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ABSTRACT

Providing the early childhood (EC) community with a timely, actionable information about the Illinois State Board of Education's early learning initiative, "Little Prints" is a newsletter highlighting best practices among EC programs, representing the interests of and issues of EC professionals engaged in the education and care of children from birth to age 8, and working with other EC publications to inform the broader EC community of the links that bind individual programs into an essential continuum of EC services. This document consists of the two issues of the newsletter for 2002. Issue 1 focuses on the use of technology in early childhood education, highlighting the progress made since the first large-scale project to use computers in education. This issue also summarizes findings from two decades of study at Western Illinois University on how best to employ technology as a learning tool in early education, describes NAEYC's technology forum, and features two case studies of technology use in special education settings. Also included is a list of resources available to EC teachers and caregivers in need of information on the use of technology with young children. The second issue focuses on assessment techniques as the next step in the state's Early Learning Standards, highlighting specifically the work sampling system of assessment. The issue describes Illinois' version of the Work sampling system, highlights three key components of the system, features one educator's experience using this assessment and developer Samuel Meisels' perspective on the method, and includes a case study of the system at work in an public school early childhood program. (HTH)

Little Prints, 2002.

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Little Prints

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Scissors, glue, paint... and a computer

It's a little-known fact,
but Illinois is home to the first large-scale project to use computers in education.

Begun in 1959 by University of Illinois Professor Donald Bitier, the PLATO project was a system of several thousand terminals that, among other things, served undergraduate education as well as elementary school reading, a community college and several campuses in Chicago.

Educational technology has come a long way since PLATO. K-12 educators now have a rich array of options for computer use, and funding for hardware, software, networks and Internet access is commonplace. To a much lesser extent, computers and other technologies are also used in pre-K learning, of course. But while the rest of education has plunged into the technology ocean and now swims with multiple strokes, early learning teachers and caregivers are, for the most part, still wetting their toes.

Perhaps that should change. A large and growing body of evidence suggests that when used correctly, educational technology has a clearly beneficial effect on the social, emotional, physical and cognitive development of young children. The key is to use the computer as one tool among many that help children to explore their world.

"The research indicates that... computers supplement but do not replace highly valued early childhood activities and materials such as art, sand, water, books, exploration with writing materials and dramatic play," says a position paper on technology and young children prepared by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). "Developmentally appropriate software engages children in creative play, mastery learning, problem solving and conversation."

And that's not all. NAEYC and other centers of early childhood education theory and practice note that computers stimulate teamwork and social interaction in ways that other activities sometimes do not. "Children engage in high levels of spoken communication and cooperation at the computer," says NAEYC. "They initiate interactions more frequently and in different ways than when engaged with traditional activities such as puzzles or blocks. They engage in more turn taking at the computer and simultaneously show high levels of language and cooperative-play activity."

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So what do we know about the best approach to using computers with early learners? One of the best summaries comes from Dr. Susan Haugland, whose exploration of the relationship between computers and young children has been among the most definitive to date. Her basic advice:

- **Don't introduce children to computers before age 3.** Computers are not a good match for the developmental skills that children younger than three are trying to master, such as crawling, walking, talking and making friends.
- **Use computers in developmentally appropriate ways.** This would seem to be self evident, but studies show that many teachers use computers in traditional and often rigid ways, including drills in basic skills. Instead, Haugland notes, young children need free access to computers and control over open-ended learning experiences, with plenty of time to experiment and explore. Children and teachers should learn together, with teachers encouraging peer tutoring, possible even at young ages. Instead of drill, computers should be used to teach powerful ideas.
- **Carefully plan for computer use.** Teachers, administrators and parents might begin by finding and sharing journal and magazine articles on best practices, and a study group of the most interested stakeholders could be organized. Find experienced mentors through local agencies, the state board, or colleges of education. Plan to have, at most, one computer available for every seven children, with one computer for every five children much better for pre-kindergarten children.
- **Train teachers and caregivers.** As is the case with any learning tool, effective use of computers in the early childhood environment requires among teachers and caregivers clear goals and objectives, an understanding of how the computer can help achieve those goals and advance preparation.

Young children who use computers with proper supporting activities show gains in intelligence, nonverbal skills, structural knowledge, long-term memory, manual dexterity, verbal skills, problem solving, abstraction and conceptual skills, Haugland notes. What's more, she says, "Computer use enhances children's self-concept, and children demonstrate increasing levels of spoken communication and cooperation. Children share leadership roles more frequently and develop positive attitudes toward learning."

In this issue of *Little Prints*, we will review the research and show you how technology can be applied to benefit young children, including special needs children. We'll provide a list of resources and a short bibliography to help you plan your own technology program. Also in this issue: An update on the work of the Universal Preschool Task Force.

As always, please call us with your good ideas or your questions. We're here to help.

Best regards,

Kay Henderson

Kay Henderson

Please direct comments about *Little Prints* to:

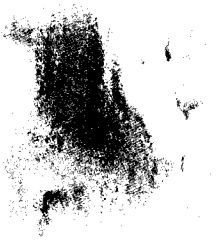
Kay Henderson,
Division Administrator
Early Childhood
Education, ISBE
100 North First Street,
Springfield, IL
62777-0001

telephone:
(217) 524-4835

email:
hhenders@isbe.net

Technology Works

Two Decades of WIU Studies Provide the Models



Since 1981, researchers at Western Illinois University in Macomb have been intensively studying how best to employ technology as a learning tool in early childhood education, especially for children with disabilities.

Their overriding findings:

- Used appropriately, computers and other forms of technology (such as electronic toys, tape recorders, switches and digital cameras) enhance virtually every aspect of young children's growth and development, including social/emotional, fine motor and cognitive skill development.
- Although computers are rarely useful for children younger than three, children even younger than that – especially those with disabilities – can benefit from interactive technologies. That's because they can use technology to affect their environment; i.e., touch a screen and see a response, touch a switch and make a toy move, or speak into a microphone and play back their own recorded voices.
- Properly used, technology can help decrease aggressive behavior and increase children's independence, self-esteem, emergent literacy and communication skills – and more.
- This is just as true for children with severe disabilities as it is for children with none, for children who are at-risk for academic failure and those who are not, and for children in rural or city environments of all ethnic backgrounds.

"Technology is not something that we 'think' might work," says Dr. Patricia Hutinger, early childhood professor and director of the Center for Best Practices in Early Childhood Education at WIU. "Everything we do is research based, including the models, curricula and software we develop."

The WIU work is significant because of the duration of their studies and progression from broadly construed research to studies that are increasingly narrower and focused on specific academic areas, such as art or literacy. Taken as a whole, the WIU work is an important cornerstone for early childhood technology theory and modern practice, creating in Illinois one of the nation's leading resources for educators and caregivers. So far, the Center for Best Practices has replicated its projects in 35 states and Canada, in both public and private institutions.

EARLY DAYS

The Center, established in August 1999, is the successor to the Macomb Projects, which began in 1975 when Hutinger and a colleague received U.S. Department of Education money to develop and replicate a rural model for early learning among infants to three-year-olds.

Technology-specific work began in 1981. Hutinger's sons had a keen interest in computers, and that spurred her interest in technology as a teaching tool. An accomplished artist, Hutinger personally disliked using her early Apple computer to create artwork, although she saw the potential for using computers in artistic learning.

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The Center for Best Practices in Early Childhood Education

How it can work for you

The Center for Best Practices in Early Childhood Education offers a number of resources for early childhood educators.

In addition to its research projects, the Center's staff conducts inservices, conference presentations and workshops on topics that include but are not limited to technology integration, expressive arts, technology assessment, technology literacy and technology as a tool. The staff also develops software, videotapes and manuals. A catalog is available upon request (see contact information below).

ACTTive Technology, a quarterly newsletter produced by the Center, features articles about technology applications for young children and curriculum activities drawn from the Center's research projects. The newsletter is available for $16 per year. For a sampling of articles from past issues, including such topics as "Tips for Making Technology Work for You" and "Adapting Literacy Activities for Young Children," go to www.wiu.edu/users/mimacp/wiu/ACTTive Tech.html.

The Center's Apples Magazine, an hour-long satellite program broadcast monthly for nine months of the year and produced by STARNET Regions I and II, covers hot topics in early childhood education. Previous broadcasts are available on videotape.

"If your program needs technology-related help, give us a call," says Carol Bell, content specialist/trainer, who has been with the Center for nine years. "If we're at a point where one of our projects has an opening and you qualify, we'll be glad to include you. If we're not, we'll take an application and when we have an opening we will contact you. Meanwhile we can provide written resource materials, technical assistance by phone and videos."

Fee-based training on applications and setting up technology programs is also available.

For more information on the Center's research, products and services, visit the Center's web site at http://www.wiu.edu/users/mimacp/wiu/index.html, or call the Center at (309) 298-1634.

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So one of her sons arranged a meeting with a Florida man who, she says, "had this thing called a suck switch – a sip-and-puff switch – and I thought that with this switch we could use technology with babies."

GET INTO THE ACTT

That idea led, in 1983, to a project called Activating Children Through Technology (ACTT), to integrate technology into programs for children aged 0-3 and 3-5 with mild to severe disabilities. Formal ACTT work continued through 1994. Among other things, ACTT devised a curriculum guide for creating a computer learning environment, adapting it to local conditions, involving parents, and using switches and touch tablets with activities based on Center-created and commercial software.

"We created our own software because our philosophy is that children need the opportunity to explore and control their own learning, and there was no such software available at the time," says Linda Robinson, assistant director of the Center, technology integration specialist and a member of the Center's staff for 20 years. "We very much were against drill-and-practice programs where children learn letters and numbers for the sake of learning letters and numbers, unrelated to anything else and without any meaningful context."

From the beginning the Center used software that was interactive and developmentally appropriate, including switch programs that enabled children to control sounds and animation. Another program, designed for two children to use at the same time, taught turn-taking and provided a new experience. Due to their disabilities, some of the children had never had the opportunity to play with other children.

The Center also employed Logo, a programming language that also served as a problem-solving program. One such program required a child to figure out how to move a turtle from its point of origin to a sticker placed elsewhere on the screen, using a switch. Another controlled a small robot placed on the floor of the classroom.

ADAPTIVE ENVIRONMENTS

A variety of adaptations were required to make the computer accessible.

"For a child with severe disabilities, you look for their most reliable movements, and then you figure out an adaptation that will make the computer accessible," says Hutinger. "Sometimes you put the switch on the headrest of their wheelchair so they can control it with just a little side movement of their head. There are even eyebrow switches."

ACTT demonstrated several important things. Technology was shown to provide unique opportunities for children to interact with their environment. It also showed the benefits of an environment in which children could use a computer together, the need for software that was open-ended and gave children control of their learning, and the need to integrate technology into the curriculum. The research resulted in a model that detailed how to do all these things and created the software and adaptations necessary.

An outreach program that trained others to replicate the model continued through 1994, by which time the Center had worked with more than 40 sites in 13 states. Its work shaped Hutinger's basic philosophy about technology.

"We need to think of computers, switches, electronic toys, tape recorders and all these resources as just another medium within an early childhood classroom," she says. "Technology is a tool, just like paint brushes and paint, that adds dimension to an early childhood classroom and gives children the opportunity to do things they've never done before."

