staff, parents are included to see if they have the same concerns.

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5. *What Does Your Charter Say About Assessment of Children?*

Out of the 24 centres interviewed:

11 centres had detailed comments about assessment of children in their charters.

9 centres had no comments specifically about assessment of children in their charter, while

4 centres had either one sentence or a small section which they did not follow any more.

The greatest difficulties mentioned that prevented centres from carrying out charter requirements were:

- the need for more staff
- not enough time
- more training for staff needed.

1 childcare centre commented that "there was a need to have trained staff aware of how, when, where and why assessment is carried out, also to make the time available to do it".

1 centre commented that they did not carry out what was written in the charter however, "they would broaden what was written about assessment when they have established something they are happy with".

Several other centres without written statements about assessment in their charter were still working out or trialling some new assessment procedures.

It was clear from the information received that two teacher kindergartens had greater difficulty in carrying out their assessment procedures when compared with three teacher kindergartens.

1 centre commented "time is the greatest difficulty. We need a third teacher. We have a session to run as well as needing to carry out individual assessment" and another kindergarten commented "there is pressure to keep 40/40 for funding, children are getting quantity rather than quality. You don't get a chance to even see some children. You notice them when half the morning has gone. You feel quite guilty sometimes that you haven't worked with some children".

1 centre who commented that their charter contained no statement about assessment of children said that they were not sure of the charter's role now. They felt that there have been changes in the focus of the charter ... from equity to accountability. They also commented "we would be continually revising the charter if we were to use it as a working document". "Your training and professional behaviour determines what you do, not the charter." They also commented that occasionally a student may bring it to the fore to focus on.

This centre could be contrasted with others that had more comprehensive information about their procedures for assessment of children in their charter such as found in the following Case Study.

Case Study 5

Kindergarten III the charter stated:

"The staff regularly observe and assess children's developmental stages and needs and plan according to these needs. Staff will assess the needs of individual children and provide appropriate support within the daily programme. Staff will meet regularly and discuss the observations and record aims and objectives in the staff meeting folder."

Under 'planning' it stated planning is undertaken for 'individual children's objectives'.

The staff commented that they still regularly observe and assess children. However, they do not have time to do all children. "Don't know how you would work it to do all children, there is not enough time. If you had three staff you could release one and take turns carrying out observations. Children who do their own thing miss out all the way through the education system. They are the good ones that just carry on. You are working with the behaviour problems, the noisy ones, the slow ones. They are the ones I feel sorry for they miss out."

"We do meet regularly and discuss observations. We have staff meetings. Often we discuss strategies with another centre, we keep in close contact as we need to back each other. We could do with many more helping us. We only get help for the really needy children. There is no help for others that could be helped for example, to correct the little problems. If these were corrected early these are the children who would benefit. We would like more money spent on

them and for staff to know ways of dealing with it. Every situation is different.We do not plan for individual children's objectives, you really can't get round to every child. Some will get through the system and you won't notice. You can't pick up everything. How can you? It is just not happening for every child. We just try to make the world a happier place for them."

This centre's charter also stated:

"We will assure one staff member is available at the end of each session for parent/whanau consultation or at a pre-arranged time."

Staff commented:

"Staff are available, parents are informed of this. We don't like fobbing parents off. If they have said there is a problem we think it is up to the staff to listen. You need to listen when it is said, not in a few days time. Some parents will set up time, they come in about all sorts of things. When each child starts we offer for parents to come and talk. If parents have concerns it is rubbing off on the children ..."

Some specific comments that centres made that would aid their assessment included:

"We need more qualified staff members. Replacing staff with more qualified people because they have the skills of observation and the developmental knowledge."

"We do not have any criteria currently yet ERO have expectations."

"We like working without boundaries and tailoring assessment to suit the individual needs."

"The group of 40 children is a huge group. If the phone rings or there is an accident how do you spend time on assessment."

Concern that "the minimum standards and expectations are so high where is the time for general working with children. The things that we do are able to be done because of the third teacher".

Case Study 6

Kindergarten IV

When asked what would they find most helpful to aid them in carrying out their assessment procedure commented:

- Some way of quickly recording findings.

- A short, not too detailed checklist (with staffing as it is there is not the capacity to do detailed assessments of all children. Currently we target children with particular problems, from observations and focus on them. We are constantly informally assessing children and endeavour to plan the programme to cater for perceived needs. Our programme covers all areas of development on a daily basis).

- Either someone to 'do it' (assess children) or someone to release staff to assess children.

- Need inservice training on assessment.

- There seems to be no ideal method (we don't want anything like the schools such as record cards or tests).

- There is a need for ongoing assessment. (Some children are developmentally sound. We don't have time to do all children. Only time to fill the gaps. We don't always have time to work with gifted children or those on target.)

- A guideline as to the areas that the Ministry feels we should be assessing eg how we should go about it? how much detail do we have to write?

- We don't want it being passed on to schools, it is for our information and the parents. It should be accessible to parents

Summary

The forms of assessment most commonly used by the centres interviewed included observations, staff discussion and parental discussion.

The areas of development covered included physical, social/emotional, cognitive and language with aesthetic/creative and cultural to a lesser extent.

Assessment was used for a range of purposes. To plan a programme, to share with parents and to check individual development featured highly.

Information from assessment was shared mainly with other staff and parents.

Less than half the centres interviewed had any details about assessment of children in their charter.

Suggestions preferred by teachers to help them carry out assessment of children included:

- a reliever to free up teachers to carry out assessment
- guidelines and recommendations
- courses on assessment.

Phase III - Observation Exercise Data

Following the structured interviews and questionnaires it became clear that centres rely very heavily on general observations in their assessment of children. All 24 centres interviewed used general observations as a major part of their assessment procedure, and most (120/145) returning questionnaires used observations.

This third phase of the research was designed to establish what was happening during general observations in centres and to verify if valuable observations were taking place when staff were working with children.

Twelve centres were selected from the 24 interview centres to be used for the observation exercise.

All the observations that had been recalled as made by a staff member, or group of staff, following one morning's work with children were recorded. Staff were then asked what else they knew about any child mentioned to establish the type of picture or information staff had already gathered on each child.

(i) The Number of Children Observed

The results showed that many observations were taking place within centres while staff were carrying out their everyday work with children. Staff also had gathered detailed background information on some of the children they mentioned as being the focus of their observations.

Large amounts of observation data were able to be recalled by some staff following one morning of working with children. In centres the number of children observed by any one staff member ranged from 33 to 6.

The staff member who observed 33 children in one morning was in a three teacher semi-rural kindergarten. She said she was able to observe this number of children because she was the floating person on this day. This meant she could be inside or outside and in this way managed to see and recall what all but four children were doing on this day. The floating person in this centre was also responsible for talking to parents when they dropped off and collected children.

The staff member who observed six children was working in an under two section of a semi-rural childcare centre. There were two staff members and four babies in this section on the morning of the exercise. When talking about her observations the staff member had observed an additional two children who had recently moved to the over two's section as she had been 'deliberately keeping an eye on them' to see how they were settling.

