

A Better Way to Do Preschool Assessment: Announcing the Revised Preschool COR

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"This new COR aligns more closely with our state standards and with the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework."

"Our parents like this assessment better than any of the others we've tried."

"Everyone is preoccupied with literacy and math, so I'm glad that this edition gives us more in these areas, without losing the focus on the whole child."

"We like the computerized version and we finally got the training we've been begging for."

"The teaching guide that comes with the COR makes it easier to use developmental information as we plan activities for children day to day."

"We need to measure phonological awareness and alphabet knowledge, so I appreciate the new literacy items in the COR."

These comments are typical of those we've heard from early childhood teachers, child care staff, and administrators using the newly released Second Edition of the Preschool Child Observation Record (COR). The Preschool COR is High/Scope's educational assessment instrument for children ages 2½ to 6 years. It is designed to measure individual and group progress in early childhood programs.

The COR made its debut over 10 years ago. At that time the early childhood education field was witnessing a significant increase in the number of young children enrolled in day care, preschool, Head Start, and other early learning programs. This increase highlighted the critical need for everyone concerned about the quality of early childhood programs—preschool teachers, aides, supervisors, agency directors, administrators, state and federal legislators, and parents—to understand the importance of looking systematically at all areas of children's development and of articulating the details behind statements like "He played with blocks" or "She played in the art area." High/Scope developed the COR in response to the early childhood community's need for a generic assessment instrument that could provide an accurate and comprehensive portrait of individual children's progress and that could be used in any early

childhood setting emphasizing child development.

Some of the same concerns expressed by early childhood educators 10 years ago continued to be widely expressed as High/Scope set out to produce the second edition of the Preschool COR. In the spring of 2001, the Erikson Institute conducted a survey of 25 national leaders in the early childhood field and asked them to discuss what they felt were the most important components of an assessment instrument for early education programs. Those responding generally agreed that conventional standardized tests are of "little importance" and that they should "never be used in preschool programs" (Horton and Bowman, 2002, p. 10). The survey also reported that the majority of these national leaders believed that the most important feature of an assessment system was for it to be linked to early childhood curriculum and supported by developmentally appropriate strategies and resources (p. 6).

Like the previous edition, the new Preschool COR responds to these concerns by providing an authentic assessment system in which data on children are gathered by teachers in the course of the normal daily activities of early childhood programs, that is, as children play, engage in conversation, pretend, build with blocks, explore books, listen to and discuss stories, make beginning attempts at writing, create artwork, and so forth. The COR's developmental scales are closely tied to curriculum, not to a specific model, but to the general kinds of learning experiences that occur in high-quality early childhood programs that emphasize child development.

The effort to revise the COR resulted in part from a general need to update a 10-year-old instrument. However, High/Scope project staff had several additional, more specific, goals in mind as they approached this revision. One of these stemmed from the release of the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework (U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, 2000). We recognized that to continue to be responsive to the needs of Head Start programs, the COR needed to reflect some of the changes in focus seen in the Outcomes Framework. The legislatively mandated sections of the Framework, which place a major emphasis on sound prereading and writing foundations for children entering kindergarten, were of par-

tical concern to us in revising the COR. A second goal of the COR revision effort was to respond to the hundreds of users who wanted to see a clearer connection between the High/Scope preschool key experiences and the COR items and levels.

A look at the second edition of the Preschool COR instrument reveals the following changes:

- While the essence of the COR process—teachers observing children during the course of the daily routine and recording and scoring child anecdotes (see below)—has not changed, the contents and appearance of the Preschool COR kit are different. The new components have been designed to reduce professional jargon and unnecessary steps, while providing in one package the materials needed for COR-based assessment and teacher planning.
- The revised COR is based on the same six general categories of child development that were used in the previous edition: *initiative*; *social relations*; *creative representation*; *movement and music*; *language and literacy*; and *logic and math* (with the last category renamed as *mathematics and science*). However, all the categories have undergone some change. The most significant changes are in the *language and literacy* and *mathematics and science* categories. These have been revised and expanded to more accurately measure early literacy, early math reasoning, and science foundations; together they now comprise half the instrument. (The new COR has a total of 32 items as compared to 30 in the previous edition.)
- One of the most popular additions to the new kit may be the inclusion of *What's Next: Planning Children's Activities Around Preschool COR Observations*. This is a teaching guide that makes it easier for classroom staff to plan daily experiences closely tied to children's specific developmental needs, as identified in day-to-day COR observations.
- Other new components in this edition of the COR are *Parent Guides* in both Spanish and English, a handy desk poster that provides a quick reference to the COR system, and a new form for recording child observations, the *Child Anecdotes* booklet.

The Contents of the Preschool COR Kit

The following components of the Preschool COR kit (paper-and-pencil version) provide all the necessary materials for completing assessments on a class of 25 children up to three times a year. Those who are familiar with the High/Scope COR for Infants and Toddlers will notice that the components of the new Preschool COR resemble the model established by the infant-toddler version.

