

Monitoring Development: FunShine Assessment

Authentic Assessment: Keeping It Simple!

In recent years, there has been a dramatic increase in societal and government initiatives promoting accountability in early childhood. Quality rating systems have been developed in numerous states, state child care licensing agencies are asking for proof of developmentally appropriate curriculum being implemented, and parents/guardians want to know that their children are in an optimal learning environment.

School systems and government agencies are tasked to set goals, track progress, analyze strengths and weaknesses in programs, and use this information to inform lesson planning and individualization. They must report on their achievements and endure consequences for unmet goals. Early childhood education and intervention programs are increasingly being asked to prove their worth. This means that in addition to implementing a solid, research-based curriculum, teachers must link that curriculum to assessment. It's more than a bit overwhelming for teachers!

In order to assist you, we have developed an authentic assessment process based on observation that easily pairs with FunShine curriculum. Printable resources and training videos have been placed online. Before we introduce you to it, however, let's start with some background information on assessment.

"Assessment is the process of gathering information about children from several forms of evidence, then organizing and interpreting that information." (McAfee, Leong & Bodrova, 2004, p. 3)

"The National Early Childhood Assessment Resource Group summarized the purposes for appropriate uses of assessment in the early childhood years as follows:

- *Assessing to promote children's learning and development*
- *Identifying children for health and social services*
- *Monitoring trends and evaluating programs and services*
- *Assessing academic achievement to hold individual students, teachers, and schools accountable"* (Shepard, Kagan, Lynn & Wurtz, 1998, pp. 20–21)

Why is assessment such a hot topic in early childhood? It's important for a number of reasons. For starters, assessment assures that curriculum is comprehensive, giving attention to all areas of development. It also measures school readiness, which is especially important in economically disadvantaged homes/communities. Assessment can also be used to identify disabilities and for intervention with children who have developmental delays, as well as children simply needing some individualized instruction. Finally, it can enhance social, language, and academic skills through responsive early care and education. Ultimately, it can contribute to better outcomes for children, when it is done carefully.

Considerations/Cautions

There are a number of things that are important to keep in mind when you begin assessing children. The tools and process that you choose to utilize must be reliable and valid. Do they give you the information you are seeking? Is the observation based on what you actually see as opposed to what you expect to see? How is the information going to be used? Be careful—assessment done incorrectly and with bias can easily lead to typecasting or categorizing children.

Our role as teachers is only to measure a child’s individual progress over time. It is not appropriate to measure one child against another. Also, teachers typically do not have the training or the expertise to make any kind of a formal diagnosis. While we may have a hunch that a child may be ahead of (or behind in) developmental milestones, our most important role in cases of concern is to alert parents/guardians, be supportive, and provide them with good community resources so they can pursue additional help from specialists.

So, to sum it up: *“Assessments can make crucial contributions to the improvement of children’s well-being, but only if they are well designed, implemented effectively, developed in the context of systematic planning, and are interpreted and used appropriately.”* (National Research Council, 2008)

Authentic Assessment with FunShine Express and FunShine Digital Training

FunShine provides live and on-demand training on using the FunShine Authentic Assessment. Links to trainings that will help you learn about our assessment process are available at funshineexpress.com under the Training tab.

Authentic Assessment Process

Below is the three-step process to use with our free online resources. All documents can be found in PDF form at funshineexpress.com under the Assessment tab.

Step 1 – Plan Activities to Observe

All FunShine curriculum activities are labeled with Indicators. A comprehensive list of those codes and the Developmental Continuum is included in your Starter Pack. Domains, Subdomains, Goals, and Indicators are identified for infants to 5-year-olds.

The Indicators are aligned to your state standards, which can be found at funshineexpress.com under the Alignments tab.

Assessment should be an ongoing process, with meetings to inform parents/guardians held several times per year. We suggest assessing in three month periods, followed with a parent/guardian meeting at the conclusion of each. Assess between Sept. and Nov., Dec. and Feb., March and May, and June and Aug. Hold meetings with parents/guardians in November, February, May, and August.