Number of Children Observed

| Centre Number	Identification of Centre
1	A three teacher kindergarten
2	A three teacher kindergarten
3	A childcare centre with 3-5 year olds
4	A two teacher kindergarten
5	An under twos childcare centre
6	A three teacher kindergarten
7	A two teacher kindergarten
8	An under twos and 2-5s childcare centre
9	An under twos childcare centre
10	A two teacher kindergarten
11	An under twos childcare centre
12	An under twos childcare centre

The Twelve Centres in the Observation Exercise

Figure 17 - The Number of Children Observed by the Different Centres

(ii) Who Was Observed

When looking at who was observed it became apparent that some children were uppermost in the mind of staff because they were a concern, either because of a special need or behavioural difficulty.

One centre commented that those observed were "usually those that you have on your mind". Only one child out of the 14 observed by this staff member was an exception to this and this particular child was observed because she carried out some special work during the morning. All other observations were made of children that had a special need of some sort.

Another centre commented that they always have some children 'to zoom in on' and apart from this felt that they observed more social interactions than anything else.

In one centre the staff member who recalled her observations following one morning's work with children had worked outside all morning. So only the children outside could be observed. The other staff member who worked inside saw different children. Only two children discussed had been observed by both teachers.

When more than one staff member contributed to the observations of children apart from at this centre the observations were very similar and reinforced each other's observations.

Table 1 - Observations According to Gender

Centre Number	Males	Females	Total Children Observed
1	17	16	33
2	11	13	24
3	10	7	17
4	7	9	16
5	9	6	15
6	10	4	14
7	6	6	12
8	3	8	11
9	5	5	10
10	5	4	9
11	7	2	9
12	6	-	6

Number of Males and Females Observed

(Refer to Figure 18 for the type of Centre referred to)

There appears to be a balance between the number of males and females observed. Where only males were observed in centre number 12, no females were present in the group that day.

(iii)   The Areas of Development Covered by Observations

When looking at the areas of development covered by the range of observations it showed that the staff involved in the observation exercise observed social and socio-emotional or emotional and socio-emotional development more than other areas. This was the case in 11 out of 12 centres. The one centre (number 3) that was an exception to this made predominantly cognitive observations and this cognitive development focus clearly fitted with the philosophy of that particular centre.

Table 2 - Number of Children Observed by Areas of Development in the 12 Centres

Areas of Development Covered by Observations	Centres												Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
physical	15	8	1	1	6	2	-	1	3	4	4	4	45
social	12	7	2	4	1	1	7	3	2	1	1	3	41
emotional	7	6	3	3	3	3	1	6	10	1	2	3	48
socio-emotional	9	3	1	3	2	4	1	-	1	1	2	1	28
cognitive	9	8	10	3	1	2	4	3	-	4	1	1	45
language	13	6	1	1	4	2	3	2	-	2	1	3	35

(Refer to Figure 18 [Number of Children Observed for Each Area of Development] for type of centre referred to by centres 1-12)

The total number of areas of development observed were greater than the total number of children observed as several areas of development were often covered in the discussion of one child. This can be demonstrated by the following example:

Male A. A was clinging to his mother to start with. I took him from his Mum and distracted him with a monkey. He watched Mum go. He picked up his boots and put them on his feet. He then settled. He tried to do a puzzle which was beyond him but he tried. After that he was happy to take off and join in. This observation covered emotional, physical, cognitive and social comments about child A.

Examples of observations placed under each area of development have been taken from all 12 centres in the observation exercise.

Physical observations included both physical well-being as well as specific observations of physical development.

Examples of physical well being included observations such as:

Female H "Her eyes worry me. She has one lazy eye . I will need to watch it and mention it to her Mum".

Male L "L is not walking himself. Staff have slacked off a little at supporting him. They were enthusiastic to start with. Today he was going on his knees. There are concerns about his development."

Female E "E has spots on her face. She has been pale this week and is a little withdrawn today. We will need to talk to her parents about it. She is quieter than usual."

Male J J is still not eating. Hasn't been eating for a couple of weeks. We gave him a sandwich instead of vegies today but he still didn't eat it."

Examples of observations of physical development included observations such as:

Male D "D was good at throwing a ball in the right direction."

Female A "A was very clumsy and took big bounding steps."

Male L "L negotiated a swing ladder on the climbing frame on his own."

Female A "A spent some time on her stomach today. She lifted her chest off the ground. We are watching her development. She is not taking weight on her legs yet we are trying to put her on her *puku* to encourage this."

Social observations included examples such as:

Male M "M wouldn't go near a large group at the water tray however would go with only one or two children."

Females C + C "C and C played together as usual. They usually dress up and play games together."

| Males J + M | "J and M were together friendly, sharing, saying please and thank you to each other, helping each other, supporting. Previously their play hadn't been constructive it had been silly behaviour and anti-social." |
| Female S | "Can see the influence of a new friendship. It is taking precedence over work. It is a really nice change of friendship." |

Emotional observations included examples such as:

Male D	"Very emotional. Gets upset when someone leaves kindergarten. He went up to a parent and asked **please** could the child come to school with him."
Female A	"... seems more settled today. Last week she was not quite herself. She is very placid. We are trying to get her motivated."
Male J	"J is very settled. Mum is picking him up more. He is not in care as much. He is usually grizzly and whining. He burst in today with a big smile. He has blossomed and is happy to be here now."
Female K	"K has just come in as a four year old. She is a little lost at times. We need to keep an eye on her. She clings to her morning tea ..."

Socio-emotional observations included examples such as:

| Male M | "Because he had a day at home yesterday he was clingy. He was happy as long as he was held. So I held him when he had morning tea. Sometimes he will not eat if he is in the high chair. He showed signs of tiredness, snuggled in, thumb in mouth went to sleep ..." |

Female C   "C was more co-operative. She had to be reminded to pack up
            but did it. Usually she is reluctant to co-operate."

Male R   "We had needed to watch him closely because of aggressive
            behaviour. We've tried to catch him before he aggresses.
            Unfortunately we see him afterwards often. He is not as
            aggressive as previously. His mother says he is often aggressive
            with his brother at home. He has difficulty with socialising skills.
            He had previously stabbed dolls and cut off their limbs. His fists
            came up quickly. He has only been at the centre for three weeks."

Male A   "Sharing is an area of concern. Initially he couldn't share space or
            equipment. Today he was a lot better. He got frustrated playing
            cricket and wanted his turn then and there. He was prepared to
            tackle for the ball. We are trying to put it on him to stand up for
            himself. Previously he had held onto whatever he had and
            wouldn't move from it. One time today when he tried to take
            someone else's trolley he coped at being told 'no'."

Cognitive observations included both concentration level of children and
examples of specific cognitive skills.

Female F   "F played in the sandpit for a long time. Also at the carpentry
            she was very pleased with herself, I hadn't seen her do this
            before. Lately she has been a little mischievous therefore it was
            good to see the development of these new skills in carpentry."

Male S   "First thing today he was cutting, sat down with paper circles.
            Cut out five or six of them in half then in quarters. He made a
            boat then made about four boats by stapling them together. He
            went out and floated them. He loves the water played pouring.
            He is quite orderly. He carefully carries and pours. He has his
            eyes on what he is doing."

Female F   "F read two Hairy MacClary stories today she is reading at a level perhaps better than a seven year old. She also has good comprehension of the issues she reads about."