NEXT STEPS

ACTT established the Macomb Projects as an authority on technology for disabled children. "People kept asking us for recommendations," says Robinson. So the next logical step was to develop a model to ensure that children with moderate to severe disabilities were properly evaluated for the best types of technology to use. Under another federal grant, WIU worked with 50 children and teams of parents, teachers, and therapists to determine what each child needed as far as an input device and software to help them progress educationally.

The result: a model with guidelines for technology assessment, equipment placement, customization of activities to meet children's needs and individual educational goals, software and family involvement.

Next up – the Expressive Arts Project, built on early findings, to create a model to train families, teachers and early childhood decision makers to use appropriate art activities with young children with moderate to severe disabilities. The focus was on visual arts, music, movement and dramatic play.

"Children gain cognitive, communication, fine motor and social skills through developmentally appropriate art activities, and appropriate graphics software can provide all young children a means of artistic expression," says Robinson. "The model helps teachers to adapt materials so that every child can participate in expressive arts activities."

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Where to Start
If You're Just Starting Out

There's No Need to Reinvent the Wheel

For prekindergarten teachers and administrators who feel daunted by the prospect of introducing and implementing computer technology into the classroom, expert assistance is readily available.

"Start by placing a call to the Center," says Patricia Hutinger, director of the Center for Best Practices in Early Childhood Education at Western Illinois University. "We're set up to replicate research-proven models and to train, and we can really individualize training. We can also provide a wealth of written materials and videos that focus on key issues."

Hutinger suggests some key areas where you'll need to focus attention:

Obtain good advice on equipment. Call the Center or talk to someone that has had lots of good experience with prekindergarten children. Often the computer coordinator at a school knows a great deal about working with children from third grade on up, but they don't know about computer use with young children. The Center's staff works in both Mac and Windows environments, but finds that adaptations are simpler to make on Macs.

Ensure proper training. Teachers need individualized training on the equipment they have available and in using computers effectively with small children.

Rally support from the school system. Training takes time. Teachers need to be granted that time, and their training needs to be ongoing. A single workshop is not the answer. Teachers need follow-up, support and access to assistance when necessary.

Create the correct computer environment. The height at which a computer is placed, the furniture surrounding it and its location in the classroom can aid or hinder its overall effectiveness. For recommendations, visit www.wiu.edu/users/mimacp/wiu/techtips.html.

Select highly interactive software. Integrate it into the curriculum. Good software can support or extend the kinds of activities going on in the classroom, and it can also initiate a set of activities. The best is open-ended, allows a child to explore and control learning, and builds in success. For recommendations, visit www.mprojects.wiu.edu/littech/suggsoft.html.

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A FOCUS ON LITERACY

Beginning in 1994, WIU focused on four projects to use technology to increase emergent literacy skills. The Early Childhood Interactive Technology Literacy Curriculum Project used interactive multimedia software to create meaningful emergent literacy experiences for children aged 3-6 with mild to severe disabilities. LitTECH Interactive Outreach offered training for the model, including designing classroom computer centers to support literacy and use of an authoring program to write software to connect the real-life experiences of children to learning.

The third literacy initiative, the Early Childhood Emergent Literacy Technology Project, used case studies to describe and explain the effects of an interactive technology literacy curriculum on the emergent literacy skills of children aged 3-5 with mild to moderate disabilities.

The most recently funded literacy research project is the Emergent Literacy Technology Curriculum, ELiTeC, which provides teachers a framework for using technology for literacy activities.

Literacy project data clearly showed that computers can help young children increase their understanding of print concepts such as turning pages, reading left to right and top to bottom, and seeing that stories have a beginning, middle and end. It showed that developmentally appropriate software improves emergent literacy skills and increases interest in literacy activities, and that family involvement at home increases the benefits.

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

It was time to bring together many of these research strands into a single project. In 1995, the Macomb Projects began collaboration with Just Kids Early Childhood Center, a large Middle Island, New York learning center that included a large population of children with mild to severe disabilities. The project, known as Early Childhood Comprehensive Technology System (ECCTS), used the WIU-developed curriculum integration, technology assessment and training models with a transition-to-kindergarten model, developed elsewhere, to create a comprehensive system. The program trained the learning center's staff, which then implemented the technology and collected extensive data over a three-year period. The data led to the development of a comprehensive technology model that can be replicated.

"ECCTS data pointed to the need for administrative commitment to technology for the computer to be an effective classroom tool," says Robinson. "A trained tech team will ensure the successful use of technology, and ongoing support and technical assistance for teachers and support staff is critical."

Attitude is also important to the successful implementation of technology as a tool. Hutinger's advice: Start small with teachers that want to be involved.

WHAT'S NEXT?

New projects, with an increasingly narrow focus on specific curriculum areas, suggest themselves all the time, Hutinger says.

"At the Mac Expo I was listening to (Apple Computer CEO) Steve Jobs talk about their new technology and about iDVDs that you use to burn your own interactive DVDs, and we're going to have to figure out some ways to use that," says Hutinger. "I'm also interested in finding out how we can use hand-held computers with kids beaming back and forth. We need to be moving into the new technology. It's becoming so much more powerful and it's growing exponentially, and I'm very interested in how it all can be applied to some of the things we do in early childhood education."

From humble beginnings, the technology forum of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has grown to become a premier resource for early learning teachers and caregivers.

Technology Forum Provides Research, Information and a Sounding Board for a Growing Membership

"I personally believe that if we don't use technology as a tool for learning right now, it's like the equivalent of malpractice," says Dara Feldman, president of the Technology Special Interest Forum, as it is formally known.

"Our neediest kids, who haven't been read to and nurtured at home, need to be able to see, hear, feel, and interact with multimedia applications that bring them the experiences they haven't had directly. We need to give children tools that are going to scaffold their learning and guide them to success."

The forum was founded about 15 years ago by a small group of early childhood researchers and educators who believed that technology could support the development of young children and their teachers. As recently as a few years ago, forum meetings held in conjunction with NAEYC's annual meeting attracted just 20 participants. But last year, 150 early childhood education practitioners attended forum sessions at the annual meeting.

Through the forum, members talk about technology issues, share research and demonstrate best practices that benefit children up to age eight.

"The time for technology awareness in early childhood education has arrived," says Feldman. "People are increasingly using technology for their own purposes, and they're starting to understand its appropriateness and benefits in early childhood education."

Teachers and caregivers may access the forum in three ways.

First, the forum operates a web site – www.techandyoungchildren.org – which provides a broad range of information that has been screened before it is posted. The site's section on best educational practices includes such information as how to introduce and appropriately use computers with young children and how to select educational software. The technology information exchange features on-line staff development opportunities and award-winning early childhood technology projects, and provides links to noteworthy publications and web sites. A wealth of technology related research is available, and the site's section on funding details where and how to apply for technology grants.

The next addition to the web site will be a gallery where members can share resources they've created and projects that young children have created. New links are added all the time, and members are encouraged to make recommendations for other links.

Second, the forum hosts meetings and technology resource rooms at the NAEYC annual conference in November and the National Institute for Early Childhood Professional Development each June. At meetings, members share successes and focus on technology appropriate for children and professional development. All-day resource rooms are stocked with wireless laptops that can be easily moved from one area or room to another. There, educators explore bookmarked web sites, review developmentally appropriate software, hold discussions, have questions answered, and participate in spotlight sessions that provide hands-on learning.

Finally, any educator may join the forum's on-line, electronic member-to-member information exchange, or listserv. "The listserv provides a way for members to post and receive messages from other members," says Feldman. "People can ask questions about any aspect of technology, professional development, hardware, software – whatever – and other people will respond. Messages often become ongoing discussions on topics that are important to members, and through the listserv we often find people who are willing to share their ideas in spotlight sessions in our technology resource rooms."

Resources at Your Fingertips

Little Prints, with the help of good friends from the educational community, has assembled a list of resources available to all teachers and caregivers who need information about the use of technology with young children, be they mainstream or special needs. The links provide a rich and stimulating range of data, technology implementation theory and hard-won practical knowledge for teachers and caregivers at all levels of expertise.

GENERAL RESOURCES

Technology and Young Children, a project of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Technology Special Interest Forum.
http://www.techandyoungchildren.org/bestedu.html

The Early Childhood Weblinks project is a collection of web resources that were recommended by presenters at the 1998, 1999 and 2000 NAEYC conferences.
http://ali.apple.com/naeyc/

This page begins the section of weblinks that applies specifically to the concerns of early childhood educators.
http://ali.apple.com/naeyc/11.shtml#tech

Children and Computers, issued by The Texas Education Agency and co-sponsored by the University of Texas Pan American and K.I.D.S. Computers, Inc., provides software evaluations, grant information, links to research and other useful materials.
www.childrenandcomputers.com

A comprehensive summary of **computer ergonomics for young children** can be found at www.orosha.org/cergos/.

Technology in Early Childhood Education, a June 2001 survey of issues and best practices in technology conducted by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, can be found at:
www.nwrel.org/request.

Cyberstart is a Pennsylvania program to provide Internet services to child care centers.
www.cyberstart.org

RESOURCES IN ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGIES

Family Center on Technology and Disability can be found at
http://fctd.ucp.org/fctd/.
Click on "Model Programs."

The technical assistance project of the **Rehabilitation Engineering Society of North America** (RESNA) provides technical assistance to state and territorial assistive technology projects funded under the Tech Act. The RESNA web site includes a directory of those projects, which are valuable resources to professionals and parents in any state.
http://www.resna.org/taproject/index.html

The **Alliance for Technology Access** is a consumer-oriented organization with projects in many states and jurisdictions. The web site includes a directory of these projects, a valuable resource for parents and professionals.
http://www.ataccess.org/

The **Circle of Inclusion** provides resources on augmentative and alternative communications.
www.circleofinclusion.org/augcomm/index.html

The National Center for Improved Practice in Special Education Through Technology, Materials and Media offers a wide range of information and resources.
www.edc.org/fsc/ncip/

Keys to Inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream environments can be found in two links on the web site of the National Early Childhood Technical Assistance System. The links are Legislation/Policies and Effective Practices. See
http://www.nectas.unc.edu/inclusion/splash/inclusionsplash.asp

Several projects on best practices in the use of technology with young children with disabilities have been funded by the **Office of Special Education Programs**. Some are model demonstration programs, designed to develop, test and replicate a model for improved services. Some are outreach projects funded to disseminate best practice models of services.

Early Childhood Curriculum Support: Predicting, Listening, Observing, and Recording – Integrating Technology (Project ECCSPLORe – IT)
http://www.mprojects.wiu.edu/ei/eihome.html

FAMILY TIES: Enhancing Parent Involvement in the Education of Preschool Children with Disabilities
http://www.familychild.org

Let's Play! Project
http://cosmos.ot.buffalo.edu/letsplay

Project KITE Outreach: Kids Included Through Technology are Enriched
www.pacer.org/kite/kite.htm

Writing Lab Outreach Project
www.wmich.edu/wlop

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The book *Technology Tools for Young Learners*, by Leni Von Blackensee, provides concrete examples of ways technology can be used with young children. From Eye on Education, (941-833-0551)
www.eyeoneducation.com

For a **policy brief** on assistive technology and inclusion, see
http://www.asri.edu/CFSP/brochure/asstech.htm

Technicable, a newsletter from Partnerships in Assistive Technology, P.O. Box 17662, Raleigh, NC 27619-7662.

