Reading Assignment

How Does HighScope Assess Children?

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Lucy and her doctor are going over the blood tests from her annual physical exam. "Your total cholesterol level is 275, which is too high," says the doctor. "Anything over 240 puts you at risk for heart disease. I'm going to suggest some lifestyle changes and prescribe medication to lower your cholesterol level." The doctor explains the difference between "bad" and "good" cholesterol and shows Lucy her numbers on the lab report. She tells Lucy to reduce the amount of fat in her diet and gives her an information sheet on healthier eating. She also recommends that Lucy exercise at least 30 minutes a day, and together Lucy and her doctor discuss different options (walking, swimming, using the treadmill machine) and how Lucy can fit this regular activity into her schedule.

In the above scenario, both Lucy and her doctor are concerned about a potentially serious medical condition. By testing Lucy's blood before and after she makes the recommended changes, they can assess whether the new diet, regular exercise, and prescribed medication are having the intended effect of lowering her cholesterol level. If the results are good, Lucy can continue the new behavior pattern. If not, she and her doctor can explore additional options, such as trying a new medication.

In addition to simply being concerned about her own patient, Lucy's doctor, like other medical researchers, wants to know how different treatments work for the population as a whole. Does an old drug continue to be effective for many patients or for the same patient over time? Do new drugs work without having potentially dangerous side effects? Are different medications effective for different people? How can doctors help patients understand and follow recommended lifestyle changes? Should other family members be included in the treatment plan?

How Does HighScope Assess Children? (continued)

Even in other types of situations where there is not a "problem," we may want to know if our day-to-day behavior is good for us, our associates, and our possessions, leading us to seek objective answers about our actions and their consequences. Sometimes the answer is obvious (e.g., stepping on the scale tells us if we are losing weight), but other times we are not sure what questions to ask or how to measure the response. Also, though we may be able to assess changes in our own behavior, there are times when we want or need to know how we compare to others. In this reading assignment's opening scenario, for example, it is not enough for Lucy and her doctor to know whether her cholesterol has gone down. They need to know whether it is at or below the safe level recommended by experts in the field.

Similarly, good early childhood assessment tools provide all these types of information about children and their progress in our programs. They help us focus on important child behaviors, especially in areas where we may not have expertise. For example, detailed measures in specific curriculum content areas can help us know what milestones to look for in early language development or emerging relationships between children. Appropriate, comprehensive instruments also allow us to step back and take a broader view of the young children in our programs and whether we are meeting their needs. Looking at the children as learners thus helps us to look at ourselves as teachers.

How Does HighScope Assess Children? (continued)

Systematic assessment can help us organize our impressions and use them to create objective, numerically based reports. Although numbers do not replace the words in detailed anecdotes, they are handy for summarizing data gathered over time about one individual or for grouping information about the class as a whole. Numerical summaries also make it easier to communicate with others, especially those who are not familiar with the individuals being assessed. Systematic assessment is especially useful for communicating with administrators, funders, policy makers, taxpayers, and others who care about the effectiveness of the program overall.

Because HighScope is concerned about individual children and teachers in the classroom, as well as system-level public policy makers, HighScope's child assessment tool serves multiple purposes. It is designed to look at meaningful educational outcomes, gather information in ways that are natural and comfortable for children and adults, and provide accurate data that can be used for individual child planning and policylevel decision making. Also, because HighScope is an advocate for sound early childhood practices in general, its assessment tool is designed for use by non-HighScope programs as well as by those that do use the HighScope Curriculum.

How Does HighScope Assess Children? (continued)

The Benefits of Authentic Assessment

Educators assess young children to see how they are developing and to measure how the programs the children attend contribute to the children's growth. Traditional **testing** — such as a series of multiplechoice questions — is one way to measure children's learning. However, this type of test provides only limited information. It typically looks at learning for which there is one right answer. It does not indicate how children solve problems or collaborate with others. Moreover, it only shows how children do in the testing situation, not how they perform in real educational settings and everyday life.