Male T   I was thrilled to see the maths activity, the level at which he was working today. He was working with an electric circuit - very busy. He is well able and diverging into something else.

Under Cognitive development there were 11 examples of work being carried out which could have also been placed under the heading Aesthetic/Creative development. These were mainly from Centres 1 and 2.

Examples of cognitive but which also represent aesthetic/creative development would be found in the following observations:

Male J   "J did a painting. It was still at a stage where 'not much'. He watched someone do another painting. He needed staff to comment on his. He knew all the colours ...".

Female K   "K worked inside today. She was very proud of her hat she stapled and sellotaped and she did a painting and worked for a long time. When she was new she spent time outside. As she has been at kindergarten longer she has gravitated to the creative area."

Language observations included non-verbal communication listening skills and specific examples of speech such as:

Male S   "S appears to be behind in speech development. When he sees something he is quite verbal but you can't understand it ...".

Female V   "V could relate back what was happening in the story today. She had good understanding and carried on a good discussion."

Male N   "Noticed he stood up for himself. He said 'No I don't like that'. This was good to hear."

Female N   "N has been going to speech. We had concerns and referred her
            to psych. Maybe it was a lack of experiences or exposure to
            others. She lives in a small flat. In the beginning we could
            hardly understand her, today she told a long involved story. It
            had made a big impression on her to visit her Grandmother and
            cousins. She told me all about it. We will now have to work on
            endings for stories as she went on and on. Previously she only
            had a single word or two words such as 'sing song'. Now she
            volunteers lots of information."

Two examples of language that were given came from children who had
English as a second language. Staff mentioned that they had been
particularly working with and encouraging the language of these children.
These observations could have also been placed under 'cultural development'
as that provided the focus for the language observation. As there were only
two examples that covered any aspect of cultural focus a specific category
was not allocated to this.

As many of the areas of development are not always clear cut the examples
given under each section were to demonstrate the types of observations
placed under the different areas.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Three methods of data gathering, questionnaires, structured interviews and an observation exercise were used to determine the current status of assessment of children in kindergartens and childcare centres in New Zealand.

Information was gathered using the questionnaire from a diversity of centres throughout New Zealand. The responses represented a balance of both kindergarten and childcare centres and of urban and rural centres. The sample reflected a variation in the size of centres, number of teachers, and in the age range of children that they catered for. A range of ethnic compositions were also represented.

A special feature of early childhood centres became evident when 87% of centres were found to have used a team approach to respond to the questionnaire. Many centres also requested that a team approach be used for giving responses during the structured interviews. During the observation exercise, when reporting their observations, the staff member was usually supported by others. This indicates that a collegial approach is used commonly in early childhood centres. The questionnaire data collated from the 145 centres reflected the views of 397 staff who had input into these responses.

The questionnaire had many open questions which provided the opportunity for centres to reflect the special nature or needs of their own centre. This achieved the aim of revealing the diversity of approaches used in different centres and the wide range of their perceived needs regarding assessment. Many personal views and opinions were able to be documented from the

responses showing the differing values placed on assessment. Responses reflected a range of purposes and uses to which the assessment information was put and a variety of concerns and constraints on carrying out their assessment procedures.

The questionnaire compared a large sample of centres from one College of Education catchment area with a smaller sample from each of the other five College of Education catchment areas. This was to determine whether different approaches were used in different areas. The comparison proved useful because differences were found between the different geographical regions.

The structured interviews, conducted at centres following the questionnaire, provided 24 centres with the opportunity to elaborate on how, when and why they used the assessment that they had in place. This sample represented four centres from each College of Education catchment area, with two childcare centres and two kindergartens being used from each. Care was taken to ensure that a variety of centres were represented from the questionnaire including the use of centres which had formal and those which used informal approaches to assessment.

The face-to-face interview clarified and put in perspective much of the information gathered from the questionnaire. Through discussion, staff were able to explain the motives for their assessment practices.

From the questionnaire and structured interview data it became apparent that centres used observations as the main method for gathering assessment information on children. It therefore seemed important to find out details of the type of observations and quantity of information gathered by this process. The observation exercise was devised to determine the number and type of observations of children that occur while staff are working in their centres.

Twelve centres were used for the observation exercise [1 kindergarten and 1 childcare centre from each of the 6 College of Education catchment areas]. All centres involved in the observation exercise had participated in a structured interview. Care was taken to ensure that the interview sample reflected information from urban and rural centres, two and three-teacher kindergartens, large and small childcare centres catering for a diversity of age ranges as well as representing differing ethnic compositions.

After one morning's work, a staff member was asked to recall all the observations of children that she had made that morning. This information was intended to verify if valuable observations were taking place in centres. Many observations did occur each morning while staff were engaged in their work with children.

The observation exercise relied heavily on staff being able to recall all that they had observed in one morning. Some staff commented that they probably had observed more than they recalled, as often observations are remembered when there is a reason or related incident which makes the information memorable. For example if a specific question had been asked about "James' language" at the end of the morning, an observation related to this may have been made yet not recalled without this prompting.

The fact that the researcher was present for the morning could also have influenced what and how much was observed. Only one staff member commented that they believed more observations than usual had been made. However, it was decided that it was important to be present so the observations could be put into context.

The three methods of data gathering each provided very different and specific information which added to and extended the data obtained by each of the other methods. The questionnaires gathered a great deal of

quantitative data about the current assessment practices in kindergartens and childcare centres throughout New Zealand. This information was elaborated on with the qualitative data obtained through the structured interviews. This provided a clear view of the motives and reasons for why and how these assessment procedures were conducted. The case studies given in the structured interview results reflected how differing aspects of assessment might be carried out by individual kindergartens and childcare centres. This contrasted with the questionnaire information which presented information from many centres however did not reflect how an individual centre might conduct each aspect of assessment. The observation exercise was able to verify that many observations are being made in centres. It reinforced the role of observations as a primary source of assessment information as revealed in the results of the questionnaire and the structured interview.

(a) Discussion of questionnaire results

The main purpose of assessment was listed as "for record keeping" or "accountability". It appeared that many centres were assessing children for the sake of accountability rather than for a reason that would benefit the child, teacher, parents or community. It is hard to justify assessment that has no benefits [Crooks, 1991]. Many centres go to a great deal of trouble to assess children but do not give as much thought to the use or benefit to which they put the information. It would appear to be of little value to know that "Peter could cut with scissors" if the information was not then used to benefit Peter in some way [eg. to promote further development of this skill] or to provide useful information for the teacher to use in planning or for sharing positively with parents.

Many other centres listed purposes of assessment that indeed showed that the information was used to benefit the child by catering for their individual needs. Also information was used by teachers for programme planning.

Parents also benefited from assessment [although to a lesser degree] as the purpose of assessment was listed by some centres as "for working with parents". This purpose was listed more by childcare centres than by kindergartens. [see Figure 3].

Observations were the most common procedure used for assessing children. This was usually combined with at least one other procedure, such as staff discussion, to add to the information gathered on the child. The least common procedure used for assessing children was "tests" [only used by 5 of 145 centres]. This information suggests that early childhood centres prefer to assess as part of the process of working with children rather than as an end measure. Most early childhood teachers in this study have chosen to assess children by observing them within their natural context [see Figure 4].