We cover each Indicator at least once in every 3 month period. Look for the checkmark and highlighted indicators at the top of activities and observe/assess those.

If you would like to select different activities for assessment, or work with a different time frame for assessment checkpoints, you may do so.

An Activity List of those recommended for assessment is also available online at funshineexpress.com under the Resources tab. You will find that many of the activities cover multiple skills. This helps keep observation manageable.

 **SCIENCE**

Color Mixing Paddles and Magnifiers

Indicators: science SC1.1, **SC1.2**, SC2.1, SC3.1

Materials from Kit: Color Mixing Paddles

Suggested Materials: plastic magnifiers

- Offer the children the Color Mixing Paddles. Explore for awhile, switching the paddles and noticing how things change with different colors.
- Invite the children outside to explore with the Color Mixing Paddles and plastic magnifiers. Look for nests, worms, birds, and other nature items that interest the children.

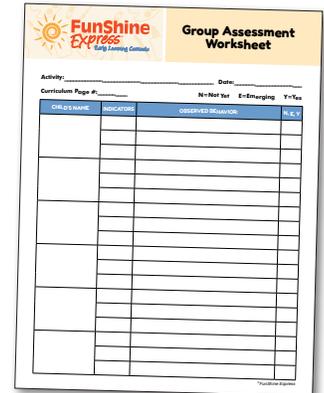
Observe: Watch how the children use the magnifiers and Color Mixing Paddles as they observe the outdoor environment. Talk with them about the tools and their discoveries.



Step 2 – Gather Evidence, Adjust Curriculum, and Build a Portfolio for each child

Once you have decided which activities you will observe, set aside some time to prepare by thinking about the skills you are assessing. All activities with assessment opportunities identified include guidance for the behaviors to look for in the **Observation** section, included in a blue font. For more information about individual Indicators, you may also refer to the online version of our Developmental Continuum.

- We created the **Group Assessment Worksheet** to help you record your observations and anecdotal evidence for more than one child at a time. Be sure to take objective notes that record a child's skills and not your opinion. Children's behavior will be most natural if they are not aware you are making an observation, so take notes discreetly. Record the activity title, date of the observation, and the page number at the top of the sheet. Enter each child's name or initials in the column on the left. List the Indicator codes you are observing for each child. Finally, record quick observations.
- As you observe, consider whether the child is proficiently using the skill. Ask yourself, "Are the activities meeting the children's needs? Does a child need extra practice or help in a particular area? How can I adapt an activity to give a child extra practice or extend learning?" After you observe, you will use the notes you take to help you adjust future activities daily.
- After you observe the children in the group, take some time to note how each child was performing the skill. There are three performance levels:
 - N (Not yet)** – child is not able to complete this skill
 - E (Emerging)** – child is attempting, but needs some assistance
 - Y (Yes)** – child can complete the skill on his/her own
 - NA (Not Assessed)** – not assessed during this period



The image shows a 'Group Assessment Worksheet' form. At the top left is the 'FunShine Express' logo with the tagline 'Early Learning Goals'. To the right of the logo is the title 'Group Assessment Worksheet'. Below the logo and title are fields for 'Activity: _____' and 'Date: _____'. Underneath these are fields for 'Curriculum Page # _____' and 'Page # _____'. The main body of the form is a table with the following columns: 'CHILD'S NAME', 'INDICATOR', 'OBSERVED BEHAVIOR', and 'N, E, Y, NA'. The table has several rows for recording data.

As an example for assigning performance levels, if you were observing M4.3 and children working to solve puzzles, you might record the following behaviors:

N – J was unable to fit pieces of the puzzle together, became frustrated, and quickly chose another activity.

E – J worked on fitting the pieces of the puzzle together but became frustrated. She asked me for help, and we completed the remainder of the puzzle together.

Y – J spent several minutes putting together one puzzle. When she finished, she asked for a puzzle with more pieces.