Another way to measure children's development is with **authentic assessments**. These include objective observations, portfolios of children's work, and teacher and parent ratings of children's behavior. Authentic assessments are more naturalistic. They take place in the real world or duplicate a familiar situation instead of creating an artificial testing environment. As such, they provide a more accurate picture of what children normally do and reflect their true capabilities. Authentic assessments add to what we can learn from tests. They provide teachers with valuable and practical information to understand and plan for the developmental needs of their students. Authentic measures can look at a broader range of children's behavior than can tests, which tend to focus on a single area of learning. With authentic assessments, the assessment process itself is more open ended — that is, it can allow for multiple answers and may even look at how children arrive at them. Finally, authentic measures often assess

How Does HighScope Assess Children? (continued)

children over a longer period of time than a single test, so results do not depend on how children feel or their willingness to perform on a particular day.

HighScope recognizes that tests can be informative and are sometimes necessary (e.g., for research or diagnostic purposes). Tests may be the only feasible option in large-scale program evaluations and are often required by a funding source. However, High- Scope is a strong proponent of authentic assessment, especially with young children. It therefore uses an authentic tool to measure overall development as well as learning in specific curriculum content areas.

The assessment instruments HighScope develops are always validated, meaning they meet the same rigorous scientific standards for **reliability and validity** as do conventional tests. A reliable

assessment produces the same results when completed by different observers or at two closely spaced points in time. A valid instrument measures what it claims, is consistent with findings from similar measures, and may also predict future behavior. When developed according to these strict requirements, authentic measures can and should be as **standardized** as conventional tests. (See "Advantages of Authentic Assessment" on slide 6.)

The next section describes the authentic assessment tool developed by HighScope, COR Advantage, the latest version of the Child Observation Record (COR). Because this authentic measure assesses the universal characteristics of children's development, COR Advantage can be used by any early childhood program, not just those implementing the HighScope Curriculum.

How Does HighScope Assess Children? (continued)

Advantages of Authentic Assessment

- Based on real performance of the child, rather than an artificial testing situation

- Can focus on a broad range of developmental areas

- Assesses thinking and problem-solving abilities, not just factual knowledge

- Produces a profile of change and development over time

- Helps adults develop objective observational skills

- Helps adults become more knowledgeable about child development

- Encourages programs to become more child oriented (view learning from a child's perspective)

- Provides child-focused information adults can use to plan activities

- Makes adults pay attention to the "invisible" child

- If done as part of regular ongoing activities, does not add to program time or cost

- Can be done by all staff, including aides and assistants, with proper training

- Provides feedback to program administration and funding agencies

- Provides valuable and meaningful information for staff and families to share

How Does HighScope Assess Children? (continued)

COR Advantage

COR Advantage overview

COR Advantage (Epstein, Marshall, & Gainsley, 2014) is an observation-based instrument for systematically assessing the knowledge and abilities of children from birth through kindergarten in nine areas of development (see "Categories and Items in COR Advantage" on slide 12). Each content area is composed of items that address key concepts in early learning, for a total of 36 items (including two for English language learners). Based on objective anecdotal notes about the child, recorded over time by an observer (such as a teacher, caregiver, parent, or researcher), each item is scored using an eight-level scale ranging from 0 (lowest) to 7 (highest). To help observers score COR Advantage reliably, and interpret and apply the results, this assessment tool provides notes for each area, item, and level, along with two anecdotal examples for each level.

How Does HighScope Assess Children? (continued)

COR Advantage is one continuous measure from birth to kindergarten. This developmental continuum allows programs that serve children over many years to track their progress throughout the length of their enrollment. Multiple levels also help assess children with special needs, whose developmental ages may differ across one or more dimensions.

COR Advantage components

COR Advantage is designed to assist users in collecting and scoring observation-based child assessment data and is available online at my.coradvantage.com. An online help desk, found at help.coradvantage.com, provides step-by-step tutorials, instructions for its completion (i.e., how to enter and score anecdotes as well as compile summary forms), access to webinars, and answers to frequently asked questions. A Scoring Guide (Epstein, et al., 2014) provides descriptions of all the content areas, items, and developmental levels, along with examples at each level to help users score COR Advantage reliably. The help desk also provides instructions for building reports that summarize child and classroom level data, as well as administrative reports designed to assist programs in meeting their reporting requirements or professional learning needs. COR Advantage doubles as a family engagement tool that connects families to the learning that is occurring in the classroom. The online help desk, Scoring Guide, and other materials are not intended as a substitute for COR Advantage training, which HighScope strongly recommends and makes available through numerous courses and workshops.