Kindergartens used observations, staff discussion and checklists more than did childcare centres. Staff discussion appeared to be easier for kindergartens with a set non-contact time available to them for this purpose [although many also discussed children at lunch times and during sessions]. It was more difficult for childcare staff to find a common discussion time as staff meetings were often held only once or twice a month. Many other important items were on the agenda of these meetings and thus limited the time available for the discussion of individual children.

Childcare centres used parental discussion and report books/daily records as a means of assessing children more often than kindergartens. Childcare centres appeared to value communication with parents highly. It may be perceived that it is more important for information to be shared with parents of children in childcare centres because these children often spend more hours each day in the centres.

Less than 41% of centres had written assessment of all children [time constraints and not enough staffing were the main reasons given for this]. Children with a special need or concern were those most likely to have a written assessment. Also older children were often targeted for written assessment. These results highlight an equity issue. Some children receive more systematic assessment than others. If educators only assess children with a special need or concern then those children without a special need are not having their needs met and, more importantly, their learning is not being promoted based on their abilities, strengths and interests. There is need to cater for the interests and abilities of individuals. *Each child is a unique person with an individual pattern and timing of growth, as well as individual personality, learning style and family background. Both curriculum and adults' interactions with children should be responsive to individual differences* [Bredekamp, 1987: 2].

Many centres were not satisfied with the assessment system that they were using and were revising or trialing new assessment procedures. Staff seemed to be aware of the new direction of assessment as they were working towards including it in the planning cycle of their work with young children. Limitations about the assessment procedures reflected practical difficulties with the current high ratio of children per adult and the fact that the procedures used were too time consuming.

Staff in centres reported that they concentrated most on assessment of physical, social, language, cognitive and emotional development with less emphasis on assessment of aesthetic/creative and fewer still concentrated on cultural development. Some centres commented that they didn't know how to assess cultural development, however mentioned that they provided for cultural needs within the programme. The linking of programme with assessment had not been made. The next step of assessing whether the individual cultural needs of all children were being met through the programme offered needed to be evaluated. To provide a balanced

programme and hope that it will meet the needs of all is minimising the vital role of assessment within the planning cycle of work with children. Early childhood professionals have neglected assessment of individual children, and it is important to make informed decisions about what is interesting, challenging and developmentally appropriate for all children [Henricksen, 1992]. If all areas of development are assessed and from that staff determine the abilities, strengths and interests of children, opportunities can then be provided to promote development based on this assessment. In this way the interests of the child will be paramount [Ministerial Working Party, 1990].

Twelve centres reported that they chose which areas of development to cover depending on the needs of the child. The focus here appeared to be on filling gaps in development rather than on extending existing strengths. Kindergartens listed language development as an area that they assessed more than others, while childcare centres concentrated more on social and emotional development. This difference may again be due to the fact that children sometimes attend childcare centres for many hours of their day. The emphasis that kindergartens believed they placed on assessment of language development was not evident in the observation exercise data [see Table 1]. Although 56 centres reported they did not concentrate on any areas of development more than others it was noted that some of these centres had not actually indicated that they covered all areas of development from the list [see question 10 in appendix 2].

Several of the uses of assessment listed related to working on concerns of filling gaps in development. Assessment information was used often in planning the programme to meet individual needs [see Figure 8]. Kindergartens were represented more, reporting this use of assessment information whereas childcare centres used information "to share with parents" more frequently. This relates closely to the procedures used for assessment where childcare centres often used parental discussion as a

method of assessment. Sharing information with parents as a use or purpose of assessment showed the close parental relations in these centres. Kindergartens used staff discussion more as a method of assessment which linked with the use of programme planning as a main purpose. This discussion often occurred during staff meetings where programme planning takes place.

Most centres shared assessment information with many groups [see Figure 9] however some centres only shared information with parents and whanau. Only 5 centres shared information with new entrant teachers. These results reinforce the findings of recent research [Wiley and Smith, 1992] which found that there is still a reluctance to pass on information from early childhood centres to schools. Also the survey of school entry practices [Thackery, Syme and Hendry, 1992] concur that information on children's experiences before starting school was not passed on. Apart from parents, whanau and other early childhood personnel, the wider community was not involved in the assessment procedures.

Children themselves were only included in the process of assessment by a few centres. Self-assessment is recognised as a valuable part of the assessment process with older children and adults however, many in the early childhood sector do not seem to use it. Early childhood educators need confidence in children's ability to identify there own strengths and needs. Children are making important decisions about their own abilities all the time [Carr and May, 1992]. The valuable role of self assessment as one part of the process does not seem to be fully appreciated in early childhood.

Parent involvement in assessment appears high with 111 centres involving parents somewhere in their assessment procedures. However a closer look reveals that many parents were only included if there was a concern or during individual education programme meetings [IEPs] which were held

with parents of children with special needs. Other centres only included parents after assessment had been carried out. If true partnership in early childhood is valued, parents will need to be involved continuously and throughout the process of assessment [as they were in 18 centres]. It was apparent that the sharing of information was often a one-way process such as when parents were told about the assessment once it had been carried out. A responsive, reciprocal approach is needed where parents have equal input into assessment information [Carr and May, 1992]. If parents are not included in this way their valuable role in providing background and current information on their child as well as their perspective of the child's interests, strengths and abilities will prevent the assessment picture from being full and comprehensive. If a number of people, places and situations are part of the assessment the child's needs have a better chance of being appropriately recognised and catered for. What is needed is ... *an effective relationship between professionals and parents with an emphasis on reciprocity that allows people to give as well as to take* [Pugh and D'Ath, 1984: 220]. Closer relations between early childhood and home provide opportunities to overcome many discontinuities. *The parent knows the child's history: physical, medical, social and intellectual ... as a member of a family and the role that the child plays in the total family group* [Gordon and Browne, 1989: 211]. *Professionals can help parents to look in more detail at what their child can do and share what they know about child development, curriculum and provision* [Bruce, 1987: 109]. By combining the information it provides the basis for enhancing the development of the child.

Two hundred and three staff from 84 centres had attended courses on assessment. The list of courses showed that many were not specifically on assessment however related to it in some way. Some courses were specifically for assessment of children with special needs. While it could be argued that the same procedures could be used with all children, the courses specifically addressed the needs of children who required extra help and support. Some courses were designed specifically on how to write IEPs for

children with special needs. Children with special needs usually were the first priority for assessment within centres. This practice has perhaps been reinforced by courses specifically targeting children with special needs rather than the provision of more courses on assessment to promote the learning of all children. This is not to suggest that there should be less assessment of children with special needs but rather that assessment of all children should be promoted.

Observations featured highly in the content of the courses listed. Results, both of the questionnaire and the structured interview, show that observations are a commonly used method of assessment. However there is still scope for more systematic observations. *Observation is a deliberate, active process carried out with care and forethought, of noting events as they occur* [Smith, 1988: 33].

Self-assessment featured in one course [Teacher Appraisal and Assessment]. It was difficult to know whether this self-assessment was for staff or children. As mentioned previously, self-assessment is an important area which could be further developed within the early childhood sector.

