

**KRISTIE PRETTI-FRONTCZAK:** This recording is all about early childhood assessment purposes, and I'm Kristie Pretti-Frontczak, the owner of B2K Solutions. I been working in early childhood for decades. And primarily, I focused my work on the assessment of young children. So let's talk a little bit about the major reasons we engage in assessment, and the different purposes and decisions for which we do assessment.

So basically, assessment is this way of gathering information. And we gather information to make a series of decisions. And so, it's much more a process than it is a moment in time. And many would argue that assessment is all about sitting beside and getting to know a child. In early childhood, we have at least six major purposes, or six major decisions. It seems over time those decisions have grown, there are more decisions that need to be made, there are more reasons we engage in assessment.

However, the literature is pretty consistent in looking at these six broad areas. And we'll talk about each, and then talk a little bit about some of the nuances within each purpose. So we have Developmental and Behavioral Screening, which we'll talk about next is not to be confused with universal screening. Eligibility for IDEA, which stands for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. At the time of this recording it was last reauthorized in 2004.

We also engage in assessment for the purpose of Planning Instruction and Revising Instruction. Instruction is used broadly. It could be a learning opportunity, an interaction with a toddler, or preschool activity. So we're really using this word instruction quite broadly. A fifth purpose we engage in assessment in early childhood is Program Evaluation. And of course, because we live in an age of accountability, that has become a sixth purpose.

So let's first talk about developmental and behavioral screening. This is probably one of the biggest places people are confused. And I encourage you to read the joint paper by the Division for Early Childhood, the National Association for the Education of Young Children, and the National Head Start Association. Their joint paper on response to intervention frameworks in early childhood really talks about the difference between what we've always known in early childhood is part of our child find in terms of developmental and behavioral screening, versus in this multi-tiered system of support models, or in response to intervention models how K12 has conceptualized universal screening.

So basically, the nuts and the bolts are that developmental and behavioral screening is still a part of recommended practice in working with young children. We always want to identify and intervene as early as possible. The idea is that a developmental or behavioral screener tells us, should I be worried? Is there a red flag? These are things do we do quickly. They should be done easily, and they should be done in a way that leads to not over identifying, but also not under identifying children in our communities.

On the flip side, universal screening, which sounds an awful lot alike because they have a similar name, which is screening, is really designed to determine if children who are already receiving services, children who are already receiving instruction, how are they doing? So it's a thermometer, a check-in, a temperature check, right? We want to see how kids are doing. And in general, we want to compare them to what is an expectation at a given point, a certain grade, a certain age, a certain time of the year.

So universal screening is really done to help us determine how children are progressing and if they need more or different instruction. That's a really different decision that we would make, versus does this child need additional testing, and might they qualify for special education services? So it's really important that groups sit down and take a look at the difference between developmental and behavioral screening and universal screening, and then apply the recommended practices for each of those purposes.

As alluded to, another major purpose is evaluation, or sometimes we call it eligibility. This is where we really talk about, is a child struggling to the point where we think that they may qualify in a given state as a child with a disability, or a child with some sort of delay or disorder. And so this is part of our federal requirements in the United States, again, under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, where we really look thoroughly at a child's development in the context of their family and community to determine if they qualify for services.

Again, very different decisions than the two we just talked about before around screening this is really trying to make a decision of the nature or severity of a problem that has been identified. And then we can decide if a child qualifies under IDEA. Another purpose for assessment in early childhood, probably a key purpose, and one day that is mashed into other purposes or disregarded, is how we plan instruction. So what do we do to figure out what to teach, where to teach, and how to teach? What is guiding us?

Whether I'm a home visitor, an itinerant teacher, a speech language pathologist, a preschool teacher, it doesn't matter. If I'm serving a child under any circumstances, in a child care, I'm a mom, I'm a preschool teacher that's got an inclusive classroom, I need to make decisions about what to teach, where to teach, and how to teach. And these things should not be dictated by state policies, or local norms, or expectations that are outside the cultural realm of the children that I serve. I really need to use my assessment information.

And then, of course, we've seen different types of cycles and ways to think of this as an iterative process. This instruction that we deliver isn't static. And so, we really want to think about how is it an ongoing way that we revise instruction? How are we looking over time to see that children are thriving? How are we changing what we do in terms of what we teach, when we teach, where we teach, what we teach with, and of course, how we teach.

The fifth purpose of assessment is this notion of program evaluation. This can be really complicated as well, because we might look at an individual child, and look at their data to help us know how a program is-- if they're effective, if they're meeting their mission, if they're meeting their desired goals. We might look at groups of children. So we might aggregate data and look at a class, or we might look at a district, or we might even look at an entire state.

So we look at the child's performance on key indicators. We might also look at the environment in which the child is receiving instruction to see if there is a quality environment in terms of the physical and social environment. We might look at how teams function. We might look at how instruction is delivered. We might look at how satisfied members of the community are with the program. More and more, people might be looking at kindergarten readiness to determine the quality of programming. So this can become very complicated and takes a lot of skilled effort to engage in program evaluation that produces data that are trustworthy, and that can be used to make decisions.

The last major purpose of early childhood assessment is this one called accountability. And so, we've seen these phrases before, quality rating, race to the top. We know that there are different agencies. If you work for Head Start, you might know that there are lots of different rules that need to be followed, ways that you need to be held accountable for the services that you're providing. And so, regardless of where the pressure comes from, whether it be a federal agency, a state agency, or even just stakeholders in terms of taxpayers, we do live in an age of accountability where we need to make sure that we are meeting the standards set forth-- that we are giving every child and every family an opportunity to thrive.

But again, as with program evaluation, this is quite complicated. And the stakes can be quite high. So we need to be very careful that we don't start mixing the tools that we use for one purpose for these purposes. It's sort of a little bit new still in our field of early childhood. We're still trying to find our way. And oftentimes, we might pull from K12, or we might use existing tools and try to adapt them in some way to meet our needs, or to meet the pressures under accountability. So again, the answers that we seek in terms of accountability are much broader than things that a teacher, or a home visitor, or a parent might need on a day-to-day basis to plan and revise instruction.

And certainly, it would be different data than we would use in a developmental and behavioral screener that's solely there to tell us if we need to do additional testing. It's not there to tell us if a child is meeting broad outcomes set forth by a federal agency. So again, it's important that we think about, what is our purpose for engaging in assessment? Why am I sitting beside this person, this child, this team, this program, this community? What is it that I need to know? And how is it that I'm going to go about getting those data in a way that I can make trustworthy decisions?