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*Early Childhood Assessment*



**Carol S. Lidz**



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*This book is dedicated to the individuals who have played a direct role  
in providing me with the opportunities to work with preschool children  
and to gain whatever level of expertise I can now claim  
that gave me the courage (OK,chutzpah) to write this book.*

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## ◆ *Acknowledgments*

After many years of working in school systems with school-age children, my first opportunity to work intensively with preschool children was at Moss Rehabilitation Hospital, when the psychology department was under the direction of Phillip Spergel. Phil assigned me to the pediatric unit, where I had the good fortune to work with the large number of children brought to Moss through a contract with the Get Set day care program of the Philadelphia Board of Education. It was through this work that I discovered I really enjoyed working with this age group and that I also discovered the limited information that was available at the time. Thanks, Phil.

For the following five years, I worked at Hall-Mercer Community Mental Health/Mental Retardation Center of Pennsylvania Hospital, where I was assigned to consult with the therapeutic nursery program. This was under the clinical directorship of Carl Gasta, who, sadly, died a number of years ago.

I was next hired by Bill Dibble, the associate director of United Cerebral Palsy Association of Philadelphia and Vicinity to create and direct the (then) Head Start Clinic Team. For over eight years I was the administrator and senior psychologist for this team, which provided a model for services to children with special needs throughout the Philadelphia area. This was also my first opportunity to carry out research as an applied psychologist. Thanks, Bill.

Following my work with the Clinic Team (though continuing there on a part-time basis—not being able to let the baby go!), I was introduced to academia by Sylvia Rosenfield, who invited me to be the coordinator of her grant for an early childhood specialization with Temple University's School Psychology Program. This was my first opportunity to teach the preschool assessment course, where I consistently overwhelmed students with the large number of handouts because there was no satisfactory text at that time. Thanks, Sylvia (and my apologies to my students; you can buy this book now!).

My final thanks go to H. Carl Haywood, who by inviting me to design and direct the School Psychology Program within the newly created Graduate School of Education and Psychology at Touro College, provided me with continued opportunities to teach and develop the preschool assessment course, as well as to conduct research related to my work with dynamic assessment and parent-child interactions with young children. (The students there also complained about the workload. My apologies also to you. This is one response to the yet unasked question of what the Temple and Touro programs have in common. You, too, may buy this book!) Thanks (again), Carl.

Of course I must express gratitude to the wonderful children and families, as well as the teachers and supervisors, with whom I have had the privilege of working over these many years. My special thanks to the darling children of the Head Start programs throughout Philadelphia. We will never really know how we touched each other's lives.

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## ◆ *Preface*

This is a book for practitioners by a practitioner. This is a book for academics by an academic. No, I am not having an identity crisis. I stand with my feet firmly planted in both worlds. Primarily, this is a book I need for teaching my graduate students in school psychology, and it is the book I wish I had had when I began my work as a school psychologist.

There are other books that tackle the topic of assessment of preschool children, but while I have used them as references and greatly value their content, I never selected any of them as a text for my course in early childhood assessment. The books that are available focus on specific tests, are organized according to disability, or commit to one specific model. To my amazement, some of these omit in-depth discussions of play, parent-child interaction, and dynamic assessment. Because most of them are edited volumes, there is inevitable redundancy across chapters. The greatest limitation is that it is difficult for practitioners to walk away from these books feeling as if they were put on the road to application of the content. Although any book is limited in its ability to prepare practitioners for practice, there remains a gap in the availability of a book that focuses primarily on such applications.

The purpose of this book is to provide general guidelines for designing and conducting assessments of young children between the ages of 3 through 5 years: the preschool years. Although details are provided regarding some informal procedures (e.g., interviews, observations), specific standardized procedures are mentioned only briefly, with more space dedicated to issues regarding their administration and application. Similarly, this book does not cover specific disorders. However, to say that this book offers general guidelines is not to imply that it avoids specifics. Some areas neglected by other books are described in detail, such as parent-child interaction and dynamic assessment, and other areas, such as interviews and observations, are detailed with forms and formats unique to this text. Another important aspect of this book is that it offers an integrated discussion and format for assessment of young children. Each chapter offers discussion of a specialized topic, but always with awareness of content in other chapters, and always with a sense of moving toward an integrated application of procedures to the whole child.

This book is appropriate as a graduate school text in school or clinical psychology and for practitioners who either have never received formal training in the assessment of young children or wish to review and update their thinking and practices in this area. To facilitate the use of this book with graduate students, suggested activities are listed at the end of each chapter under the headings of scholarship and application. Course instructors can use these suggestions as they wish, for example, by asking students to select one or more scholarship and application activity from among the chapters to fulfill course requirements.

This book also expresses an attitude and a commitment to the idea that best assessment practices should reflect what is good for families and for children and not just what is fast and cheap to implement. Of course, there are economic realities that must be faced, but we have an ethical obligation to resist and to protest against practices that threaten to cheat our clients of effective and meaningful services and interventions.

This book walks the reader through a comprehensive assessment, touching each of the major data sources necessary for a full understanding of children and their environments. It is

organized primarily in terms of these data sources, rather than in terms of diagnostic category, functional domain, or specific procedure. Assessment is a complex process, and any procedure generates information that crosses domains. There is no such thing as a purely cognitive or purely social-emotional measure. Although it may be helpful to divide the discussion into functional domains when assembling a final report, during the course of the assessment the psychologist must first parse out the information from each procedure to decide what that procedure is measuring at that time for that child, and ask the question: What did I learn about this child from what I just did? Only in this way can we put Humpty-Dumpty back together again and give meaning to our statements about the whole child.

Assessment is a journey. We begin with an idea of where we want to go and carry a map to guide the way, but we can never predict what we meet along the way or exactly how that will affect the point at which we arrive. This text attempts to provide a map that reflects the richness and complexity of children's development and the lives they live within their communities and families. The journey never fails to be interesting and challenging for those whose eyes and minds are open. Welcome to the world of early childhood assessment.

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