The 61 centres where no staff members had attended a course on assessment had relied on their preservice training [which had usually taken place prior to the change in focus of assessment] their own further study and reading, or discussion with colleagues for gathering information on assessment.

Many centres made positive statements about the value of assessment such as "worthwhile, valuable, a means of working in partnership with parents, an aid to teacher and child development, necessary for responsible programming and part of the process of working with children". Most concerns were with the practicality of carrying out assessment such as the need for better staff-child ratios and time being made available. Fewer concerns were about

confidentiality, fear of labelling or the worry that the results would be misused. Childcare centres especially expressed difficulty with finding a time for all staff to get together to work on assessment. Concerns were expressed about how assessment information was given to parents. It was believed that information needed to be reported in a way that would be beneficial to the child and enhance parent-child relationships. This relates to the principles that state that assessment must be positive and emphasise educational growth and progress [Ministerial Working Party, 1990] and that it needs to support parents' relationships with their children [NAEYC and NAECS/SDE, 1991].

Guidelines and suggested procedures for carrying out assessment of children were requested by 116 centres. It was interesting to note that 12 of the 13 kindergartens that said they would not find guidelines useful came from one specific district in a particular catchment area and that 4 of the 11 childcare centres that would not find guidelines useful were from this same district. It would be interesting to know what had influenced early childhood staff from this region to be so hesitant about receiving guidelines or procedures.

When other statements about assessment had been called for, many points made were, in fact, principles which reflected the values and views of staff from a range of centres:

1. assessment must be positive and available to parents
2. written records of children should not be passed on to school
3. assessment needs to fit the working philosophy of the centre ["each centre is similar but also very different"]
4. children should not be compared to norms
5. assessment should be part of children's everyday play and activity
6. assessment should result in opportunities for children to progress in all areas of development
7. assessment must be confidential, unobtrusive and purposeful
8. assessment requires a variety of staff input

9. assessment needs to be continuous

10. parents must be involved

11. the assessment process needs to be simple and carried out within the natural environment

12. assessment must be relevant for the particular point in development and not used as an indicator of future development,

13. assessment must not take staff away from the children, and

14. opportunities need to be made available for continuity of information on assessment at the preservice level as well as for all early childhood staff within the field.

(b) Discussion of structured interview results

Observations, staff discussion and parental discussion featured most prominently in the methods of assessment used by the centres interviewed. One centre was selected that indicated that they used "tests" as a method of assessment, however during the structured interview, it was discovered that they "tested" children's ability to perform skills from a checklist. This seemed to belong more appropriately under "checklist" rather than "test". The results from this sample of 24 centres concurred with the questionnaire results as more kindergartens than childcare centres used checklists. Parental discussion again was used more by childcare centres. Daily books and records were only found in childcare centres.

The results showed that kindergartens were revising their assessment procedures as several mentioned working towards some extension or their current observation practices. The difference between 2 and 3-teacher kindergartens in their ability to carry out systematic observations was apparent. All 6 of the 2-teacher kindergartens individually observed only

those children causing concern with some also specifically observing for IEPs on children with special needs. However 5 out of the 6 3-teacher kindergartens were carrying out assessment of most children in their kindergartens.

Individual planning occurred during staff discussion in many kindergartens. This links with the information from the questionnaire which showed that staff discussion was a common procedure used by kindergartens and planning the programme to cater for individuals the most common use to which he information was put.

Many kindergartens recognised that some children were missing out on being assessed and put in place procedures such as targeting different children to be observed each session, observing all children as they started or systematically working through the roll of all morning children [the oldest children]. One centre commented that some children constantly need longer discussion than others. By working through the roll, all children were being considered although the amount of time spent on each was not equal. One kindergarten used meetings every 6 weeks to draw up management plans "of what outcomes they would like to see". This approach fits with the suggestions made in the Achievement Initiative document [Ministry of Education, 1991] that there is a need for the desired outcome to be determined before the assessment takes place.

Parental discussion was important for most kindergartens. Many saw the need for true partnership in the sharing of information with only a few centres not showing evidence of valuing the role of parents.

All childcare centres interviewed used observations as one means of assessment. This differs from the questionnaire results where observations were not listed as frequently. It is possible that many centres forgot to write observations as a method used because it was taken for granted that everyone observed children. The observation information, as in kindergartens, showed that systematic observation was occurring in many centres. Staff were working on observations and devising means of including all children. The daily books used by 4 centres covered all children. Other centres were systematically working towards including all children in their assessment.

Five out of the 12 childcare centres used staff meetings as a time for discussion of children while 7 centres used informal discussion throughout the day. Again the difficulty of staff finding a common time to get together has apparently limited the opportunities for planning for individuals through these staff discussions.

Parental discussion was given a high priority by childcare centres. This took the form of giving information to parents in some cases and using a sharing of information approach by others. Assessment needs to be responsive and reciprocal and opportunities need to be made for communication to be a two-way process [Carr and May, 1992]. This was clearly happening in some centres where they showed that they valued parental involvement by providing many opportunities for these interactions [see case study 4]. Parental discussion was used more in childcare centres. This may be due to better ratios of adults to children, many staff would have less parents to relate to, or again there may be a perceived greater need to share information with parents as children attend childcare centres often for longer hours. Kindergartens mentioned that, with two teachers and 80 families to relate to, it was not always possible to have genuine parental discussion.

Checklists were being trialed at many centres. These were usually "basic skills" checklists, some of which had been given to centres by early childhood personnel in the field or exchanged between centres. Checklists for every child occupied a great deal of time therefore it was important that sufficient time be spent using the information derived from them. The purpose and the use of checklists needed a lot of consideration. Often they were used for accountability or to keep a record of each child and the child did not benefit by the information being fully used to promote the child's development. It is suggested that checklists should contain questions about observable behaviour rather than global child characteristics. The behaviour should be presented in a non-normative manner [Technical Planning Sub Group, 1992].

Daily books showed that the importance of communicating with parents about the child in a positive way had been recognised. Some centres recorded things that children could successfully complete. The centre had recognised the need to identify educational progress and growth. This was an important aspect of reporting to parents emphasised by the Ministerial Working Party [1990]. Case study 1 outlined how several procedures are often used together to assess children. This centre commented on a need for regular parent-teacher meetings. Most other centres also commented on some area of assessment that they would like to work on. This seemed to show that staff were evaluating their own assessment procedures and making decisions about their own needs. This should be born in mind when courses are offered so that specific needs of particular centres can be catered for.

The structured interviews showed a similar pattern to the questionnaire results when looking at the areas of development covered by assessment [see Figure 13]. Case study 2 showed clearly how the areas of development were covered and catered for within the programme. General observations were made of children engaged in daily activities. This approach reflects the principle of assessment which sees the need for it to be an ongoing part of

the teaching and learning process [Combined Colleges of Education Assessment Working Party, 1991] rather than being a separate exercise. However, as children are free to choose the areas they are working in, many children may never be observed engaged in an activity demonstrating an area of development that they deliberately avoid. Children who have difficulty for example with puzzles, construction or other areas of problem solving may never choose to work in these areas. Therefore assessment of their abilities in this area of development will not be made. This highlights the importance of assessing all areas of development for every child with the aim being to use that information to promote learning.