How Does HighScope Assess Children? (continued)

COR Advantage content

COR Advantage assesses development from infancy through kindergarten in nine areas: Approaches to Learning; Social and Emotional Development; Physical Development and Health; Language, Literacy, and Communication; Mathematics; Creative Arts; Science and Technology; Social Studies; and (for children whose first language is not English) English Language Learning. For a more detailed list, see "Categories and Items in COR Advantage" on slide 12.

Completing COR Advantage

Using COR Advantage is a continuous process. Adults record objective anecdotal notes on children throughout the year and use them to score COR Advantage at periodic intervals. Raters may also use information from portfolios, photos, or other types of documentation to score COR Advantage. Although teachers do not record an anecdote on every child, every day, in every category (which would not be feasible), they do make several observations per week per child. They periodically review their collection of anecdotes to make sure each child's behavior is documented in each of the COR Advantage categories. If they notice a gap, they pay special attention to that child and area over the next few days and record what they observe.

Using the notes or other documentary evidence relevant to each item, raters score or "level" the entries on a scale of 0 to 7 to reflect each child's current level of development. Depending on a program's needs and reporting requirements, the anecdotes are used to complete and score COR Advantage two or three times a year, for example,

How Does HighScope Assess Children? (continued)

at the beginning, midpoint, and end of the program. Less frequent measurement does not permit one to track development over time. More frequent measurement does not allow sufficient time between assessments for any changes to show up.

Using COR Advantage

COR Advantage can be used by different people and for different purposes. Anyone who is familiar with the child (or children) being observed and who has been trained to record and score anecdotal notes can complete COR Advantage. This tool is primarily used by teachers and caregivers responsible for daily planning and regular reporting on their program. It is also used extensively by researchers and evaluators studying child development and how it is affected by program participation. COR Advantage

may also be completed by family members, program volunteers and paraprofessionals, curriculum supervisors, and other program or administrative staff directly involved with the children. Training by a designated HighScope trainer is necessary to ensure that all these individuals use COR Advantage correctly and obtain reliable and valid results.

Of particular value to those who use COR Advantage for planning (i.e., adults who work directly with children) are suggested activities based on observations of children at different developmental levels. These activities help teachers scaffold (support and gently extend) early learning in all the content areas. For more information on these planning resources, visit the COR Advtange website at https://coradvantage.com.

How Does HighScope Assess Children? (continued)

In addition to providing teachers with the basis for daily planning, COR Advantage information can be shared with a variety of audiences. During formal conferences and informal communications, teachers share anecdotes (but not scores) with families to involve them in their child's program experience and to educate them about how to extend their child's learning at home. Administrators use COR Advantage results to monitor their programs and identify areas for staff inservice training. Finally, policymakers and funders, interested in holding programs accountable for their effectiveness, can rely on this assessment tool to provide accurate and objective information about how children are learning and developing.

Gathering Information About Children: Anecdotal Notes

A critical input to team planning is individual teachers' anecdotal notes — written observations about what children do and say. These notes, which teachers learn to record objectively, are not only used in daily lesson planning but also to complete and score COR Advantage. Anecdotal notes are also used to share meaningful information with families.

Recording anecdotal notes

Teachers take several anecdotes a week on each child and make sure, over a period of several months, that all developmental areas are covered for individual children and for the class as a whole. To record objective anecdotes (i.e., notes that are factual and neutral):

How Does HighScope Assess Children? (continued)

Observe children throughout the day. Watch and listen to children as you support and interact with them during all parts of the daily routine. Pay attention to the ingredients of active participatory learning, noting what materials children choose, how they manipulate them, and what they say and do in their interactions with adults and other children. Use the HighScope key developmental indicators (KDIs) to describe the problems children encounter in play, how children solve the problems, and the kinds of knowledge and skills the children demonstrate. Your observations can also guide on-the-spot interactions with children. During planning, refer to team members' observations to plan individual and group experiences that will further children's learning.