"Technology Integration into Early Childhood Curricula: Where We've Been, Where We Are, Where We Should Go," by Patsy Pierce, discusses how technology is used in early childhood education and its impact on development with suggestions for improved use of television, videotapes and computers with young children.
http://ericir.syr.edu/plweb-cgi

The **Kinderstart** web site provides a series of useful links to access thoughtful commentary on the use of technology in early learning environments.

Look for links under
http://kinderstart.com/education-daycarechildcare/ including "Computers and educational issues" and "Special education, special needs."

Special Education Teacher Turns Preschool Students into Tech-Savvy Learners

The computer talk in Denita Clover's special education classroom for children aged 3 to 5 is not unlike what you might hear in a typical office setting. It's not unusual to hear a child say, "Mrs. Clover, the computer froze and I need help," or "Mrs. Clover, the computer needs to be rebooted."

And every day during free time you can see young learners in this Colchester Elementary School environment independently inserting and removing CDs from the drives of the classroom's two computers, playing computer games, creating artwork or teaching another child how to use a software program.

"Denita is one of many good and creative teachers who do very appropriate activities with early childhood special education," says Carol Bell, content specialist/trainer at the Center for Best Practices in Early Childhood Education at Western Illinois University in nearby Macomb. "We've worked with her for eight years, and from the beginning she incorporated technology throughout her curriculum, making sure that it supports other learning."

It wasn't always this way for Clover, who has been with the school for 22 years.

"I can thank the Center at Western for *everything*," says Clover. "Before I started working with them, I knew virtually nothing about technology. I've now worked with them on four projects. It's been a real learning experience, and they have been so supportive."

The Center, then called the Macomb Projects, was looking for good teachers to participate in an emerging literacy study when it first contacted Clover. At the time, her classroom had one old Apple IIe computer, largely controlled and always closely supervised by the teacher herself.

For one full school year, Center staff members observed how Clover used technology with children. The next year, they trained her to implement the grant-developed LitTECH model for integrating technology into the classroom. They worked with her as she learned to use a newly acquired computer, designed and managed her computer centers to support literacy concepts, chose software and used *HyperStudio*, an authoring program, to create presentations that connected her students' real-life experiences to learning. The next year, Center staff observed Clover's classroom and provided additional support and training.

Now, all of Clover's special education students, typically 13 to 15 children with developmental delays in speech and language per class, use computers, which are always a choice during free time. Those who choose other activities learn to use computers during assigned small-group time.

"The kids love to create artwork, and they really like using *KidPix*," says Clover. "They especially love to print their work and take it home."

HyperStudio is one of Clover's favorite programs. When the class takes field trips, she and sometimes the children will use a digital camera. Back in the classroom, she helps the children use the program and the pictures to create an electronic book about the trip that they can print and take home.

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Also using *HyperStudio*, Clover likes to have children who are working with her in small groups create their own electronic book version of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*, after she has read the story to them.

"I'll start by asking, 'What do you want on the first page?' and they'll say, for example, 'A picture of Goldilocks,'" says Clover. "Then I'll ask, 'Do you want to draw one, or should we find one somewhere?'"

The children might choose to use an illustration from a book, taking its picture with the digital camera and inserting it into the electronic book. Just as often, because her classroom is loaded with props, the children will act out a scene. Clover or a child will take a picture of the actors and insert that into the book. Clover serves as director.

"Instead of doing the work herself, Denita talks a child through the process," says Bell. "She'll say, for example, 'Go to the word on the top of the screen that begins with an F,' so we see children recognizing the use of letters in words and the beginning sounds as she talks them through how to do things."

The most challenging collaboration for Clover was TEChPLACES, a project that explored use of the Internet as a vehicle for children to communicate to others about their community. Clover first worked with her children to send e-mail to two kindergartens and a first grade in the other participating schools. Since very young children do not grasp the concept of regular mail, let alone e-mail, Clover had to find a way to make the concept concrete.

"Working together in a large group, all the kids helped to compose a letter to send to the school principal," says Clover. "After we sent it, we all went down to her office. She brought up the letter on the screen so they could see it, and then she printed it for them. While the children were still watching, she typed a letter to them and sent it back to our classroom. When we got back there, we brought it up, printed it and read it."

Working as a large group, Clover's class e-mailed back and forth to the three other classes for an entire school year. They compose their letters together, with the children dictating and Clover typing. In addition, the children also type in their own messages into the letter, sometimes creating strings of letters that confound the older children who receive the e-mails.

"That activity follows the way that children learn to write," says Bell. "They start with scribbles, then we see recognizable letters, then words – and we see the same thing with the computer. At first they just hit the keys, modeling adult behavior. After a while they start choosing letters and you start seeing words appear in their random strings of letters."

As part of the TEChPLACES project, the class was to create a Web site that would inform the other schools about the community in which they lived.

"We took a walk and the children looked at their community, and when we got back they created 'maps' or pictures based on what they had seen and what interested them," says Clover.

All four participating classes drew maps, and all were very different. Depending on the age of the children, some saw their community as roads and streets, others as a series of places. Included among the items on Clover's children's maps were houses, a "hair washing place" and a soda vending machine. This information was communicated to the Center staff, who took over the next part of the project.

"We sent our team to all of those places and videotaped what goes on in them, then we worked with each teacher to build a community web site for their class," says Bell. We also created an Internet site and a CD-ROM that combined components of all four communities."

The web site and CD-ROM were interactive. For example, on the CD-ROM, when children clicked on the picture of the vending machine, it opened an interactive matching game. They could click on the "hair washing place" or the vet's office and see a quick-time video of what goes on inside each business and to find additional interactive activities.

Participation in the Center's early childhood technology projects resulted in changes in Clover's classroom. The Apple IIe was replaced by two computers – one a Mac and one a PC. The children prefer the Mac, Clover says, because the single-button mouse is easier to use, CD-ROMs are easier to access and remove, and software runs more smoothly than on the PC.

Clover's technology teaching methods have also changed. Her computer center is open to all children to make choices, help each other, and actively work on projects. Rather than being concerned that the children might break something, Clover is more concerned that they are actively engaged in their activities and continually solving problems together.

"When it comes to technology implementation, Clover's approach to using technology with young children is an example of the philosophy that prevails among many teachers involved in Center projects," says Bell. "That is, that technology is an extremely useful tool."

CASE STUDY:
Lake County, Illinois

Special Lessons from Computers for Special Ed

It's easy to tell when four-year-old Kim wants to work on the computer in Linda Wallin's special education preschool classroom. Kim, who is moderately mentally impaired, thrusts into Wallin's hand a picture of a computer taken from his book of cards that illustrate common words and phrases.

Kim, whose parents are from Korea, immediately begins to manipulate the mouse on a Mac G3 computer loaded with "My First 1,000 Words," a program that teaches words using animated illustrations and sound. For example, he clicks on a picture of a smiling mouth to hear the word "teeth," or on a bent arm to hear such words as "elbow." The word is pronounced by the computer as the body part bends, jumps, wiggles or otherwise rewards the click.

Kim's favorite picture is "bottom." Click on that one and the animated cartoon derriere seems to dance in time to a happy ditty. Over and over again, giggling, he makes it dance. "You're being silly, Kim," says Wallin. "Let's click on the picture for 'back.'" Kim tries to comply, but he lacks the necessary motor skills. He hits cartoons for hair, head and leg, but can't seem to maneuver the pointer to "back." Nonetheless, he seems to enjoy trying, perhaps because as he clicks around the screen, he makes fun things happen.

"I firmly believe it's important to get the kid to the computer with age-appropriate software," says Wallin, who is employed by the Special Education District of Lake County at Hawthorn Elementary North in Vernon Hills. "Even at this age, it is good for teaching cognitive skills and as a diagnostic tool."

Take James, whose memory at age 3 was so poor that he could not learn the alphabet. He rarely uttered a word in class. One day, Wallin and James were exploring a children's web site looking for pictures of dinosaurs. "He clicked and found a picture of a dinosaur egg and said, 'Aw, cool!'" she says. "Imagine how delighted I was."

James, now 5, is in a mixed class of five children with IEPs and 15 regular students. "It took him a year to learn his colors, and numbers still elude him, but he's functionally independent on the computer," Wallin says.

Even modest results like these can be elusive to achieve. Wallin, who holds a master's degree in special education and a certificate of advanced study in technology and education, has worked with the special education district (known as SEDOL) for 12 years. During that period she has been assigned to a number of schools. At Hawthorn North, she, an assistant and specialists such as occupational and speech therapists spend 2½ hours a day with 12 to 15 students aged 3 to 5 who have moderate to severe disabilities involving speech, hearing or vision disorders. Her students may be as much as two years behind the cognitive, social and motor development of typically developing children.

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Wallin began using computers with early childhood special education kids in 1992. Software available then was designed for the average kindergartner and was too advanced for her students, who start the day they turn three. But when Betsy, a little girl with an auditory processing disability, turned five, things changed.

"I had been trying to teach Betsy to recognize and name letters for seven months with no success," says Wallin. "I started working with her one-on-one, once a week, and within three weeks with the computer she had learned the alphabet. It was a revelation. Betsy's verbal comprehension was weak, but her visual comprehension was strong. Those are the children who do well with computers – the ones who learn visually."

In 1993, Wallin created a simple pattern recognition program that was more appropriate for her youngsters than the commercially available software of the time. The top of the screen would show, for example, a circle-square-circle-square-circle pattern. The student would use the mouse to click on what came next from the shapes the bottom of the screen. If the answer was correct, music played and a figure jumped up and down on the screen. If not, the child tried again. With some children, this simple routine was effective. With others, it was not.

Today, Wallin uses a broader range of computerized tools. For example, she favors an Intellitools® keyboard and overlays for children who can't manage a mouse or standard keyboard. The overlays contain a series of large pictures or shapes that children can press instead of trying to hit small keys or manipulate the mouse. Programs she uses include "Millie's Math House" from Edmark and "Exploring Patterns" from Intellitools.

Although some students use the computer independently, Wallin most often works directly at the machine with her students. Some, like Kim, find it fun but slow going. Others sometimes surprise her.

Oswaldo joined Wallin's class when he turned three. He was uncommunicative, did not respond to verbal direction, and initially appeared to have very low cognitive skills. One day when Wallin had left the Mac computer with her hard drive window open on the screen, Oswaldo began using the mouse to methodically drag all the icons out of that window and onto the desktop.

"I almost had a heart attack when I saw what he was doing, and luckily he didn't drag the icons into the trash, but I was thrilled – it was my first indication that he had good thinking skills," says Wallin. "It turned out that Oswaldo had average or above average intelligence, but he had auditory processing problems. With Spanish spoken at home and English at school, he had trouble understanding what people were saying. But visually, at the computer, he could learn. By the end of the year, he was using the computer independently, turning it on, opening and using programs – the whole nine yards."

One piece of classroom equipment Wallin finds essential is the digital camera, which she and speech therapist Lori Rothstein use in a number of ways.

For example, digital photographs of each child are mounted on a large poster that shows a house on one side and the school on another. To take attendance, children move their photos to the school. To provide visual clues for autistic children who have not mastered language, Wallin takes, prints and laminates photos of them doing things like washing their hands or putting on their coats. When it's time for that activity, she shows the child the appropriate picture and accompanies it with a verbal prompt.

A similar picture helped Wallin direct the behavior of a little boy with an auditory processing disorder who had spent his first 18 months in a Romanian orphanage.