Use Observations to Individualize Lesson Plans

Once you have recorded your observations and assigned a performance level (N, E, or Y) for the Indicator, this will help you individualize similar future activities. Here are some ways you could individualize for each level in the scenario above:

N – Provide colorful puzzles with less pieces; ask a child who is proficient with puzzles to sit and help the child solve the puzzle; join the child and talk about strategies to solve a puzzle (matching colors, matching parts of pictures, etc.) and then guide the child to solve the puzzle with help; encourage parents/guardians to offer puzzle practice at home.

E – Provide other puzzles with a similar number of pieces and more opportunities to practice; encourage the child to work with a peer to solve a puzzle; sit with the child and talk about their strategies to solve the puzzle.

Y – Provide more difficult puzzles to complete (more details in the picture; more pieces; smaller pieces); allow a child to create their own puzzle using a picture they created or a picture from a magazine.

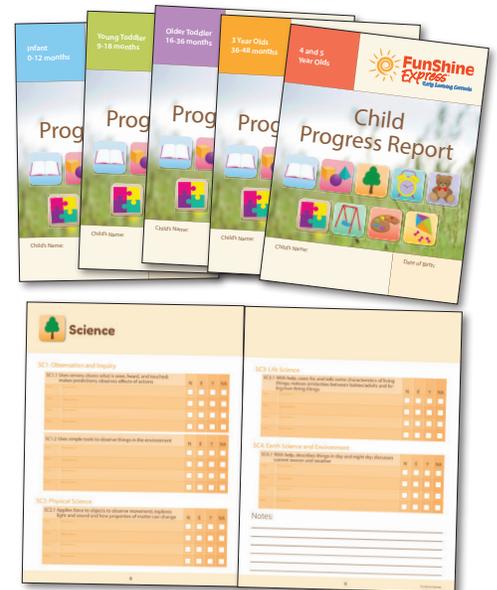
Individualizing activities allows you to meet the needs of all children in your class. Observing and assessing help you know where a child is developmentally and how to help them continue growing and developing each skill. Whether a child needs more support or needs more of a challenge, making notes about individualization is helpful to you, and may be necessary depending on requirements from your state licensing agency.

Transfer Observations to the Child Progress Report

FunShine has created a simple way for you to track all observations for each Indicator during the year in one place. You may purchase an age-appropriate Child Progress Report for each child in your facility, or you may print Child Progress Reports from our website at funshineexpress.com under the Assessment tab.

Once you have observations recorded on the Group Observation Worksheet, you can transfer the information to the individual Child Progress Reports.

We have planned for each Indicator to be assessed once every three months. Our Child Progress Reports provide space to consolidate your observations for the year. You can record the observation date, the notes you took, and the performance level at the time of each observation.



Keeping Organized: Building a Portfolio

Set up a folder or binder for each child. Keep the Child Progress Reports there. Collect a variety of work samples and/or pictures and videos of each child playing and mastering certain skills. Date them accordingly. You do not need to have work samples for every single indicator. Be selective and include those that are meaningful representations. Too much material makes binders difficult to manage and is overwhelming for you and parents/guardians.

Step 3 – Meet with Parents/Guardians

At the end of your assessment period, be sure you have your Child Progress Reports up to date. Select the work samples, pictures, or videos you want to share with parents/guardians ahead of time. The Child Progress Report is similar to a “report card format” that parents/guardians will understand, and they will be able to see their child’s progress at each meeting. If you feel nervous, remember that parents/guardians are often nervous for these meetings, too!

Set aside some time without interruptions. When you meet with parents/guardians, focus on each child’s strengths and the growth you have seen. Use stories such as, “I remember his (curiosity, problem-solving) when he was working on this project, or “I extended this activity to give her an extra challenge because she already knew this skill and look what she was able to accomplish!” or “She loves to (play ball with a friend). Does she have a chance to practice that with friends away from school? It is a great way to build physical and social skills!”

Be sure to ask parents/guardians to share some of their observations or concerns so you can discuss how you can be mutually supportive at home and school to set goals and maximize growth in their child.