How Does HighScope Assess Children? (continued)

Categories and Items in COR Advantage

Approaches to Learning
A. Initiative and planning
B. Problem solving with materials
C. Reflection

Social and Emotional Development
D. Emotions
E. Building relationships with adults
F. Building relationships with other children
G. Community
H. Conflict resolution

Physical Development and Health
I. Gross-motor skills
J. Fine-motor skills
K. Personal care and healthy behavior

Language, Literacy, and Communication
L. Speaking
M. Listening and comprehension
N. Phonological awareness
O. Alphabetic knowledge
P. Reading
Q. Book enjoyment and knowledge
R. Writing

Mathematics
S. Number and counting
T. Geometry: Shapes and spatial awareness
U. Measurement
V. Patterns
W. Data analysis

Creative Arts
X. Art
Y. Music
Z. Movement
AA. Pretend play

Science and Technology
BB. Observing and classifying
CC. Experimenting, predicting, and drawing conclusions
DD. Natural and physical world
EE. Tools and technology

Social Studies
FF. Knowledge of self and others
GG. Geography
HH. History

English Language Learning (if appropriate)
II. Listening to and understanding English
JJ. Speaking English

How Does HighScope Assess Children? (continued)

Briefly note observations. So much happens each day that teachers cannot depend on their memory to recall what each child or group of children did and said. Therefore, it is important to try to write brief but complete anecdotes on the spot, or jot down a few key words you can refer to later for writing more detailed anecdotes. You have many options for recording events as they happen. Teachers take several anecdotes a week on each child and make sure, over the course of the program, that all developmental areas are covered for individuals and for the class as a whole.

Suspend judgment. Anecdotal notes are meant to record what happens, not to guess what a child intends or to state whether the teacher thinks the child is acting "good" or "bad." For example, an objective anecdote might say, "At work time in the art area, John made three paintings — one with wide red and thin blue stripes, another with wide green and yellow stripes, and then a third with all four colors. He hung them up to dry." A subjective (or judgmental) anecdote might state, "John painted three pictures using just a few lines. He left most of each page blank. Wasted lots of paper." Objective anecdotes help teachers both value what each child does and plan according to children's needs, interests, and developmental and ability levels.

How Does HighScope Assess Children? (continued)

Using your anecdotal notes

Anecdotal notes offer you and your coworkers many benefits. Recording and reviewing them helps you learn and think about how young children develop. Because observations are organized by KDIs, note taking also helps you become more knowledgeable about the learning content of the HighScope Curriculum. As you review the notes with the rest of your planning team, you may find that you have little information about particular children or few examples of learning in a particular content area or KDI. This alerts the team to the fact that teachers need to pay more attention to certain class members, plan individual and group experiences to fill in the gaps, and/or add materials that promote a particular area of development. The team may decide to set up an inservice training session to learn more about early development in that domain. Finally, although note taking adds some time to each day's tasks, it is less burdensome and the information is more reliable and valid than compiling several months' worth of data at the end of each assessment period.

How Does HighScope Assess Children? (continued)

Anecdotal Notes: A Summary

How to Use Anecdotes

Use anecdotes to

- Learn about and plan for individual or groups of children.
- Share information about children with family members.
- Complete and score COR Advantage.

How to Write Objective Anecdotes

When writing anecdotes,

- Focus on what the child did and said.
- Be factual.
- Be specific.
- Be brief.

Format for Anecdotes

Each anecdote should include the following:

- Date the anecdote happened.
- Beginning: Identify when a behavior or activity took place, where it took place, and who was involved.
- Middle: Describe what a child did and said; use quotes to document the child's language.
- End: When applicable, state the outcome.

Tips for Taking Anecdotes

- Use abbreviations (e.g., the child's initials, HA for house area, SGT for small-group time). Record just enough information to jog your memory, and then elaborate on the anecdote later.
- In each area, keep a supply of note-taking materials, such as sticky notes, index cards, clipboards, digital camera, or a notepad attached to the wall with string. Other options include wearing a necklace pen or a shop-type apron with pockets. You can also use your smartphone or tablet to take pictures and record brief anecdotes.
- Set a realistic goal for the number of anecdotes to record each day. Begin with four or five and gradually increase the number as the process becomes routine.