"He loved the computer so much that he would go to it any time there was a transition," says Wallin. "I took a picture of him at the computer, printed it and added a circle with a line through it. That was my way of helping him to understand, 'No computer at this time.'"

From the NECC 2001 Exhibit Floor

The National Educational Computing Conference, a premier event for the world of educational technology, was held in Chicago in late June. Although focused primarily on K-12 education, the presentations by computer hardware makers, software publishers and service providers included a rich mélange of information and products for the early learning community.

Little Prints is pleased to provide this summary of NECC sights, sounds and information for early childhood education.

Please note, however: These summaries do not constitute an endorsement of or recommendation for any product or service. Given the size of NECC, *Little Prints* easily may have overlooked an interesting item. This is not an exhaustive review. Even so, *Little Prints* believes readers may find our summaries useful.

SOFTWARE FOR PREKINDERGARTEN CHILDREN

Alphabet

Published for children as young as age 3, Alphabet is a delightful swirl of color and energy based on bright, energetic shapes and forms that begin from stylized letterforms. The imaginative artwork, by Czech artist Kveta Pacovská, responds and reshapes immediately as children provide input in a mouse, keyboard or by speaking into a microphone. Sounds of nature and music add creative changes to the letters. Alphabet is open-ended; children may explore the letters, colors and shapes as they wish.

Other preschool titles from this manufacturer include:

- Max and the Magician, third in the series of software adventures of Max from Dogsfairyland, focusing on orientation skills, color perception, counting, early reading skills, and cause and effect relationships
- The Millie Meter series for children beginning at age 4, with titles that explain basic nutrition and ecosystems through interactive play, in multiple languages.

For more information:
Publishing, www.tivola.com

Ani's℠ Rocket Ride

This game for children aged 3 to 7 was partially funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, developed with the Erikson Institute of Advanced Study in Child Development in Chicago, and inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach to early learning. Available in English and Spanish versions, the game encourages children to explore, discover and synthesize new information by responding to their natural curiosity.

Children help Ani, a friendly alien, learn about Earth by exploring a forest, pond and garden and bringing found objects into a classroom with science, art, drama and literacy centers. There, children experiment with and learn about the objects. In simulated Internet centers, children learn on-line skills in a developmentally appropriate, off-line environment. Ani's video camera documents the child's work, which can be played back. A built-in e-mail connection enables children to send their artwork home. An extensive teacher's guide provides a wealth of activities to integrate game content into the classroom.

For more information: APTE, Inc., www.internetcoach.com

Cyber Grannies

Designed to help preschool children expand vocabulary, sharpen exploration skills and learn the alphabet, this game is brightly animated and highly interactive. Each of 26 talking cartoon grandmothers – one for each letter of the alphabet – inhabits an environment where nearly every object begins with the same letter. Clicking on the correct object in each environment reveals a "hidden activity" such as a painting or counting game.

For more information:
Kutoka Interactive,
www.kutoka.com

Disney's Winnie the Pooh Preschool Plus

Winnie the Pooh and his friends help two- to four-year-old children "think, think, think" as they journey through The Hundred Acre Wood. Newly enhanced to offer an introduction to Spanish and French, the CD features adjustable, age-appropriate activities that focus on skills related to reading, math, problem-solving, creativity and foreign language learning. Children cook alphabet soup in Kanga's kitchen, count vegetables from Rabbit's garden, visit Pooh's "Echo Tree" for a foreign language lesson, and attend a birthday celebration for Eeyore. Off-line activities to extend learning are available at the web site.

For more information:
Disney Interactive,
www.disney.com

GollyGee Blocks™

Children create simple or complex 3D pictures using traditional building block shapes and a library of objects. Intuitive editing tools enable children to stack, stretch, rotate, copy, color and texture blocks and to make vibrant 3D scenes. Designed for grades K-6, the program does not require a child to be able to read or write. Text, however, may be added. Mathematics, language and social studies activities are included. An activity guide provides classroom activities aligned to state and national standards.

For more information:
GollyGee Software, Inc.,
www.gollygee.com
A free demo of the program is available on the Web site.

KidPix® Deluxe 3

This versatile multimedia and presentation tool, designed for children grades K-8, is also used with pre-K children. Dazzling colors and features enable children to create drawings, storybooks, comic books, arts and crafts projects, slide shows, posters and more – with or without text. Bright backgrounds enable children to create pictures using drag-and-drop objects. Rubber stamps facilitate creativity with a single, repeated shape. Graphics may be resized, recolored and have sound added. Resulting drawings can be e-mailed. A teacher's resource binder eases integration into the curriculum with tutorials, lesson plans and a resource CD.

For more information:
The Learning Company®,
www.learningcompanyschool.com/kps

Kidspiration™

Designed for grades K-3 and promoted as appropriate for children who do not yet read or write, the CD has a library of more than 1,200 drawings of everyday objects that help children see, organize and develop ideas. A SuperGrouper™ tool provides an interactive way to group and arrange objects. Audio helps children connect visual images with words and can record the words that match the images they've chosen. Reading, writing, social studies and science activities are included. A separate interactive training CD, which takes about an hour to complete, helps educators integrate the program into the curriculum.

For more information:
Inspiration® Software, Inc.,
www.inspiration.com
An evaluation disk is available.

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Leaps and Bounds 1 and 2
The first CD leads young users through six activities that stimulate the imagination and help to develop pre-reading skills. Each activity has lively, colorful characters, catchy music and surprises. Mouse clicking enables children to hear animal sounds, stimulate actions, make a tune, uncover clues and match animated characters in pairs. The new second CD has more energetic characters and six additional activities. Stimulating movements and sounds help children improve visual and auditory discrimination. The web site provides free classroom ideas, printable activities and educational clip art.

For more information:
Tool Factory, Inc.,
www.toolfactory.com

Star Wars® Early Learning Activity Center™
Pre-K through first grade children develop early math, music and language skills as they help sequence dance steps for Jar Jar, sort and classify fanciful creatures, identify patterns and plan simple puppet shows. An underwater treasure hunt develops understanding of simple spatial relationships. A mix of directed and open activities is provided, utilizing cartoon-like versions of the movie characters.

For more information:
Lucas Learning,
www.lucaslearning.com

NON-SOFTWARE TECHNOLOGY FOR PREKINDERGARTEN CHILDREN

The Leap into Literacy™ Center – Pre-K Edition
This multifaceted, multisensory, technology-based program uses sight, sound and touch to deliver a curriculum based on best practices in reading research. Children learn letter-name recognition, letter-sound association, vocabulary and simple spelling. The LeapPad talking book and electronic pen bring books to life with touch-interactive technology that enables children to read or sound out specific words or to hear the entire story read. Using the LeapDesk, with removable plastic letters that fit into a keyboard-like holder, children see and feel shapes of letters and hear the sounds they make, separately and in simple words. The LeapMat, a large keyboard-like plastic mat, teaches letter-name recognition, letter-sound recognition and spelling of three-letter words. It can be used on a wall, floor or table for individual or group instruction. The Pad, Desk and Mat come with optional-use earphones. A CD with engaging songs, five posters, 19 storybooks, a resource guide and teacher's manual complete the package.

For more information:
LeapFrog Schoolhouse,
www.leapfrogschoolhouse.com

Little Fingers™ Keyboards
These colorful under-sized keyboards are designed to fit the hands of children as young as age 3. Keyboards, made for both Mac and IBM-compatible environments, come with a number pad or a built-in trackball. Keycaps show both upper- and lower-case letters, so that children who are familiar with one case can easily see and find the letters. The maker offers 30-day free trials to teachers.

For more information:
Datadesk Technologies,
www.data-desk.com

KidzMouse™
The KidzMouse, a small and colorful mouse shaped for young hands, was designed by grandmother Susan Giles for her four-year-old granddaughter. The KidzMouse replaces the usual mouse buttons with a squeezable head on the theory that the typical mouse tapping action can be difficult for children with developing motor skills.

For more information:
KidzMouse, Inc.
www.kidzmouse.com
or 888-503-kidz

TECHNOLOGY FOR SPECIAL NEEDS KIDS

IntelliTools®
This company develops and markets hardware and software tools to meet the learning needs of children with disabilities. Products are designed to help children with physical and/or cognitive educational challenges to optimize their social and academic preparation and success. Tutorials and activities are available on the company's web site, and hands-on professional development is offered through a national network of specialists.

Examples:

- IntelliKeys® includes six touch-sensitive computer keyboard overlays designed for children who have difficulty using standard keyboards. Usable with any software that accepts keyboard input, the overlays feature large, well-spaced keys in high-contrast colors that make it easy for children to locate letters and numbers.
- The SwitchIt! Suite features four programs for the beginning switch user. Programs follow a developmental sequence from cause-and-effect to higher-level thinking skills and can be customized for individual children. Children build objects, patterns, and scenes and distinguish between opposites such as big and little with the click of a switch. Custom options include auditory reinforcement, adjustable numbers of steps to complete an activity, and rewards.
- Teach Me to Talk is designed for the child who is having difficulty learning to talk or make sounds correctly. It features a collection of 150 real-life pictures that can be manipulated by adding music, movement and/or text.
- Old MacDonald's Farm Deluxe has activities for all children, from the able-bodied to those with severe disabilities. Teachers decide how many of the one to 18 animals to display on screen, whether to use real or cartoon animation and sounds, and which of six activities to use, such as matching and playing songs. For switch users, teachers have cause-and-effect, press-and-hold, inverse-switch, two-switch and scanning options.

For more information:
IntelliTools, Inc.,
www.intellitools.com

DynaVox Systems, Inc.
DynaVox offers several types of augmentative and alternative communication systems for individuals who cannot speak. The company's DSS software system provides speech alternatives for children as young as age 2, using simple pictures to help users build phrases, words and eventually advance to spelling. Computerized DynaVox pads can be mounted on wheelchairs and are provided at three levels of capability, including models with built-in infrared capabilities that permit users to operate televisions, VCRs, computers and other devices. They can be controlled by a variety of techniques, including pneumatic switches for those who use it by mouth.

For more information:
www.dynavoxsys.com

CLASSROOM/INSTRUCTIONAL MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE FOR TEACHERS AND ADMINISTRATORS

All classroom and school management software shown at NECC was designed for use with K-12 classes, where accurate attendance records are critical for funding and where grades, homework and student access to their own records becomes important. All offer features that can be of use to prekindergarten teachers, administrators and parents.

PowerSchool
This web-based student information system helps teachers to manage classrooms, administrators to make informed decisions, students to stay on track, and parents to stay informed. Teachers can easily tie assignments to standards and benchmarks, post homework assignments and provide links to web resources, enter grades into an on-line grade book, take attendance and greatly streamline other administrative tasks including parent communications. Information is always real-time and accessible to individual students and their parents in a confidential, password-protected environment. Administrators can easily access individual, class, group, school and district information and generate reports.

A master scheduling function ensures maximum efficiency of teaching resources, eliminates paperwork, and automatically populates on-line teacher attendance/grade books with pertinent student and contact information.

For more information:
Apple Computer, Inc.,
www.apple.com/education

Teacher's Pal 2000
Currently client-server based with plans for an Internet-based product in 2002, the program facilitates the management of standards-based curriculum, simplifies the alignment of curriculum and lessons with mandated standards, and assesses and reports the success of standards-based curriculum and lesson plans. It links lesson objectives to learner activities and state standards, which come pre-loaded, and helps to create a lesson plan bank that can be shared among teachers. An assessment tool allows teachers to record student progress and plan individual or group remediation to assure standards compliance and mastery, and creates customizable reports.

