



## Using COR Advantage in the Classroom

by Molly Jourden and Christine Snyder

**A**s educators, we want to be able to assess young children's development so we can feel confident that our best practices are contributing to children's growth. However, not all approaches to assessment give us the information we're looking for. Traditional assessments, which typically involve pulling children out of the classroom and asking them to perform rote tasks (often at the direction of an unfamiliar adult) provide only limited information. Traditional assessments reflect how children do in the testing situation, not how they perform in "real" educational life. Conversely, authentic assessment tools allow teachers to assess children in their natural environment, engaging with familiar and interesting materials while interacting with familiar caregivers. HighScope's new COR Advantage — the latest update to the Child Observation Record (COR) — is an observation-based authentic assessment that provides "seamless" assessment for children from birth through kindergarten age at all developmental levels, including English language learners (ELLs) and children with special needs (see related article, p. 11).

Authenticity of assessment tools is important because the results of these instruments are used for teacher planning, sharing developmental information with families, and tracking child growth and program efficacy. When teachers have accurate and meaningful information about children's development, they are better able to plan subsequent activities to support children in advancing to the next developmental stage. There are, however, some common challenges when using authentic assessment tools with young children. For example, the instrument may start at a level higher than a child's current

ability or it may end close to his or her starting developmental level, limiting the teacher's opportunity to accurately record the child's growth. In addition, many assessment tools are not appropriate for use with children who have developmental delays because the lowest possible score is higher than the child's current developmental ability in one or more areas. These challenges can impact teachers' ability to plan and communicate relevant and accurate information to families. The features of COR Advantage overcome many of these common challenges faced when authentically assessing young children.

As teachers in the HighScope Demonstration Preschool, we had the opportunity to use the new COR Advantage assessment tool in our classroom for the last three months of the 2012–2013 school year. Many benefits of the new instrument immediately became apparent. For example, features of the newly-revised COR include additional item

levels that complete the whole picture of a child's development. Instead of two separate assessments — one for infants and toddlers and one for preschoolers — COR Advantage offers birth-through-kindergarten assessment in one instrument. With this full developmental spectrum, teachers can easily score anecdotes for children at all developmental levels, including ELLs and those with special needs. There is also a strong correlation between COR Advantage and the HighScope Key Developmental Indicators (KDIs).

### Portraying Child Development

COR Advantage includes eight content areas: Approaches to Learning; Social and Emotional Development; Physical Development and Health; Language, Literacy, and Communication; Mathematics; Creative Arts; Science and Technology; and Social Studies. It also includes a ninth category, English Language Learning, for use when working with children whose primary language is other than English. These content areas include specific items and levels that address key concepts in children's

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learning from birth to kindergarten. For each item (see p. 12 for list of items), teachers gather objective anecdotal evidence based on their observations of children in the classroom over time and then select an appropriate corresponding level in the *COR Advantage Scoring Guide*. The scoring guide includes explanations of each COR item along with sample anecdotes.

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The developmental levels ranging from birth through kindergarten provide teachers with a clear concept of where children have been developmentally, where they are currently, and where they are heading in the future. Teachers are better able to support regressions and delays as well as scaffold children to the next level of development. Within one year, teachers are able to document greater spans of growth even if children are ahead or behind the typical developmental range for their age group. For example, when using a preschool assessment tool ranging from level one to level five for three- and four-year-olds, a child who starts the year at a level four ability would only have the opportunity to display an advance of one level. COR Advantage has a greater number of levels and reaches beyond the preschool years to allow for continuous documentation of that child's development. A child who starts the year at a level four might realistically be a level six by the end of the year and it would be accurately reflected by using this wide-ranging tool. An example of this would be a preschool child who starts the year writing three recognizable letters; this would be scored with COR Advantage at a level 4 for item R. Writing. As the year progresses, the child begins combining recognizable letters to form words to

express her plans, thoughts, and feelings. She might be making a card to wish her brother a "Happy Birthday" or writing the words *Block Area* to express to others where she will work at work time. Now, the child would have obtained a score of a level 5 for item R. Writing in the COR Advantage. As the child continues to progress, and by the end of the school year, she is able to write a sentence with words that are separated by spaces. If the preschool assessment tool that this child's teacher was using ended at level 5, this further progression by the child would not be captured by the assessment tool. Since COR Advantage spans across a greater range of developmental levels than a specific age-range assessment tool, COR Advantage can capture this child's progress at a level 6 for item R. Writing.