If necessary, know who you can refer a child or family to for additional assistance. Trust your instinct and know your limits.

We suggest meeting with parents/guardians at the conclusion of each assessment period. You could use the following schedule for assessing and planning meetings:

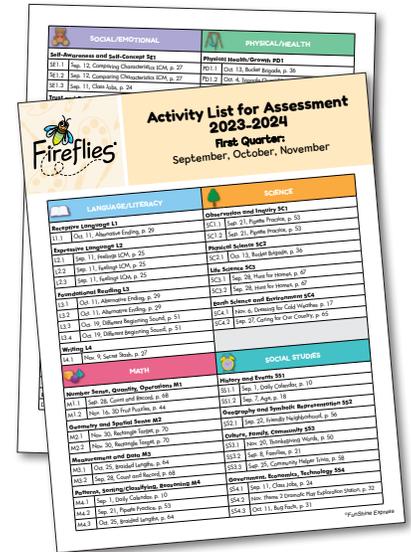
Assessment 1:	September–November	Meeting 1: End of November
Assessment 2:	December–February	Meeting 2: End of February
Assessment 3:	March–May	Meeting 3: End of May
Assessment 4:	June–August	Meeting 4: End of August

Keeping parents/guardians informed about their child’s progress helps them become partners in their child’s education!

Assessment Cycle Overview

As you can see, assessment takes place on a daily basis, whether you are doing a formal observation or making changes to activities based on the results from your observations (individualizing). Assessment is a cycle and can be summarized by the steps below:

1. Choose activities to observe and assess. Use the Activity List to help you identify activities.
2. Locate the activity in the curriculum guide or on FunShine Digital. Read the activity and the Observation guidelines provided. Think about the Indicator you are observing and the kinds of behaviors you expect to see. Print the Group Observation Worksheet and fill in information before children arrive. Implement the activity. Sit off to the side so you can observe and take notes without being obvious.
3. Be sure to assign a performance level to each observation while the activity is still fresh in your mind.
4. Look at lesson plans for the rest of the week. Make notes on activities where the skill will be addressed again to help you individualize the activity for each child.
5. Transfer notes from the Group Observation Worksheet to the Child Progress Report.



Digital Assessment

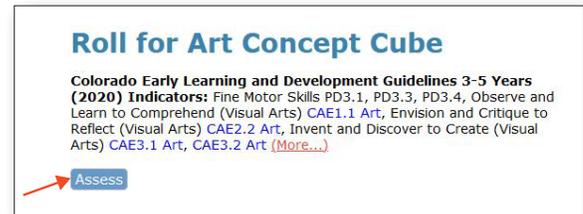
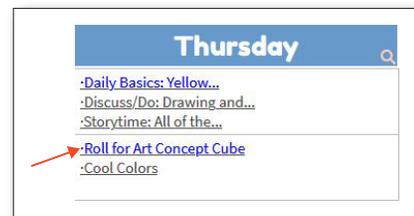
Digital Assessment and Portfolios Using FunShine Digital

Within FunShine Digital, you have the option to generate digital assessments and portfolios. With this feature, you can click to assess your state standards in an activity in your lesson plans. Space is included for documenting individual child observations, attaching videos/photos, and assigning proficiency levels. This information is recorded in a digital Child Progress Report that will track child progress throughout the year. FunShine Digital Assessment uses the same teacher-friendly, three-step approach as our traditional assessments. Here's how it works:



1. Plan activities to observe

Our writers have identified assessment opportunities within specific activities. Activities with built-in assessment are marked with blue highlighted indicators and include observation suggestions. You may choose to assess any FunShine Digital activity as long as it is not on your calendar for a future date. When you preview an activity, the Assess button appears. To record an observation, simply click the Assess button and select the indicator(s) you would like to assess.



2. Gather evidence, adjust curriculum, and build portfolios

On the Observation Entry page, record observation notes, upload photos/videos, select a proficiency level for each child, and save the observation. Edit future FunShine activities to adjust curriculum and individualize instruction. When you use FunShine Digital, the portfolio is created for you automatically!