Physical development was thought to be the easiest area of development to observe. Staff believed they would readily identify children with difficulties in physical development. Emotional development was thought to be the most difficult to observe. Individual variations are enormous in emotional development and it is often difficult to establish a "norm". Cognitive development was also reported as difficult to assess as time was needed to work one-to-one to assess individuals in this area of development.

Following the structured interviews the variety of uses to which assessment information was put were able to be itemised in more detail [see Figure 14]. Case study 3 showed how the childcare centre used assessment information:

- **to benefit the child** "to ensure all children are developing along recognised norms, to target areas of delay or accelerated development and modify activities to meet their needs",
- **to benefit the teacher** "to increase the teacher's awareness of children and help staff get to know each child and to show your teaching progression",
- **to benefit parents** "to share objective information with parents with written information to support this and to share information with parents to assist them as the primary caregiver".

This case study shows that many can benefit from assessment. Often little thought is given to the benefit of assessment [Crooks, 1991]. Assessment can benefit children, teachers, parents and the community [Harlen, 1982].

Assessment information was shared mostly with other staff, then with parents. Many centres involved parents in their assessment process [see Figure 15]. Parents needs regarding assessment were changing, one centre commented that "more and more parents of children without concerns are wanting progress reports". The teacher commented that these children "with most appropriate behaviours and skills are those that are most overlooked". The issue of fairness to all again needs to be highlighted. We would be providing an inadequate education system if the learning of only some children is promoted. If the New Zealand education system does want "the best educational achievement for all students" [Ministry of Education, 1991] Then we need to assess and promote the learning of all children.

Case study 4 showed several ways that parents are involved in the assessment process of a centre. Home visits were undertaken by the kindergarten staff. This clearly acknowledges the importance of seeing the child in their own environment. The need for ecological assessment which looks at the child in many different environments and interactions with a variety of people is stressed [Ballard, 1987].

Half of the centres interviewed did not have details of assessment of children in their charter although assessment of children is a charter requirement [Ministry of Education, 1990]. This did not mean that centres were not assessing children. It appeared that what the centres did and what the charters said varied enormously. Case study 5 showed that the charters were

not always seen as working documents or they believed they would need to be continually revising them. Many centres commented that their charters had been written prior to implementing their procedure for the assessment of children.

Suggestions that staff would find most helpful in aiding them to carry out assessment procedures showed the need for practical support [see Figure 16]. Extra staffing and time along with guidelines, courses and opportunities to share ideas with others were high on the list of needs of teachers. Qualified staff were seen as vital as they have the skills of observation based on developmental knowledge. This fits with the important emphasis placed on professional knowledge ... *early childhood teachers with a strong background in early childhood development and education interact with children in ways that are more growth promoting* [ATE and NAEYC, 1991: 18]. The sheer size of the group was noted as a problem. When only 2 teachers were present and "if the phone rings or there is an accident" carrying out assessment is very difficult.

Case study 6 gave many suggestions for what they would find most helpful. Many of these suggestions in fact matched principles found in the literature:
-    the need for ongoing assessment
-    guidelines of what to assess
-    the need to be accessible to parents
-    the need for in service training on assessment.

Staff did not want information to be passed on to schools and did not want record cards [as used in schools] or tests.

(c)   Discussion of observation exercise data

The largest number of children observed during one morning was 33 of the 37 children present at a centre. These observations were recalled by a teacher in a 3-teacher kindergarten. She was able to "float" or be inside or outside. Because she was able to move around freely she was more likely to observe a greater number of children than a teacher who was required to be inside or outside [not all "floating" staff recalled a large number of observations]. This teacher was also designated as the person to talk to parents at the end of the session. This seemed appropriate as she probably would have observed more children than the other teachers so could comment to more parents specifically about their child.

Childcare centre staff usually observed a smaller number of children each than kindergarten staff which appeared to be directly related to the fact that most childcare centres had less children per staff member. The under-two centres often had less children in their care than the childcare centres with the older children [see Figure 17]. The teacher who observed the least number of children during one morning [6 children] was working in an under-two centre with responsibility for four children at this time. She observed 2 additional children in another section of the centre as they had recently moved from the under-two section and she wanted to keep an eye on how they were settling.

The collaborative sharing of information on children became apparent when often one staff member would reinforce or recall similar observations to another. The value of having more than one person observe a child to minimise the chances of bias is recognised. Comparing observations with those of another independent observer is recommended [Smith, 1988].

When conducting the piloting of the observation exercise, it became obvious that mainly boys were being observed. Due to this finding the gender of children was recorded throughout the observation exercise. Very similar numbers of males and females were observed by staff in the observation exercises [see Table 1].

Observations covered social, emotional or socio-emotional development more often than physical, cognitive or language development. Observations did not always fit clearly into one area of development therefore examples were given to indicate the type of observations placed under each area of development. It is acknowledged that it could be argued that several examples fitted just as validly under a different area of development.

The types of information recorded represented one morning of observations recalled by one staff member [although these were often confirmed or added to by other staff]. This often resulted in a huge amount of information being gathered. If we recorded all the observations of all staff members over one week the wealth of data would be extensive. The collegial nature of work in early childhood centres would suggest that this sharing of observations of children continually takes place. When staff were asked what else they knew about a particular child [after they had mentioned an observation of that child] it was obvious that there would not have been enough time to record all the additional information about each individual. Often there was a wealth of information known about the child's family, background, interests etc. The language observations of Female N [see Results] gives an example of background information that was given to put the current observation into context.

The observation exercise produced much information about the number and type of observation made in centres. A large number of valuable observations were recalled. It was beyond the scope of the research to spend the same amount of time on all the other methods of assessment that were used in centres. To do so would have given a more comprehensive view of how, when and why assessment practices are carried out within kindergartens and childcare centres within New Zealand. None the less the present study has obtained more than enough information to form a base for recommendations which can be expanded or modified in light of future research.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

There are no national guidelines for the assessment of children in early childhood in New Zealand. This study has reported the assessment procedures being used in kindergartens and childcare centres throughout New Zealand and examined how this assessment information was used. Following a critical review of literature on assessment and collation of current practices, recommendations and guidelines for assessment have been formulated based on principles that form the foundation of sound assessment practices and also respect many important features of early childhood education.

The principles outline important components needed for assessment. Centres will be able to choose assessment procedures that cover all the principles and, at the same time, match their particular philosophy. This will provide uniformity in assessment practices, as all centres will be following the same principles. At the same time the diversity of needs will be met as centres will have the opportunity to individually package their assessment programmes.

The separate methods of data collection, questionnaires, structured interviews and an observation exercise, each contributed by providing a different perspective on similar questions on the assessment of children. In this way triangulation helped to piece together what people think they are doing regarding assessment, what they intend to do, alongside what others perceive is happening regarding the assessment of children.

It is acknowledged that only two early childhood services were used in the study [kindergartens and childcare centres]. Therefore, the information gathered cannot be generalised to cover all early childhood services in

It is acknowledged that only two early childhood services were used in the study [kindergartens and childcare centres]. Therefore, the information gathered cannot be generalised to cover all early childhood services in New Zealand [eg. Playcentres, Te Kohanga Reo]. There is the opportunity, and possibly the need, to carry out a similar study within the other early childhood services to determine their needs.

