

How Should We Assess Preschool Children?

by Carol McClendon TSHA/TCASE Joint Committee Member

In an effort to recognize and spotlight the positive work public school speech-language pathologists are doing throughout the State, the Joint TSHA/Texas Council of Administrators of Special Education (TCASE) Committee has made one of its goals the publishing of "Best Practices" articles in the *TSHA Communicologist* and on the Texas Education Agency website. This is the first in a series that we hope will have a long and successful history.

Four years ago, the Northside Independent School District (NISD) addressed the question "How should we assess preschool children?" The answer was Transdisciplinary Play-Based Assessment (TPBA) by Toni Linder, an approach that provides an opportunity for developmental observations in the areas of general knowledge, social-emotional, communication, sensori-motor, and self-help domains. The TPBA involves the child in structured and unstructured play situations with a facilitating adult, a play partner, or parent(s). Play-Based Assessment gives a natural look at the child's level of functioning in all areas of development without administering individual tests in a static environment. Under the leadership of **Patty Brannon**, Program Coordinator for Speech-Language Services in NISD, this new way of assessing the preschool population was presented to the NISD School Board for approval in December, 2004. It was fully implemented in the fall of 2005. Members of the Team presented "A Journey into Play-Based Assessment" at the 2008 TSHA Convention in San Antonio. Members of the team presenting were **Traci Hettie, Dora Wilson, Kay Stanton, Linda Page, Allison Tatsch, and Patricia Miller.**

Included in the proposal was a plan to organize an early childhood assessment team that would be trained to evaluate preschool children, ages 2-5

years, suspected of having developmental delays. Two teams were established to meet the needs of the growing preschool population identified with special needs. Each preschool assessment team consists of a school psychologist, two speech-language pathologists, an early childhood teacher, and an occupational therapist. Other professionals may include bilingual speech-language pathologists, assistive technology specialists, physical therapists, and specialists for the visually-impaired and the auditorily-impaired. Each team utilizes the Transdisciplinary Play-Based Assessment (TPBA) model (Linder, 1990). During the evaluation, the team observes the child interacting with a play facilitator who is a designated member of the team, a family member, and/or a peer. The room is set up with various interactive

toys and play equipment which promote assessment of the child's developmental skills in a natural environment. This, in turn, helps professionals as they assess the child's skills in their particular area of expertise. The team collects data in the areas of general knowledge, social-emotional, sensori-motor, communication, and self-help skills. The parent may engage in the evaluation or provide the team with information regarding the child's peer interaction skills. The district has a web-based Full and Individual Evaluation (FIE). Each team member writes his/her particular portion of the assessment, and the final report is sent to the home-school. If the team needs to observe the child interacting with typical learning peers, they may include the child in a preschool class located on the same campus or observe the child in a day care, Mother's Day Out program, or at home.

A heartfelt "thank you" to **Traci Hettie** for providing the information included in this article.

Reference:

Linder, T. (1990). *Transdisciplinary play-based assessment*. Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing

Why Use Transdisciplinary Play-Based Assessment (TPBA)?

- The TPBA is a natural, functional approach to assessment and recommendation for intervention.
- The Summary information from the TPBA can help identify areas of concern in the domains of cognition, social-emotional, communication, sensori-motor, and self-help.
- The consistency of eligibility is promoted when using the team for preschool assessment.
- The parents are actively involved throughout the process.
- The TPBA provides communication between parents and other team members prior to and during the assessment, which is key to ongoing dialogue throughout the child's involvement in an intervention program.
- The TPBA provides a holistic assessment which is very flexible in nature.
- The model is less stressful for the child and less intimidating for the parents.
- The results provide meaningful information that readily translates into objectives and strategies for intervention.
- The TPBA uses a unique and positive way of stating strengths and weaknesses incorporating terminology such as "Things I Am Already Doing" and "Things I Am Ready For."
- The TPBA meets legislative and professional requirements while addressing the diverse needs of the children.

Questions About Your Texas State License or License Renewal?

For any questions related to your Texas State license or license renewal for speech-language pathology and/or audiology, you must contact the State Board of Examiners for Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology. To contact the State Board, call 512-834-6627 or visit www.dshs.state.tx.us/speech.