3. Meet with parents/guardians

Choose to print a Child Progress Report to share with parents/guardians, or display the report on an electronic device so you can share the photos and videos you have collected. With a few clicks, you can show child growth and areas where a child will continue to develop.



The screenshot shows a 'Child Progress Report' form. It includes a date range selector for the assessment period (06/01/2021 to 08/31/2021), a dropdown menu for selecting a child (Annika Smith, September 17, 2017), and an 'Include' dropdown menu (Only indicators that have been assessed). At the bottom, there are two buttons: 'Create Report' and 'Done'.

Additional Benefits of Using FunShine Digital Assessments

All Child Progress Report information is conveniently stored in FunShine Digital, so it is not necessary to keep physical portfolios. With a few clicks, you will be able to see reports of children who have mastered a skill and a list of children who may need more practice. The FunShine Assessment tool will suggest several activities to help you provide more practice using those skills. Simply preview the suggested activities, add your selections to your Folder, and click-and-drag the activities into your calendar. With the power of FunShine Digital at your fingertips, locating activities to provide extra practice will be easier than ever.

Digital assessments are included with a subscription to FunShine Digital Daily Lesson Plans. To learn more about FunShine Digital curriculum, visit funshineexpress.com.

Tips for Making Observations and Assessments with Dual Language Learners (DLLs)

Assessing DLLs in your classroom may seem like a daunting task, but many skills you will assess do not require speaking skills. When Indicators do require speaking skills, you can always ask a parent/guardian or a bilingual teacher to help.

One of the best things you can do to prepare to assess DLLs is to watch recorded lessons with young children on mute, making anecdotal records of behaviors you see. Watch the children as they gesture, indicate quantity or size using their hands, make eye contact, share, grasp objects and writing utensils, handle books, balance, etc. As you learn to note the actions taking place, you will begin to see children displaying Indicator skills without thinking about their language skills. As you make observations, watch for children drawing shapes, sorting objects in different ways, making writing marks from left to right, using props in play, persisting in difficult activities, asking for help, etc. (Florez, 2015)



For Indicators requiring language skills, employ the help of the child's parents/guardians or bilingual teachers to observe the child using the home language and/or English. Watch the child interact with other children and the bilingual adult, noting back-and-forth conversation, nonverbal communication skills, etc. Talk with the bilingual adult after the observation to get more information about what you saw. Did you see the child using both languages? Just the home language? Can the child demonstrate the Indicator in his home language? We must remember that the child is developing language skills in both languages, and while he may not be able to demonstrate understanding of a skill in English, he may show mastery of the skill in his home language.

Tips for Making Observations and Assessments with Children with Learning Disabilities

When you consider authentic assessment of children with learning disabilities, be sure to apply the planning and adjustments you are making during your regular activities. In other words, if you have adaptations built in for the child during regular activities, be sure the same adaptations are in place when you observe him.

Consider the following when you plan to observe a child with learning disabilities in your class:

- Communicating – Be sure to use the same strategies for communicating with the child during the observation. If you normally employ sign language, gestures, or simplified questions, then do so now.
- Routine – Try not to stray from your normal routine before an observation. The child will be more comfortable and confident if the routine is unchanged.
- As with all children, do not compare the child to others in the class. You should only be comparing the child's previous observation to the current one. Make your observations objective, without opinions.
- Look for and record even the smallest changes in the child's behavior in a skill.
- After completing the observation and assessment, be sure to self-assess. Ask yourself, "Which adaptations helped the child be most successful? Which adaptations did not appear to help the child? What other strategies could I use to help the child?"
- Make and share a list of 2 or 3 things parents/guardians can do with the child at home to support the child's learning.
- Ask specialists on your child's team to help with assessing your observations and make recommendations for instructional strategies you can use to help the child grow.
- Consider inviting the specialists to your parent/guardian meeting to discuss observations and plans moving forward.