Results reflected that there were few differences in how assessment was carried out within the different geographical areas or between centres with different ethnic compositions. This could have been due to the relatively small number of centres that represented these variables. Further research, using a larger sampling, could determine whether these generalisations were valid. The sample, however, provided information from a range of centres, from differing areas and of various compositions. This meant that the results represented the views of many staff from a cross-section of centres.

The values of assessing children have been recognised by many centres. Results showed that centres are implementing and trialing new assessment procedures to keep them up with the new direction of assessment. Considering there have been no directives or guidelines for assessment in early childhood and that only a small number of courses have been offered specifically on assessment the efforts to bring about changes from within the field are remarkable. This suggests a high level of professional commitment of staff within the early childhood field.

The way forward is both exciting and challenging. Exciting because if the many values and benefits of assessment are recognised and practices implemented to obtain these benefits then children, teachers, parents/whanau and the community will be having their needs met in a way that has never occurred before. It is also challenging as the results showed that there are areas of assessment that need further development.

The following principles include the components needed for sound assessment. They can be used as recommendations and guidelines that will enable assessment practices to be beneficial to children, teachers, parents/ whanau and the community.

1. Assessment needs to be **worthwhile**. Results from the study showed that many centres are carrying out assessment for purposes of "record keeping" or "accountability". Children need to benefit as a result of assessment or data gathering is time wasted. Assessment practices need to lead to actions that will benefit the children they are assessing.

2. Assessment must be **integrated** throughout the programme of working with young children and not a separate exercise. Some centres carried out assessment as a continuous and ongoing part of their programme. However, other centres conducted assessment at set intervals [monthly, termly, yearly]. Assessment needs to be ongoing throughout the programme and recognise the changing development and needs of children.

3. Assessment needs to be **holistic**. All domains of development need to be covered. The approach should not just look at what is happening but also how. The assessment should reflect a philosophy where process is valued. Results showed that some areas of development were given more attention than others. To assess the whole child it is important that all areas of development be considered for each child.

4. Assessment needs to be **systematic**. In this way all children will be observed and all areas of their development will be assessed. Some centres had a systematic approach in place to ensure that all children received assessment attention. There is room for development for many other centres to put into place a system where every child is assessed according to all areas of development. In this way the development of all children will be catered for.

5. Assessment needs to incorporate **self-assessment.** Only one centre reported using self-assessment. There is room for the development of useful self-assessment procedures within early childhood. Quality time needs to be spent one-to-one with every child to ensure the staff are aware of the child's interests, abilities and aspirations. This time would provide opportunities to become aware of socio-cultural and family background which will help provide a greater understanding of the child's perspectives.

6. Assessment needs to incorporate a **variety of approaches.** No one method of assessment on its own is sufficient to provide a comprehensive picture of a child. A combination of methods of assessment need to be used which together meet the principles needed for sound assessment. Methods can be chosen which suit the particular philosophy and specific needs of the centre and community it serves. While results showed that some centres used a variety of assessment procedures in a way that would benefit children other centres needed to give more careful consideration to selecting procedures which would provide a comprehensive picture of each child.

7. Assessment needs to be **ecological.** Input from a range of people and a variety of settings will ensure that information comes from many perspectives and covers differing situations and interactions. Often assessment results reflected the perceptions of only staff from within the centres. By using children, teachers, parents/whanau and others from within the child's community, a more comprehensive and worthwhile picture of the child will be arrived at.

8. Assessment needs to include **parents.** Results showed that some centres were including parents continuously and throughout their assessment practices. Early childhood have the opportunity to lead the other sectors of education in carrying out true partnership with parents. Many centres were practising a reciprocal relationship of sharing information. Other centres have the opportunity to build on their work with parents to show

they are valued throughout their assessment procedures. By positively reporting details of the child's progress and growth to parents, centres have the opportunity to enhance parents' relationships with their child.

9. Assessment should be used to **promote learning.** Results showed that assessment is often used to fill gaps in development or help and support children when there is difficulty in an area of development or learning. There appears to have been a reluctance from within early childhood to intervene in development unless it was to help children with a special need. Assessment needs to be seen as a means of extending strengths. If we use what children can do as a starting point [rather than what they can't do] we can facilitate further development in all areas for all children.

Commitment needs to be shown to supporting teachers in carrying out assessment as an essential component of their work with young children. In-service courses need to be provided for all teachers so they can confidently work on the development of worthwhile assessment procedures. As many different stages of assessment development are evident from the study it is important that staff have input into course content so their own specific needs regarding assessment are met.

It is important that parents are kept abreast with new developments in assessment and their input is encouraged throughout the assessment process.

All colleges of education accept the urgent need for continued staff and course development in the teaching of assessment. In this way there will be continuity in teacher education and assessment will be appropriately valued by being given due recognition at both a preservice level and within those engaged in teaching young children.

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Appendix 1

4 March 1992

Dear Staff

I am involved in a research project looking into Assessment of Children in Early Childhood Centres for the Ministry of Education. This research will involve the posting out of the enclosed questionnaire to about 280 centres. Before the questionnaire is sent to such a large number of centres I am keen to make sure all questions are clear and that the instructions are easy to follow. I have therefore chosen two childcare centres and two kindergartens to pilot (or trial) the questionnaire. Your centre has been selected as a pilot centre.

Would you mind carrying out the questionnaire and giving your comments on it, this will help me revise the questionnaire after your comments so that the people in the main study will experience no difficulty in carrying out the questionnaire.

When you have completed the questionnaire would you make comments on the following:

1. How long did it take you to complete?
2. Were the instructions clear?
3. Were any of the questions unclear or ambiguous? If so will you say which and why?
4. Did you object to answering any of the questions?
5. In your opinion has any major topic on assessment been omitted?
6. Was the layout of the questionnaire clear/attractive?
7. Any other comments?

I really appreciate the time and effort that is involved in carrying out this questionnaire and your comments.

Many thanks

Anne Wilks

Could you please return the questionnaire and your comments in the enclosed envelope by Monday 16 March.

DRAFT QUESTIONNAIRE

Palmerston North College of Education
Te Kupenga o Te Matauranga

Questionnaire

Please return by Monday 6 April.

1. What is the name of your centre?

    Name: _____

    Telephone Number: _____

2. How many staff are employed to work with children at your centre?

    Full-time: _____

    Part-time: _____

3. How many children are on the roll at your centre? _____

4. Would you describe your centre as rural or urban?

    Rural ☐
    Urban ☐

5. Do you carry out assessment of children in your centre?

    Yes ☐
    No ☐

    If no, for what reason/s do you not carry out assessment of children?

    If yes, how do you assess children? (Could you list the assessment
    procedures that you use.)

    _____

    _____

    _____

6. Do you use a set test or checklist in your assessment procedure?

   Yes ☐
   No ☐

   If yes, could you please enclose a copy or give details of the procedure.

   _____

   _____

   _____

7. Do you have **written** assessment for **all** children in your centre?

   Yes ☐
   No ☐

   If no, which children do you assess and why?

   _____

   _____

   _____

8. What is the main purpose of the assessment that you carry out?

   _____

   _____

   _____

9. What areas of development do you cover in your assessment practices?

   Physical   ☐
   Social   ☐
   Emotional   ☐
   Intellectual ☐
   Language   ☐

Do you concentrate on any area/s more than others? Why?