### **Understanding Developmental Delays**

Children who are typically developing in one area but delayed in another often require the use of multiple tools to track growth and development. For example, a preschool-aged child with a diagnosed speech delay could be typically developing in areas of gross motor or creative arts but display a lower level of ability in the area of language, literacy and communication, possibly developmentally closer to the ability of a toddler. Because COR Advantage covers such a broad range of development, all areas of children's growth can be assessed and tracked over time using the same assessment tool rather than having to use a preschool tool for some areas and a toddler tool for others. In addition, as it is required, the growth of children with developmental delays can more accurately be compared because the same tool is used to complete assessment on all children.

(Note: COR Advantage can be used as an assessment tool with children who have developmental delays but does not take the place of necessary screening tools used to create Individual Education Programs [IEPs] and Individualized Family Service Plans [IFSPs].)

### **Versatility**

In classrooms using an age-specific tool to assess children, that is, an assessment tool that narrowly focuses on a specific age range such as birth to twelve months or 18–36 months, information can be missed or lost as a child moves from one age group or classroom to the next. In addition, age-specific tools are not necessarily consistent in the way they group developmental categories. For example, a tool for one age group might combine all cognitive skills together under one general heading, while a tool for another age group might separate out these skills under individual headings (e.g., mathematics, science, and so on). Without consistent categories, assessment is not continuous from one classroom to another. Because COR Advantage covers development from birth to kindergarten and includes the same categories for all ages, assessment of children can be connected and continuous even as they move from one group to the next.

In a typical classroom, it is common for two children within the same age range and classroom to have significant differences in developmental abilities. Using one seamless tool that covers a developmental continuum, rather than assessing children's abilities according to age-specific developmental milestones, allows for more accurate and thorough assessment of growth over the entire year for all children.

### **Teacher Planning**

During daily planning time, teachers use the assessment tool to guide their conversations about meeting the interests and developmental needs of the children. As teachers identify the potential engagement of earlier, middle, and later learners, COR Advantage provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how children might use the materials in the classroom whether or not they fall within typical age-range expectations. Because of this framework, teachers can more accurately anticipate and plan for individual abilities and actions.

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Here's an example: During a team planning meeting, teachers Rachel and Phoebe look over the anecdotes taken during the school day and discover that Joey and Ross both spent a majority of work time using the Legos in the toy area. Both of the boys are in Phoebe's small-group time and, looking at the COR Advantage reports, Phoebe realizes that she needs to collect more information related to children's experiences related to item V. Patterns. Rachel and Phoebe decide to plan a small group using Legos and Lego boards with the focus of creating patterns. Rachel and Phoebe now want to think more deeply about the small group and anticipate what each child in the group will do with the materials, displaying where they are developmentally in relation to making and recognizing patterns.

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### Family Communication

While COR Advantage provides useful information for program staff as they monitor and plan ways to support each child's development, this tool also offers a way to meaningfully involve parents as partners in recognizing and supporting their child's growth and development through the use of the COR Advantage report shared with families. Using COR Advantage, teachers provide parents each year with a report called *Your Child's Developmental Profile*, which summarizes and provides examples of their child's development. The profile is organized according to the categories in COR Advantage and, since the tool covers birth through kindergarten, parents receive a continuous report as children move from one age group to the



*A report for parents about their child's development supports a more in-depth conversation with teachers during conferences and in-home visits.*

next. This allows them to easily follow the summary of their child's development from year to year. Parents' familiarity with the profile also allows them to focus on their children's abilities rather than having to figure out how to use a complicated assessment report. This supports a more in-depth conversation with their child's teachers about home and school goals.

By using *Your Child's Developmental Profile* as an informational "bridge" during conferences and in-home visits, staff members can

- Share behaviors that are characteristic of the child's current development as observed in the school setting
- Provide anecdotal examples to support their conclusions
- Listen to parents' descriptions of what they've observed at home and discuss how they can document their observations; together with family members, explore ideas for the home setting that would support the child's interests and development

Assessment of young children's developmental growth is one of the most important aspects of being a teacher. However, it's the appropriateness of the tool that makes the assessment accurate and meaningful. By incorporating a broad developmental range, COR Advantage ensures that the development of *all* children is represented and that the growth of each child is measurable over time. ■

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