- **User Guide**—This manual explains the rationale for the Preschool COR, describes the validity and reliability studies for the instrument, and perhaps most important, explains how to use each component. Although this manual provides step-by-step instructions for the COR process, it is not intended as a replacement for COR training. High/Scope recommends a two-day Preschool COR workshop for all first-time users. One copy of the guide is in each Preschool COR kit.
- **Observation Items**—This booklet contains the actual Preschool COR assessment tool, plus explanatory material that clarifies and illustrates each of the six COR categories, the 32 items, and the five levels under each item. To guide those who are completing the COR in deciding how to score particular child behaviors, the explanation for each level contains at least two examples of typical behavior. Each kit includes two copies of this booklet.
- **What's Next: Planning Children's Activities Around Preschool COR Observations**—This manual is designed to help teachers put COR-based child observations to work as they plan strategies, experiences, and activities to support children's development. After the teaching team has discussed, recorded, and scored anecdotes about the children in their groups, they can use the ideas in this guide to plan ways to support each child's particular level of development. Each kit contains one copy of this useful guide.
- **Child Anecdotes booklet**—This booklet of forms is designed for recording anecdotes—brief notes that report teachers' observations of children's developmentally significant actions and language. Space is provided for writing numerous anecdotes for each COR

category. The form is designed to prompt users to date and score each anecdote as they record it. This provides a complete ongoing record that is easy to draw from when individual and class reports are needed. Each kit includes 25 booklets, one for each child in the class.

■ **Child Information and Developmental**

Summary—This form provides one convenient location for summarizing and storing significant information about each child, including two language items for English language learners. Space is provided for numerical results from one, two, or three completions of the Preschool COR. A total of 25 forms are included in each kit.

- **Group Summary**—This form allows users to summarize Preschool COR results for their whole group for up to three administrations of the COR. The form provides space for recording three sets of scores for each of the six COR categories for each child in the room, plus space for group statistics. This enables users to document growth for the entire group from the first time they complete the Preschool COR to the most recent administration. One summary form is included in each kit.

- **Family Report form**—This form is used to create reports for parents about their child that can be discussed at parent conferences or home visits. The form can be used as a framework for assembling information about the child's developmentally important behaviors. Space is provided for a summary of the child's behavior in each COR category followed by brief examples (from teachers' anecdotal notes) of the child's behavior in that category. Space is also provided for teachers or parents to record notes based on the parents' observations of the child at home. The kit includes a package of 50 forms.

- **Parent Guide**—This booklet explains what the COR is and invites parents to participate in the assessment process by recording notes about their child's behaviors. It includes a developmental chart giving the same developmental sequences reflected in the COR items and levels but without the item letters and level numbers. The kit includes 25 guides.

- **COR and Key Experiences Posters**—The kit includes one large poster of the Preschool

COR's six categories and 32 items and one large poster of the High/Scope preschool key experiences.

- **Complete Desk Poster**—This is a desk-sized, laminated poster that folds into a tent shape for easy use. The poster shows the key elements of the High/Scope COR system. Each kit includes two posters.
- **COR category tabs**—These color-coded index tabs may be used to organize the *Observation Items* booklets according to the COR categories. Each kit includes two sets.

Other Preschool COR Versions and Accessories

In addition to the manual Preschool COR kit (components above), High/Scope has also developed computerized COR products and services that offer additional ways of using the COR. These include a CD-ROM version of the COR, an accessory to this software that generates reports for Head Start programs, and an online COR. Following is information on each of these options:

- **Preschool COR CD-ROM.** High/Scope's *Preschool COR CD-ROM* software package is a computer version of the revised Preschool COR. This program enables teachers to use their computers to record and store their observations of children's development and to generate COR scores and reports based on this information.

Several helpful features distinguish the Preschool COR software from paper-and-pencil versions of COR forms. The software makes it easy to update and change pieces of information recorded in a program's files. When a new piece of information is available or a modification is needed in the information already stored in the program, users need only enter the information once, and the program automatically updates all relevant records, charts, graphs, and reports. The valuable time teachers spend viewing records for assessment, planning, teacher/observer self-assessment, and report writing is reduced considerably by the software's ability to call up the necessary information quickly and in the order needed.

Another feature of the software is its ability to automatically compile and analyze Preschool COR ratings both for individual children and

for the group, and then to present these findings in both graphic and narrative form. This feature becomes particularly valuable when used by Head Start or state-funded early childhood programs that are required to submit reports two or three times a year that demonstrate growth according to a particular set of regulations. The software version of the COR is available in a kit that includes the supporting print materials needed for classroom use of the COR.

- **COR-Head Start Outcomes Reporter.** The *COR-Head Start Outcomes Reporter* is another COR software product that is useful to Head Start programs. The Outcomes Reporter translates COR data into Head Start Outcomes reports. The program produces charts and graphs that illustrate children's progress throughout the year in each of the Head Start Domains and for the required Elements and Indicators. The Outcomes Reporter may be used with either printed or computer versions of the Preschool COR.
- **HighScope.net®.** Another option is using the Preschool COR online at *Highscope.net*. This new Web-based COR streamlines the process of gathering, interpreting, and reporting information on children's development and provides families with a vehicle for participating in their child's assessment. Preschool educators can simplify and organize the child assessment and team planning process by registering their group of children at the

Highscope.net site and then entering and scoring child anecdotes online. Using this data, the site generates reports both on individual children and on class progress. The site also includes special features for Head Start programs, including the ability to generate progress reports in terms of the Head Start Outcomes Framework.

Two more COR products in development and available soon are an Infant-Toddler COR CD-ROM and a COR for handheld personal digital assistants (PDAs).

In summary, this new edition of the Preschool COR offers a variety of options for educators who desire user-friendly assessment that is closely tied to curriculum goals and meets external needs for better reporting of program results.

References

- Horton, C., & Bowman, B. T. (2002). *Child assessment at the preprimary level: Expert opinion and state trends*. (Occasional Paper Number 3, Herr Research Center, Erikson Institute). Chicago, IL: Erikson Institute.
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. (2000, August 8). Information memorandum ACF-IM-HS-00-18. Retrieved from http://www.head-startinfo.org/publications/im00/im00_18.btm.

To order any of the COR products, call 1-800-40-PRESS or visit our online store at www.highscope.org/welcome.asp. ■