For more information:
Teacher's Pal,
www.teacherspal.com
A demo disk is available.

Classroom Planner®
Web-based, this program includes a variety of useful tools. The grade book records mastery and non-mastery of state and local objectives and generates a variety of reports. The lesson planner provides a template for developing lesson plans by the day, week, month, grading period or year. Individual Education Plans can be pasted into the program and learning objectives can be marked with the date of achievement. Parents can access student information in a secure environment from any computer. On-line help files make the program easy to learn.

For more information:
Schepp Turner Productions,
www.scheppturner.com

SchoolSpace™
Browser-based, this customizable school district management system offers a streamlined approach for scheduling, grading, attendance, administration and facilities management. Features for teachers include a grade book, a lesson-planning template that links to state standards, and a student profile page. Administrators can easily generate school and district reports and graphs, manage classroom and equipment inventory and schedule classes. Parent-communication features are included, and parents may access student records at any time.

For more information:
Limitless, Inc.,
www.schoolspace.com

The ParentLink Suite
This communication system helps to link parents, teachers and students through the use of telephone and Internet technology and gives parents direct access to their children's school information. The unit consists of a stand-alone server that interfaces to a school's phone system and administrative computer. Voice mail enables teachers to access messages from any phone or Internet-enabled computer. Schools can send messages home by phone and Internet. Attendance is easily tracked and parents are automatically notified of absences. An electronic grade book keeps information real-time.

For more information:
Parlant™ Technology,
www.parlant.com

INTIME
This University of Northern Iowa College of Education program, funded by a U.S. Department of Education grant, has compiled a library of videotaped case studies of teachers who effectively integrate technology into the educational environment. Still a work in progress, INTIME is built around a detailed model of technology as a facilitator for quality education. Its target audience is preservice teachers.

For more information:
www.intime.uni.edu

Task Force
Committees Formed

The Governor's Task Force on Universal Access to Preschool has formed four committees and established procedures for public comment as part of its drive to produce a five-year implementation plan by January 1.

The Task Force was charged by Governor George Ryan with developing a plan to provide early childhood education opportunities for all children aged 3 to 5 whose parents or guardians want them to participate.

Four working committees have been formed:

- **The Program, Outcomes and Assessment Committee** will develop program content guidelines and identify and describe methods to assess programs and measure results. It is co-chaired by Kay Henderson, who leads early childhood programs for the Illinois State Board of Education, and George Davis, director of the Rockford Head Start program.
- **The Staffing and Professional Development Committee** will develop recommendations for roles, qualifications and salary for staff positions associated with universal preschool, all within the context of the statewide professional development system. The committee will also examine such issues as initial preparation for a preschool position, ongoing professional development and career counseling, all as part of a statewide early childhood career lattice. It is co-chaired by Dr. Sarah Gulley, dean of the Department of Education at St. Xavier University, and Beth Doria, of the state Department of Commerce and Community Affairs.
- **The Systems Integration and Financing Committee** is responsible for cost estimates and financing strategies for a universal preschool system. It will also recommend governance and planning structures at the state and local levels, with an eye towards better coordination of services with Head Start and school activities. It is co-chaired by Harriet Meyer, president of The Ounce of Prevention Fund, Randy Valenti of the Illinois Department of Human Services Bureau of Child Care and Development, and George Ranney, chief executive officer of Chicago Metropolis 2020 and a partner in the Mayer, Brown & Platt law firm.

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- **The Public Participation and Support Committee** will collect information from parents, the childcare, Head Start and school communities and others to make certain that the Task Force has all the information it needs to support its recommendations. The committee is also charged with building public awareness and support for the initiative. It is co-chaired by Jerry Stermer, president of Voices for Illinois Children, and John Millner, Elmhurst police chief and representative of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids Illinois.

The public may participate in Task Force and committee work in several ways. A description of the Task Force with a link to a public opinion survey has been posted on the Futures for Kids web site at www.futures4kids.org. The survey will also be made available by the Illinois Parent-Teacher Association and several other organizations with an interest in early childhood education.

In addition, public forums will be arranged by a number of interested groups and schools. The groups agreed to publicize and host forums throughout the state in September and October.

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www.isbe.state.il.us

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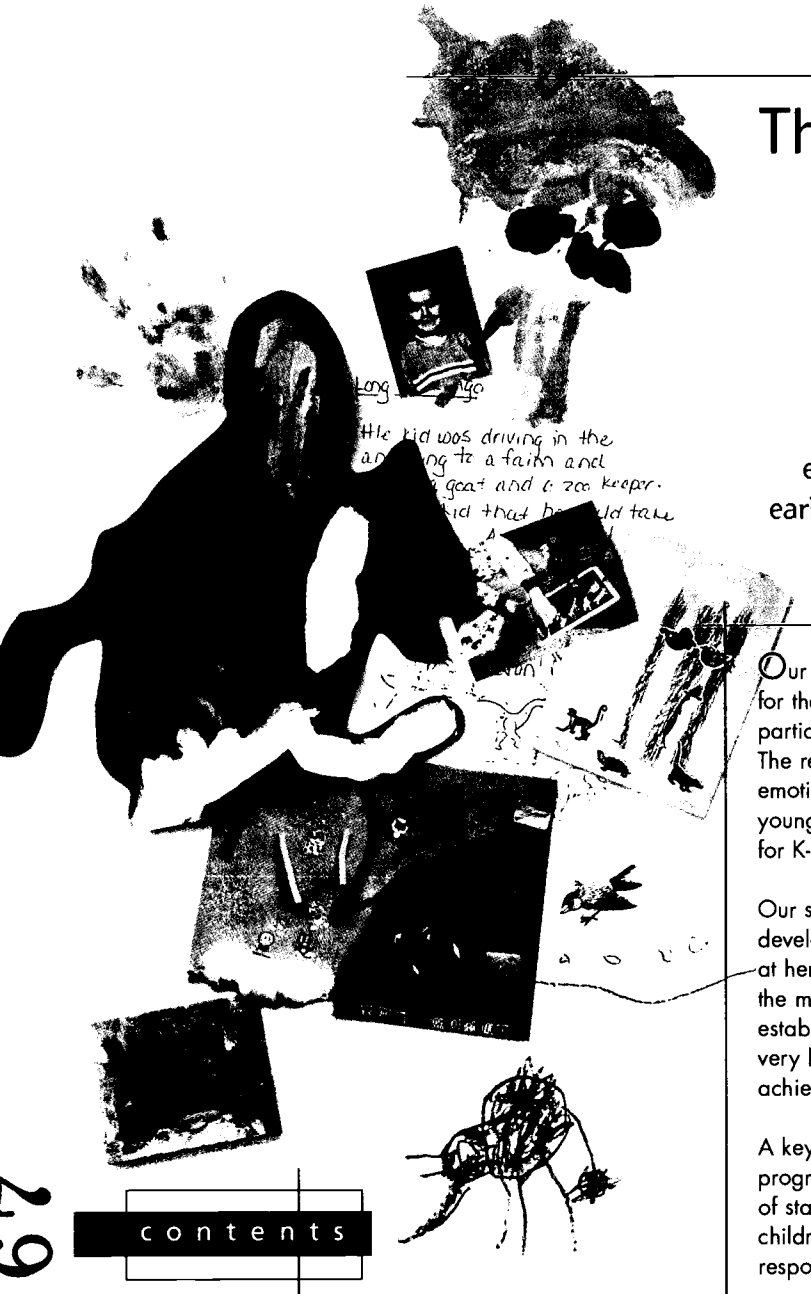

The Next Step in Assessment

One of the recurring themes

of recent years within the Illinois early childhood education community has been the drive to establish early learning standards and their corollary, meaningful child-development assessments. I am delighted to report that we are close to success with both.

Our Illinois Early Learning Standards have been a work in progress for the last several years. Hundreds of teachers and caregivers have participated at various stages as we have drafted the standards. The result, just now rolling off the presses, is a series of social, emotional, physical and cognitive developmental expectations for young children, all of them aligned with the Illinois Learning Standards for K-12 education.

Our standards recognize that every child is an individual who will develop physically, emotionally and cognitively in her or his own way, at her or his own pace. They reflect different modes of learning and the most current understanding of brain development. The standards establish simple benchmarks for young children, but deliberately say very little about how teachers and caregivers should help children achieve those results.

A key to using standards is learning how to evaluate each child's progress. In primary and secondary school, this usually takes the form of standardized testing. Such testing is inappropriate for preschool children, who usually don't read at age 3 or 4, and who often don't respond well to group or even individual testing conditions.

Instead, we early childhood educators have spent a lot of time learning about assessment techniques that are authentic, meaning that they are conducted in the context of each child's everyday classroom or care center experience. The Work Sampling System® developed by Dr. Samuel Meisels and his colleagues is an excellent example of this type of assessment.

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Work Sampling includes components that help teachers identify each child's strengths and weaknesses across the seven core areas of learning as well as social and emotional development. It provides a natural and illuminating way to showcase student work and especially student progress. In its most complex form, Work Sampling also provides a very thoughtful method for reporting to families on each child's progress and/or developmental issues.

Many highly skilled teachers in Illinois are already using Work Sampling. They report that what makes this system so valuable is its discipline. It requires teachers to observe and record information about every child, and it follows a logical, tested and proven pathway for evaluation of children in all areas of growth.

Work Sampling has now been customized to align with the Illinois Early Learning Standards. This gives teachers an excellent tool for observing, documenting and reporting a child's progress toward meeting established standards that are aligned with the Illinois Learning Standards K-12. It also provides teachers with data that can be used to inform instruction.

Beginning this fall, we will pilot Work Sampling System Illinois with schools, Head Start and child care centers statewide. While Work Sampling is not required for state-funded programs at this time, I strongly encourage you to become familiar with the system through a series of Illinois Early Learning Standards and Assessment workshops that will be available throughout the year.

This edition of Little Prints describes Work Sampling, its origins and its benefits in detail. As always, I look forward to your comments and suggestions as this initiative rolls out in Illinois.

Best regards,

Kay Henderson

Kay Henderson

Please direct comments about *Little Prints* to:

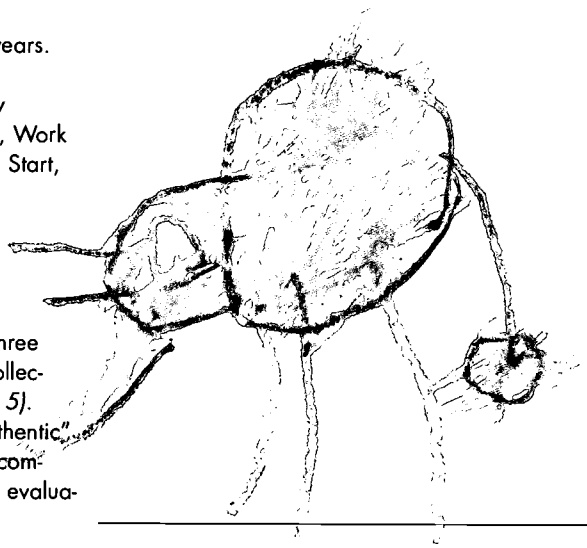
Kay Henderson,
Division Administrator
Early Childhood
Education, ISBE
100 North First Street,
Springfield, IL
62777-0001

telephone:
(217) 524-4835

email:
hhenders@isbe.net

The Work Sampling System has been around since 1993, and some Illinois prekindergarten teachers have been using all or some of its components for years.

