Why Reading Readiness?

Prekindergarten educators serve as advocates, supporters, and protectors of children throughout their early childhood education. Therefore, it is crucial for educators to recognize reading readiness—which includes language, literacy, social emotional, and approaches to learning domains—as a key component of children's development. As such, educators can incorporate elements of reading readiness throughout the preschool classroom and measure growth and development in related areas using authentic assessment.

The goal of the 2014 Forum on Promoting Effective Practices in Early Education, Using Authentic Assessment to Promote Preschoolers Reading Readiness, was to establish a better understanding of using authentic assessment to observe and measure children's pre-reading skills. Presentations regarding the different skills that comprise reading readiness and the many opportunities within the classroom to support them were delivered to teachers, principals, directors, and other early childhood stakeholders.

A Shift in Curriculum

The ever-growing disparities seen in the quality of education between the wealth and the poor has been the object of focus in recent years. Because of these wide discrepancies seen in long-term school success amongst young children, funding for evaluating and redesigning school programs have dramatically increased. The new curriculums formed highlight the importance of both academic skills, such as mathematics and reading, as well as nonacademic skills, such as social-emotional development. Social-emotional skills attained in preschool are crucial for...
future school success. One major component of social-emotional development, self-regulation, greatly impacts how children act and react to the situations they are faced with in preschool. Research suggests that children with greater self-regulation exhibit more positive feelings regarding school and score higher on measures of achievement. Therefore, curriculums should intentionally target the development of these social-emotional skills.

By gearing lessons towards specific social-emotional domains, teachers can in turn help children further strengthen their reading and writing skills. Strong self-regulation skills allow children to focus on tasks such as reading the letters of the alphabet and writing down their first names.

Supporting Children in the Classroom

It is evident that teaching a well-rounded curriculum is the best way to ensure school success for all children in the classroom. However, it is equally important to understand where the children are, developmentally, in order to optimize how we teach to these essential domains. Four-year-olds are naturally inquisitive—always asking questions. They enjoy listening to stories and telling their teachers, families, and peers about what adventures they went on this past weekend. By understanding how all of these factors influence a child’s education, teachers can build a strong relationship between student and teacher that will amplify growth. In fact, research suggests that there is a strong link between social-emotional development and academic learning.

To foster this emotional connection to children, teachers can engage in rich conversations with the children. Not only will this improve their language skills, but it will also allow the children to feel heard.

**Reading Readiness Lives Throughout the Classroom**

Opportunities to teach reading readiness skills are abundant in the preschool classroom! Children learn reading readiness skills when they are asked to follow instructions, read a sentence from an exciting story book, and have conversations with their peers. These skills are targeted in the very
structure of the classroom (e.g., labels on different classroom materials and objects). Ultimately, Teachers can utilize the set-up of their classroom, while at the same time keeping in mind the developmental period the child is currently in, in order to optimize learning for all children in the classroom.

Utilizing Authentic Assessment to Support Reading Readiness

Effectively using authentic assessment tools to support areas of reading readiness starts with creating an organized system. Teachers can use post-it notes, color-coded binders, or large sheets of paper to document the skills seen in their classroom. This system allows teachers to quickly gather information regarding reading readiness skills.

In addition to creating an organized system, teachers should also be aware of efficient ways to write and record anecdotal evidence of children’s skills. During the forum, two group activities lead by facilitators helped forum attendees apply their knowledge of creating an organized system and setting goals for the rest of the school year.

Activity One: Anecdote Writing

- The intended purpose of this activity was to help forum attendees practice identifying ideal components of anecdotes in order to incorporate them into their own observations.
- Forum participants watched a short clip of a young boy playing in the classroom and were then presented with a series of anecdotes describing the clip.
- Using what they’d just learned about ideal anecdotes, attendees determined if the observation fit the profile of a well-written anecdote.

Activity Two: Goal Setting

- Educators were asked to develop goals for supporting best practices in using authentic assessment, how to accomplish these goals, what challenges they might encounter, and strategies for overcoming these challenges.
- Using these questions to reflect on their own needs and practices, educators discussed their individual goals, set group goals, and
collaborated on strategies to achieve these goals.

- The information that emerged from participants’ goal setting worksheets was then organized into themes by the NYU-Child & Family Policy Center staff and presented back to educators.

The Pre-K Foundation for the Common Core

All authentic assessment tools utilized throughout NYC are aligned with the Pre-K Foundation for the Common Core (PKFCC) standards. This framework focuses on the holistic view of the development of a child via a set of domains associated with specific benchmark indicators. These domains include: Approaches to Learning, Physical Development and Health, Social and Emotional Development, Communication, Language and Literacy, and Cognition and Knowledge of the World. These benchmarks correspond to Work Sampling’s performance indicators, Teaching Strategies Gold dimensions, and COR Advantage’s items.

The purpose of the PKFCC is to use the authentic assessment tools to accurately capture children's growth across the 5 main domains in the PKFCC throughout the three designated checkpoints per year.

Final Goals

It is imperative to identify tangible goals for implementing authentic assessment in the preschool classroom, while simultaneously recognizing the potential challenges one must face in the process. Thus, participants were asked to create a list of future goals, possible challenges to achieving those goals, and solutions to said challenges. Teachers stated their overarching goals include: being respectful of one another, being organized, recording quality anecdotes, accurately scoring their children, and using data purposefully. By organizing future goals into actions and creating plans to achieve said goals, teachers were able to leave the forum with new insight regarding the development of their practice.