10. Could some guidelines or procedures be provided that would assist you with the assessment of children.

Yes ☐
No ☐

If yes, what would you find helpful.

_____

_____

_____

11. How do you use the information you have gained from assessment?

_____

_____

_____

12. Is any of the assessment information shared with others?

Yes ☐
No ☐

13. Are parents involved anywhere in your assessment procedures?

Yes ☐
No ☐

If **yes** at what stages of the assessment procedures are they involved?

14. Have you attended any course of inservice on assessment of children?

Yes ☐
No ☐

If yes, please list name, duration and date/s of course.

_____

_____

_____

15. What aspects of the course did you find useful for assisting you with your assessment of children?

_____

_____

_____

Thank you for completing the questionnaire. Your time is appreciated.

Anne Wilks

> **Please return by Monday 6 April
> in the enclosed envelope.**

Appendix 2

PALMERSTON NORTH
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
Te Kupenga o Te Matauranga

March 1992

Dear Staff

As you are aware "assessment of children" is a key issue in Early Childhood at the moment. I am currently engaged in a research project funded by the Ministry of Education to gather information on:

1. what is happening in the area of assessment of children in Early Childhood centres in New Zealand; and

2. to find out what suggestions and recommendations would be helpful in assisting with the assessment of children.

The first phase of this project is the enclosed questionnaire which will help with some answers. (I will be following the questionnaire up with interviews and observations at a small sample of centres.)

From the study of assessment I will be formulating suggested recommendations and guidelines on appropriate assessment procedures for Early Childhood centres.

In order to reach these goals I am asking as many staff as possible within your centre to jointly respond to the questionnaire. The findings will be published, but names of centres will not be used in any report.

Please answer the questions as fully as you believe is necessary, and tick any boxes that are appropriate for your response.

If there is not enough room on the questionnaire for your response please feel free to attach pages.

I really appreciate your contribution to this study and I hope in return the report on the findings and recommendations for assessment procedures will be useful to you in the field.

Yours faithfully

Anne Wilks.

Anne Wilks

Encl

Please return the questionnaire by Monday 6 April.

Questionnaire

Please return by Monday 6 April.

1.What is the name of your centre?

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone Number: _____

Contact Person: _____

Type of Service:	Kindergarten (NZ Free Kindergarten Union)	☐
	Full Childcare Centre	☐
	Sessional Childcare Centre	☐
	Other, please comment	☐

Do children attend on a regular basis?

	Regular	☐
	Casual	☐

2. How many staff are employed to work with children at your centre?

	Full Time	____
	Part Time (Less than 30 hrs)	____

3. How many children are on the roll at your centre? ____

Please tick the age range catered for.	Under 2	☐
	2 - 5 years	☐
	Approx. 3 - 5 years	☐

4. What is the ethnic composition of your centre?

_____

5. Do you carry out informal and formal assessment of children in your centre?

             —   Informal   ☐

                  Formal   ☐

                  Both   ☐

What kinds of assessment procedures do you use? Please list.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

If no assessment is carrried out for what reason/s do you not carry out assessment of children?

_____

_____

_____

6. What are the main purposes of the assessment that you carry out?

_____

_____

_____

7. When do you carry out the assessment of children in your centre?

_____

_____

_____

8. Please tick if you use any of the following kinds of assessment.

           Test   ☐

           Checklist   ☐

           Observation Schedule   ☐

           Developmental Profile   ☐

           Other   ☐

Please enclose a copy or give details of the procedure.

_____

_____

How **satisfactory** is the system that you use?

_____

_____

_____

9. Do you have **written** assessment for **all** children in your centre?

Yes	☐
No	☐
Some	☐

    Why do you assess in this way?

    _____

    _____

    _____

10. What areas of development do you cover in your assessment practices?

    (a) Physical ☐
        Social ☐
        Emotional ☐
        Cognitive ☐
        Language ☐
        Cultural ☐
        Aesthetic/Creative ☐

    (b) Do you concentrate on any area/s more than others? Why?

    _____

    _____

11. Are there any other areas not mentioned that you specifically assess? Please list.

    _____

    _____

    _____

(a) If yes, please list name, duration and date/s of course.

_____

_____

(b) What aspects of the course did you find useful for assisting you with your assessment of children?

_____

_____

17. Where did you gain your information on the assessment process if not at a course?

_____

_____

_____

18. Could you please say how many staff had input into answering this questionnaire.

_____

19. Are there any other comments that you wish to make regarding the assessment of children?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Thank you for completing the questionnaire. Your time is appreciated and the information you have supplied will be very useful.

Anne Wilks

> **Please return by Monday 6 April**
> **in the enclosed envelope.**

Appendix 3

23 June 1992

Name and Address

Dear

Thank you for agreeing to me using your centre as one to participate in the structured interview phase of the research project "Assessment of Children". As I mentioned on the telephone there are five questions that I would like to discuss with you. Four questions will give you the opportunity to elaborate more fully on the questions you have already answered in the questionnaire and the 5th question will be looking at what your charter or centre policy says about assessment of children and if this works in a way that you are happy with.

It would be helpful to me if you could send me a copy of the section of your charter that relates to assessment before I visit. In this way I could see if there is something specific I wanted to ask in connection with the charter information.

The questionnaires have provided lots of quantitative data which should prove very interesting to people in the Early Childhood field. By following this up with interviews at 24 centres throughout New Zealand I hope to add some qualitative data to the questionnaire information.

I wish to assure you that, as with the questionnaire information, the name of your centre will be kept completely confidential in all reports.

Thank you for your support in the project and I hope you will benefit from being a part of the research.

I look forward to seeing you on

Yours sincerely

Anne Wilks

PROPOSED STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How do you assess children? You have listed .... (Q.5 and Q8).
    Would you like to elaborate on this?

3. How is the assessment information used? You listed .... (Q.6 and Q12). Would you like to comment further on this?

Who is the assessment information shared with?

4. What does your charter say about assessment of children?
   - How do you carry this out?
   - What are the greatest difficulties in meeting these requirements?

5.   What would you find most helpful to aid you in carrying out your assessment procedures? ...... (Q15)

Appendix 4

20 August 1992

Dear

I am writing to thank you for participating in the interview for the research project "Assessment of Children in Early Childhood Centres".

The interviews have provided an extensive source of data on the wide range of assessment methods and procedures being used in Early Childhood Centres throughout New Zealand.

This second phase of the research is now complete and the information is being collated.

The final phase of the research will involve carrying out an exercise to verify if valuable observations are taking place in Centres. Most Centres involved in the research commented that their main source of assessment information came from 'general observations'. Therefore, this part of the project will be to show what is taking place during 'general observations'.

Twelve Centres will be used from the 24 Centres where interviews were carried out. The 12 Centres will include those where a staff member (or group of staff) are willing to talk to me about observations they have made following one morning's work with children. This will involve the staff in their usual activities with children and will not require anything different or special to take place.

I wish to again thank you very much for your support of the research and I will be contacting you in late September to check if you are willing to allow me to attend your Centre for one morning, and follow this up with a chat about 'general observations'.

With kind regards

Anne Wilks