What's new is a version of the assessment system that is aligned with the new Illinois Early Learning Standards (ELS), called Work Sampling Illinois. This fall, Work Sampling Illinois will be piloted in 450 state-funded, special education, Head Start, community and private child care programs statewide. Here's the new system in a nutshell.



"Elephant" – Cameron has begun to redraw animal stickers found in the classroom. His interest in animals has given him a reason to draw. He didn't enjoy participating in writing or drawing exercises before today.

WSS IL = GUIDELINES & CHECKLISTS + ELS

The Work Sampling System is a performance assessment process with three interrelated components: developmental guidelines and checklists, portfolio collections of children's work, and summary reports *(see accompanying story page 5)*. Designed for use with prekindergarten through 5th grade students, this is "authentic" assessment, or a way to learn about a child's skills, knowledge, behavior, accomplishments and dispositions through ongoing observation, documentation and evaluation as part of ordinary classroom experiences.

Work Sampling Illinois consists of the developmental guidelines and checklist component only. Whatever a teacher may do with work portfolios and reporting to parents is unaffected by participation in the pilot program. Teachers may choose to implement portfolios and summary reports according to Work Sampling System guidelines, but it is not a pilot requirement.

"We want to make the system manageable and focus on building proficiency in using the guidelines and checklists first," says Kay Henderson, division administrator, Early Childhood Education, ISBE. "That alone provides a system that organizes teaching and learning to give us a better indication of child outcomes. With proficiency in guidelines and checklists will come greater sophistication in terms of building portfolios – knowing what to save and what saved items will demonstrate over time."

HERE'S WHAT WSS IL WILL LOOK LIKE AND DO

As children engage in regular classroom activities, teachers observe and make notes about each child's performance. Twice a year they use the collected documentation to rate, on a simple two-page checklist, whether a child is "not yet" demonstrating the indicator, "in process" or demonstrating the indicator intermittently, or "proficient," meaning the child can reliably demonstrate the indicator.

For example, one indicator is "comprehends and responds to stories read aloud." To determine a child's rating under that indicator, teachers refer to the developmental guidelines book, where they find a brief explanation and eight examples of how a child might demonstrate comprehension. These include "acting out a familiar story with their classmates," "asking questions and making comments about a story," and "retelling the main events of a story just read or told by the teacher."

continued on page 4

continued from ***Work Sampling System Illinois*** page 3

The WSS IL developmental guidelines and checklists serve to focus teacher observations on key aspects of the eight domains of the Early Learning Standards. The checklist is meant to be a tool for the teacher, not a report for the family.

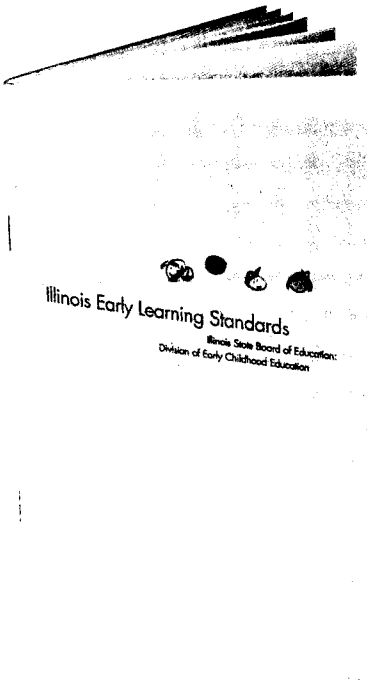
"Work Sampling Illinois will drive instruction," says Shelby King, principle education consultant for ISBE. "It will tell teachers what they should be teaching in their classrooms, what they've done a good job with and what they need to improve. It's packaged in a way that simply organizes what good teachers are already doing in their classrooms – in a way that parents and administrators can understand."

HOW THE PILOT PROGRAM WILL WORK

Training and support for pilot program teachers will be provided by 30 special education, Head Start, prekindergarten and daycare teachers, coordinators and administrators who have had three days of rigorous training in Work Sampling Illinois, all three components of the Work Sampling System, and how to train teachers. Participants will be placed in a training program at one of three levels.

Level One is for newcomers to the system, Level Two is for those with some familiarity but limited training and experience with WSS and the ELS, and Level Three is for participants who are already trained and experienced in using WSS and the ELS. Required training takes from one to three days, after which trainer support is available by phone, e-mail and follow-up sessions.

Participation in the pilot is voluntary and requires completion of an application form. Participants must attend training, develop observation systems, implement Work Sampling Illinois according to pilot requirements, make at least two checklist ratings by the end of the school year, and provide feedback regarding use of Work Sampling Illinois. Level Three participants will submit their data to be analyzed and evaluated.



The Illinois Early Learning Standards (ELS) Handbook is now available.

The Three Key
of the Work Sampling

A brief overview and snapshots of what an authentic assessment system looks like in action

HOW TO GET IN ON THE ACTION

WSS IL awareness sessions were scheduled for early spring. Those who were unable to attend and who wish to participate should call Shelby King at 217-524-4835. Participants will receive information on their level of training and additional details in early May.

"After this year's pilot we will pull together all the teachers and trainers and talk about suggestions, problems they had, things that worked and things that didn't, and we'll work all of that into the plan for expanding the program next year," says King.

"Ultimately, as a result of Work Sampling Illinois, teachers are going to be better and child outcomes will be better because children will receive instruction geared to their individual strengths, needs, interests and approaches to learning," says Henderson. "We won't wait until the end of the year to assess how a child is doing in a particular area. We'll know on a weekly and sometimes even a daily basis."

Picture this: In preparation for painting, each prekindergartner receives a paint shirt. One little boy, refusing offers of assistance, struggles for nearly 10 minutes to put his on. When he's ready to paint, the teacher sees that the shirt is inside out and backwards. She quickly grabs a camera, snaps a photo, and jots a few lines on a sticky note to affix to the back.

Components System

"This was an important piece of the teacher's understanding about the child – that he'll work very hard at a task, he's persistent, and he wants to be independent," says Jonathan Fribley, a St. Cloud, Minnesota-based early childhood educator, parent educator, educational consultant and Work Sampling System veteran. "Presented with the same task, another child might immediately ask for help, throw the shirt on the floor in frustration, paint without it, or not paint at all. But this child, when presented with a task, will get it done – in his own way. That's important for the teacher to know, and her photo will serve as a reminder to herself as well as a reminder to share the information with the family."

That's just one kind of documentation the Work Sampling System encourages. Here's a brief overview of the three-component system and how it works in the classroom:

It's a Process. Not a Test.

The Work Sampling System is an ongoing classroom performance assessment process that documents children's skills, knowledge, behavior, accomplishments and dispositions across a broad range of areas, on multiple occasions, to enhance teaching and learning. It accomplishes this goal via three complementary components: developmental guidelines and checklists, portfolios, and summary reports.

DEVELOPMENTAL GUIDELINES AND CHECKLISTS

Any valid assessment has essentially two parts – documentation (gathering and recording information) and evaluation (comparing that information to standards). With Work Sampling, documentation is ongoing, and evaluation consists of using developmental guidelines to rate each child, three times a year, on a two-page checklist that lists the skills, knowledge and behaviors to be assessed.

Step One: Documentation Work Sampling System gathers information about children as they engage in ordinary classroom activities.

"Young children are erratic in their skill development," says Fribley. "You see a skill one day and not the next, or in one context but not another. So it's a principle of good assessment that we give children multiple opportunities to show us what they know, and those opportunities can occur in vastly different circumstances."

Teachers experienced in Work Sampling use a variety of methods to record their observations. Some will make notes on note cards; some will take snapshots and jot comments on the back. Some create simple grids for skill evaluation or charts on which they can make quick marks to note when a child demonstrates a specific skill.

Knowing what to document and how to focus observation is important, Fribley notes. Let's say you wanted to find out about a child's story comprehension skills.

"I could read a story and show a child picture cards and ask him to show me which came first, which came second and so on – and people do that sort of thing and then give the child a score on story comprehension – but there are dangers in that," says Fribley. "One may be that if the child is better able to express himself orally than by manipulating picture cards, what you're getting may not be story comprehension skill but the child's ability to handle a testing situation. If you gave the child the opportunity to retell the story, or to draw the scariest part of the story, or participate in a play where he and other children act out the story, you're likely to find out more about his story comprehension."

Documentation can be done during almost any activity – even snack time, when you'll see children using counting, sorting, communication and fine motor skills.

Step Two: Evaluation The next step is to rate each child on a checklist, using the collected documentation. Ratings are determined by comparing documentation and knowledge about the child to criteria that are spelled out for each checklist item in the Developmental Guidelines book.

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For example, one checklist item reads, "Demonstrates phonological awareness."

Says Fribley: "Early childhood educators don't necessarily have a lot of background in this skill, and it is essential for early literacy development. If we're all going to be on the same page with what we're trying to help children learn, we need some kind of standard. The developmental guidelines book explains what you can expect to see in a child who demonstrates phonological awareness."

PORTFOLIOS

A portfolio is a focused, purposeful collection of each child's work that illustrates the quality of the child's efforts, progress and achievements over time. It might be a hanging file, a file folder, a box or a couple of pieces of poster board taped together. Contents might include artwork, writing samples, things the child has made, photos, teacher's notes and tape recordings.

In Work Sampling's structured approach, two kinds of items are collected. ***Core items*** demonstrate the child's growth in specific areas of a curriculum such as early literacy skills, number sense and emergent writing. ***Individualized items*** illustrate what is unique about the child.

"Orange and blue make mud" Sally loves to experiment with color. Sometimes we try to predict the results.

To Save or Not to Save Learning what to save is often the biggest stretch for teachers in their thinking, notes Fribley, who conducts workshops on portfolio collections. Teachers who have assembled collections of children's work in the past will often focus on saving work from a particular activity that doesn't necessarily illustrate the skill they want it to illustrate. One example:

"A teacher may read *Clifford, the Big Red Dog*, have the children paint pictures of Clifford, and save all the pictures to demonstrate story comprehension," says Fribley. "But the question is: what do those paintings illustrate? Do they really show understanding of the story or just fine motor control? You need to be very aware of what it is you're trying to learn about children, and that's often different than how teachers have assembled portfolios in the past."

Individualized portfolio items illustrate the unique skills, abilities and interests of the individual child. Two examples:

- A bunch of shiny paper and cloth stacked on a piece of orange construction paper in a big, gluey assemblage provided Fribley a reminder of one child's genuine interest. For about six weeks, the first thing the child did every day was head straight to the art area and glue.

- A photo of a child engaged in a color-mixing activity using eyedroppers, colors and water was a reminder to a teacher of something that, for another child, might not have been worth noting. But the activity happened in early October, before class, and it was the first day that child had come into the classroom and not spent the first half hour on separation-from-mom issues. The photo recorded an important step in the child's growth.

What's It All For? Using Portfolios with Children Portfolios can have several uses. They can facilitate communication with families, and they can even be useful in helping children begin to reflect on their own work.

"I remember the exact moment when I was convinced of that, one January or February," says Fribley. "I was sitting with a four-year-old, looking at the items in her portfolio. One was some writing she had done in the last week or two, and one was a writing sample I had saved from September. She looked at the earlier sample and

asked, 'Was that from when I was little?' I thought: she can see it; she can see her own growth. That is a powerful thing for children. It helps them feel confident in their abilities."

Using Portfolios with Families Portfolio items can help families really see their child and understand the kind of learning that goes on when children are involved in certain activities.

"Some of the very best family education I've ever done has taken place while looking at and talking about children's portfolios," says Fribley. "For example, to a family, a child's writing sample may look like scribbling. But if I talk about how I see the print going left to right, and how I see the beginning of letter formation there, and explain a bit about how children learn to write, the family can start to value the child's efforts and take pride in what the child is accomplishing."

SUMMARY REPORTS: WRAPPING IT UP

Three times a year, summary reports round up the child's accomplishments for the family and record progress for teachers and administrators. Each simple report form summarizes the information from the checklists and portfolios, describes the child's strengths and any areas of concern, and creates a clear message about how the child is doing. In Minnesota elementary schools where the Work Sampling System has been implemented, summary reports replace report cards.

Fribley believes in the Work Sampling System because of the way it provides perspective on how children learn, enhances the teacher's understanding of each individual child, and facilitates planning of instruction in a way that is responsive to children's individual needs.

"If you're going to make smart decisions about how to interact with individual children – to help them learn what they need to learn in a way they can learn it and at a time when they are ready to learn it – you need to know each child as an individual," says Fribley. "Work Sampling provides a structured, proven approach for obtaining that information, and that makes it worth doing."

MY NAME IS EVAN, E-V-A-N. MY HAIR IS THIS, KIND OF GRAYISH. MY EYES ARE BLUE. I HAVE ME AND MY DADDY AND MY MOMMY IN MY FAMILY. THAT'S ALL THAT MY FAMILY IS. I DON'T HAVE ANYONE ELSE. MY DADDY AND ME WRESTLE AND WE PLAY PIRATES. I GOT A HOOK WITH MY SWORD FOR MY BIRTHDAY. I PLAY WITH MY MOMMY AND I DO NICE THINGS FOR HER.

EVAN

Evan is very comfortable dictating stories and moves from thought to thought easily.

The Voice of Experience

A seven-year veteran of the Work Sampling System talks about why it's worth the effort and how to avoid getting bogged down at the start

Jenny loves to draw environments for her stickers. "This bird is hungry and is going to eat these four seeds for dinner"

Ask Jonathan Fribley what he likes about the Work Sampling System (WSS) as an assessment tool for preschool children and be prepared for an explicit, lengthy and passionate reply. Fribley, a St. Cloud, Minnesota-based early childhood educator, parent educator and educational consultant, has worked with the system since 1994 as a teacher and teacher trainer, and he's a real advocate. Here he shares a few reasons why:

- "Instead of creating a separate testing situation, Work Sampling uses ordinary classroom activities as the source of assessment information. The test becomes: How do children demonstrate what they know in the purposeful activities that we put before them and those they create for themselves.

- "Work Sampling makes teachers think carefully about how we learn about children and what kinds of information we need to help children discover their power to learn and grow. It's a tool that assists teachers in developing a whole panoply of skills that lead to effective instruction.

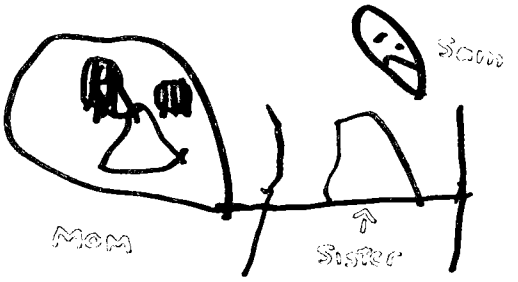
- "Work Sampling touches so many areas of teacher practice. Some of the big opportunities it offers are to improve the way you communicate with families, the way you team with special education and the way you structure your curriculum.

- "Work Sampling is a research-based, time-proven tool that has credibility and validity, so we can say, 'Based on the standards outlined in Work Sampling, I am concluding...' It is solid ground on which to make assessment and teaching decisions, and it gives families clear criteria that make sense to them."

AVOIDING POTENTIAL PITFALLS

With the benefit of experience as well as hindsight, Fribley offers advice to teachers and administrators who plan to implement Work Sampling:

Make it manageable: implement one element at a time. It is possible to implement all three components of the Work Sampling System at once – and that's what Fribley's school did in 1995 – but it's not what he



"Family Portrait" Sam and his classmates began to share how they felt when their little brother or sister was born during a family tree activity this morning.

recommends. The system's structured approach can mean a lot of change for teachers, and it's difficult to do many new things well. Most people will find it more workable to implement the guidelines and checklists first, summary reports when teachers are comfortable with guidelines and checklists, and portfolios when they are skilled with the first two elements..

Provide adequate training and knowledgeable support. At every step of implementation, teachers need adequate training by people who are trained to train others. A staff member or two who attended a Work Sampling workshop should not try to train the rest of the staff. After initial training, teachers need access to someone with experience and a higher level of knowledge about the system – someone who knows the issues and can offer solutions.

Provide adequate staff time for swapping ideas. Teachers need time to talk among themselves about Work Sampling challenges and ideas. It leads to idea sharing and more effective implementation, and it builds staff support.

Look for child understanding, not piles of paperwork. Administrators who audit teachers' work need to understand that with Work Sampling, additional paperwork is not the measure of teacher effectiveness.

Says Fribley: "The real measure is what a teacher can tell you about a child, and Work Sampling is a highly effective tool for getting to that."

A Lifetime Commitment to Children

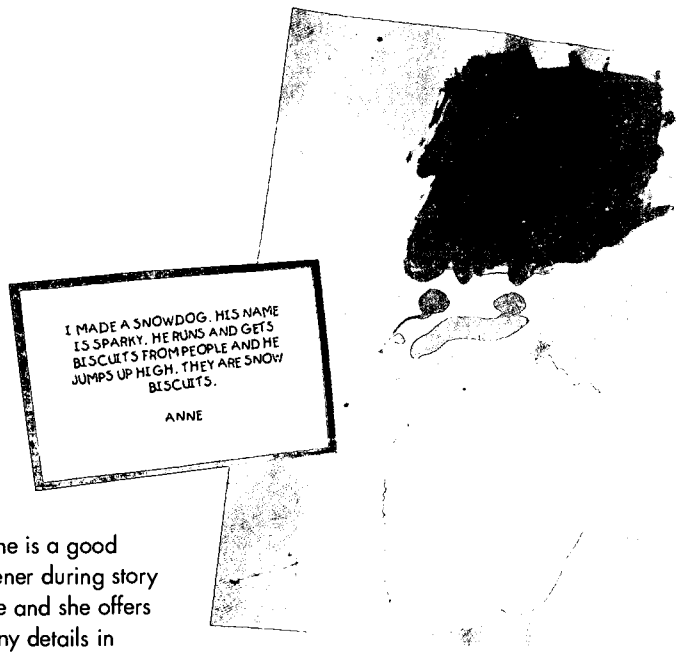
Sam Meisels and the Work Sampling System

Sam Meisels was an up-and-coming graduate student in education at Harvard University when he finally met his life's work.

"I became very interested in how children learn, but really on a theoretical level," he says. "I had no experience with children, except for being one once. I was not married. I was very young. So I did a part-time internship at a Cambridge preschool. And I was just totally smitten."

It's a good thing for early childhood education that he was. Since that time, Meisels has published nearly 150 articles, books and monographs on intervention programs for children at risk of academic failure, the developmental consequences of being an at-risk child, and authentic assessment techniques for young children. Together with other researchers, he developed a system to identify children who are at risk of school failure. And, again with a group of colleagues, he developed an approach to assessing the development of children beginning at age 3 – the Work Sampling System®. Now he has become president of the Erikson Institute in Chicago.

"I've been deeply committed, from almost the first moment I met children in the late-1960s, to their being treated fairly and honestly, and to our giving them every chance that we can," he says. "I've been enormously fortunate to have been successful and to see the impact of my work on a day-to-day basis. I'm just very grateful that it has happened."



Anne is a good listener during story time and she offers many details in her descriptions.

A PREDISPOSITION TO TINKER

Meisels has not been an educator willing to leave well enough alone. Shortly after earning his Ed.D. from Harvard, he was named director of the Eliot-Pearson Children's School at Tufts University in Boston in the early 1970s. He found that the one screening instrument used to identify at-risk children was too limited and, thus, was not sufficiently accurate. "It missed a very high proportion of children who were at risk," he says.

Working with colleagues, he developed what has proven to be a more accurate tool, the Early Screening Inventory. "It does a very good job of picking out the kids who may have problems in school," he says. "If we can identify them early, we can act preventively to help them immediately and, perhaps, avoid problems that might otherwise occur later."

Take-charge event No. 2 was Work Sampling. It was the mid-1980s, and Meisels was now a professor of education at the University of Michigan. A trend was developing of testing young children to determine if they were ready for kindergarten or if, instead, they should be held back a year or placed in junior kindergarten programs. Again, says Meisels, the accuracy and especially the predictive power of these tests were questionable.

INACCURATE ASSESSMENTS

"I thought the tests were inaccurate, and even so they were being used to make decisions about children's lives," he says. "To do that sort of thing without accurate information was potentially a great disservice to children and their families. The beginning of school should be a welcoming time, and it should be a time that's built around strength and success, not around failure and inability to achieve before you even come to school."

So once again, Meisels pulled together a team of researchers and educators to find a better way to assess the development of young children. From the start, there were ground rules.

First, Meisels and his colleagues wanted a tool that, in contrast to most tests, encouraged learning and development. The strong tendency for educators is to teach to the content of a standardized test, shaping lessons not on the basis of a child's individual needs, but on the basis of the likely examination. "We never wanted a conventional test that would influence and limit instruction in that way," he says.

Second, the assessment system had to make sense to teachers. Many standardized assessments focus on one aspect of curriculum or one domain of learning in isolation from others. But when it comes to the bread of education, children sample from the whole loaf, not from just individual slices. "We wanted an assessment that reflects the whole child and the whole teacher," says Meisels.

Third, developers wanted an assessment that gave proper weight to the social and emotional development of children, and not just cognitive growth. The group made this the first domain of activity for Work Sampling users.

Finally, because of rising interest in academic standards, the researchers wanted a system built on developmental indicators consistent with generally accepted national and state standards. "We don't have a national curriculum, but to the extent that standards were available, my colleagues and I used them as the basis for our choice for learning indicators," he says.

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Dr. Samuel J. Meisels is president of the Erikson Institute in Chicago and is considered the nation's leading authority on the assessment of young children. He is the coauthor of *The Handbook of Early Childhood Intervention* and has published nearly 150 articles, books and monographs. He was a professor of education and a researcher at the University of Michigan for 21 years, and now holds emeritus status at Michigan. Among other things, Dr. Meisels has been a preschool teacher and was a director of an early childhood laboratory school at Tufts University. He is president of the board of Zero to Three and an adviser to Head Start.

Dr. Meisels earned a B.A. in philosophy from the University of Rochester, and M.A. and Ed.D. degrees in education from Harvard University.

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A MULTI-YEAR EFFORT

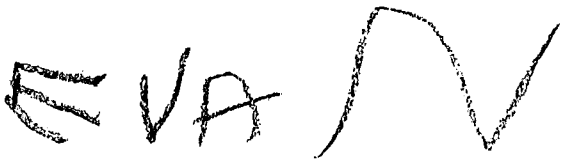
It took four years and nearly $2 million to develop the Work Sampling System. Researchers began with a set of assessment ideas that were revised and refined after review by educators and in response to the results of small experiments. Following this discovery period, the first pilot testing was done. That led to more revisions and a broad field trial. By 1994, the system's third edition was ready for general use. A fourth edition was released last summer.

Work Sampling has been used in Illinois since 1995. Recently, working with the Illinois State Board of Education and its draft Early Learning Standards, Meisels adapted WSS to fit those learning goals, as well as similar benchmarks established by the national Head Start Bureau. The result is the Work Sampling System Illinois.

Detailed analysis shows that Work Sampling can be a tremendous asset for teachers, families and young children. Studies show that children from Work Sampling classrooms significantly outperform children whose classrooms have not used the assessment tool.

But it's not easy, especially at first. Some teachers complain that it is difficult or impossible to keep up with the paperwork demands of the WSS Development Guidelines and Checklists and the Portfolio. Others consider it to be unwarranted interference in the process of early childhood education. Meisels freely acknowledges that Work Sampling is not for everyone.

"Part of the strength of this system is that it reflects the thinking and work of excellent teachers," he says. "It is a systematized assessment for all children in a classroom, so no child and no domain of learning is overlooked. The indicators have been thought through very carefully, and I think they make sense to teachers. Work Sampling is internally consistent and reflects the perspective of thousands of teachers.



Evan's control of letter size within his name is improving. He makes a good effort to follow my directions.

"But, it's not magic dust. It is not appealing to everyone. It is a lot of work, and the truth is that good teaching is a lot of work. It entails looking at every child and having a plan for what you are going to do. Teachers who do those things well say Work Sampling was put on this earth to help them.

"But teachers who lack good observation skills, who expect children to do roughly the same thing at the same time, or who are weak in curriculum may find this difficult."

Meisels's drive to develop improved assessments is far from over. He is now working with Chicago's Ounce of Prevention Fund to develop the Ounce Scale, a method for observing and recording the development of children from birth to age 3. Observations by the family are of central importance.

"The Ounce Scale has been influenced by what we've learned from Work Sampling," he says. "It's very similar to other things I've done. It helps parents learn about the amazing things that infants and toddlers do. It's another part of what's become an entire system to make certain that children receive the services they need. I am deeply committed to that goal for children and their families."

CASE STUDY: Ball Elementary School, Chatham, IL

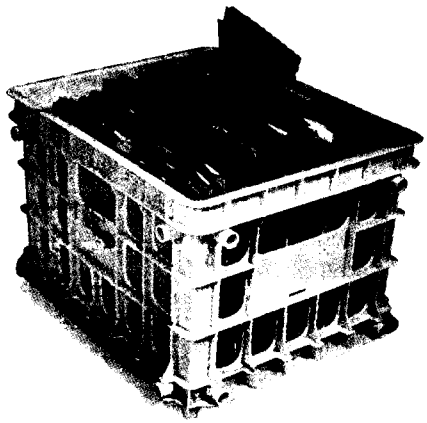
Five Years of Work Sampling Success

A modified system works well in Ball Chatham Unit School District Nº 5

The experience of teachers at Ball Elementary School in Chatham, a Springfield suburb, shows the strength of the Work Sampling System® in experienced hands.

Take the case of little Danny, a 3-year-old who found it difficult to adhere to classroom rules or teacher directions. His idea of conflict resolution was unacceptable, although direct: knock down a block sculpture that another child had built or, if conflict continued, knock down the child.

On her way to intervene, armed with a clipboard and a pen, Sara Gwaltney, Danny's teacher, would jot a quick note to record her observation, such as, "Danny walked over, knocked down Michael's block structure, reason unknown, may have been arguing over something."



Gwaltney's portfolios consist of a file folder for each child stored in a milk crate.

"You have to record what you see and you can't be judgmental," says Gwaltney, who would then talk with Danny about better ways to handle the situation.

That note, along with others compiled that week by aide Donna Kerska and early childhood teacher Dana Bertetto, was glued into a binder page labeled "Danny – Personal and Social Development." Each of the 20 children in the classroom has a similar page, along with pages for teacher observations on "Language and Literacy" and "Mathematical Thinking," the domains covered by the district's modified version of the Work Sampling System. They comprise a painstaking record of child development, successes and needs that has helped guide care giving and instruction for the children, as well as reporting done by the school to families.

For example, because of safety concerns, Danny had to be closely observed by the teaching team.

"We tried to have somebody with him most of the time, ready to intervene and give him words to use, such as, 'If you're angry, here's what you say or do,' or give him choices, such as, 'If you throw sand, you have to leave the sand table,'" says Gwaltney. "That way we we're giving him some consequences but still giving him some power."

Each time Danny exhibited unacceptable behavior, notes were added to his binder. When it came time to prepare for a family conference, Gwaltney, Kerska and Bertetto used the notes to help complete their district's adaptation of the Work Sampling checklist, which rates each child as "not yet," "in process," or "proficient" for each standard on the list.

The binder notes are also used to check for patterns and set goals. For Danny, one goal was to learn to use words to resolve conflict.

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"His social skills were an area of concern, and that's what we talked to the family about," says Gwaltney. "We were comfortable doing so because we had the documentation to back up what we were saying."

Now in his second year of prekindergarten, Danny has shown improvement in conflict resolution. "We still have problems, but not of the same magnitude or frequency," says Gwaltney. "He may knock over a block structure, but he's doing much better at not hitting the child that built it."

HOW WORK SAMPLING HELPS

Principal Linda Carter made the decision to use Work Sampling five years ago. Gwaltney received training through an ISBE early childhood professional development program housed at Western Illinois University and taught the rest of the staff to use the system.

"It's a program we're proud of," says Carter, whose staff adapted the system to fit the needs of their students. "Work Sampling helps you keep track of where children are, see the progress they're making, and see how the activities we do in the classroom can be used to help children meet the Early Learning Standards.

"It also helps with family communication. The first teachers that a child has in school sometimes have a very difficult job giving parents information that they really don't want to hear. Work Sampling provides ongoing concrete information to give to parents, based on recognized developmentally appropriate standards for young children."

PORTFOLIOS CAPTURE IMPORTANT INFORMATION

When Ball Chatham started to use Work Sampling, Carter required that teachers use checklists, guidelines and portfolios.

"The teachers see the portfolio as the best place to extract information about children for some domains, and they do not want to give it up even though Work Sampling Illinois does not require it," she says.

Gwaltney's portfolios consist of a file folder for each child stored in a milk crate. Events, oversized items, and items the children want to take home are photographed with a digital camera, printed and placed in the portfolio. Here's just one example of how they help:

When Taylor entered Roxanne Gardner's prekindergarten class at age 3, she showed tremendous interest in reading and writing and an eagerness to learn. She quickly picked up name recognition, a skill that is constantly worked into broad range of activities.

Every day, Gardner explains to the children choices they can make for activities during their free time. Then they go to tables, where they each find a sheet labeled "Today I Plan To." Staff members do most of the

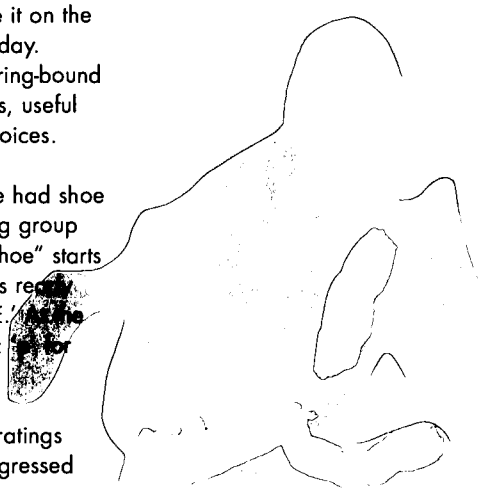
writing for the younger children, talking with them about their plans and helping them organize their thoughts. Once a month, copies of the children's personal plan sheets go into their portfolio.

"When my assistant Julie and I are writing for the children, we're always talking with them and explaining what we're writing so they make a connection between written and spoken words," says Gardner.

Taylor quickly learned to recognize her own name and to write it on the plan sheet, which is the first step to completing the sheet each day. As she progressed, she used her personalized "word bank," a ring-bound set of index cards with her name on the front and, on the cards, useful words that she can copy onto her plan sheet to indicate her choices.

"This week we were learning about feet and in the art area we had shoe polish painting, which Taylor loves," says Gardner. "At opening group I explained that if you want to do shoe polish painting today "shoe" starts with the two letters 'SH,' and 'S' and 'H' say 'shhh.' Taylor was ready and wrote 'SH' on her plan sheet, and I finished it off with 'OE.' At the end of her planning session, her plan sheet is filled with letters: 'p' for painting, 'b' for books."

The portfolio-saved plan sheets are used to help with checklist ratings and goal setting, and to show parents how each child has progressed from one conference to the next.



After reading "Polar Pen Pals" the class was asked to paint their favorite character of the story and tell why. Kaitlin chose Paddy "because he was very nice and helped Winnie."

Today, Taylor is five and almost ready for kindergarten. She can write her name beautifully – with a capital 'T' followed by lower case letters, all about the same size and left to right. And she can write nearly as well without benefit of pencil and paper.

"We did a food unit, and one small group activity was to write in pudding," says Gardner. "The children made pudding, and each had a paper plate with pudding on it. We asked them to write their name in the pudding before they ate it. Taylor did a beautiful job with that all on her own, so we took a picture of it. It's something we can put in her portfolio to show her parents – that Taylor can write her name in lots of ways, in this case using her finger. It's a whole different concept, a different kind of opportunity for children to show us what they know – and it tastes good, too."

Gardner notes that not all children are ready to make this leap, and for them, the goal is exposure. But for those who are ready, the pudding writing activity is another tool for teaching phonemic awareness by focusing on words that are meaningful to children.

WORK SAMPLING HELPS WITH SPECIAL ED CHILDREN

Patricia is a five-year-old special education student who has Down's Syndrome and is included in a Pre-K classroom. Gwaltney, her aide and the early childhood teacher are trying to determine whether Patricia knows her colors, which is one of her cognitive goals on her Individual Education Plan (IEP).

"We do colors with her about every other day, using a variety of child-initiated practice and teacher-initiated activities, because labeling and identifying of colors is inconsistent," says Gwaltney. "We record our observations in our notes, and at her IEP meeting, we can tell her family and the team that we've gone over this a lot and Patricia's not consistent. And we're comfortable with saying this because we have documented our efforts and her inconsistent responses over time."

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That's an advantage of the Work Sampling System, notes Principal Carter. "It's only human nature to recall the last event. Work Sampling allows you to look at many events rather than one single event, and it gives you a fairer assessment of the child. The information we gain from the ongoing anecdotal notes helps us design a program for each child, and it helps determine a child's strengths and weaknesses if we need to have a full case study to secure assistance through the special education process."

FROM MODIFIED WORK SAMPLING TO WSS IL PILOT

Ball Chatham recently helped to pilot the Illinois Early Learning Standards, and teachers had the opportunity to evaluate ways to align Work Sampling with the standards.

"The experience enabled us to see how the new standards fit with our Work Sampling, and how so many of the activities we do in the classroom can be used to meet those standards," says Carter. "We look forward to participating in the Work Sampling Illinois pilot."

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