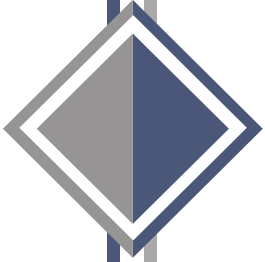


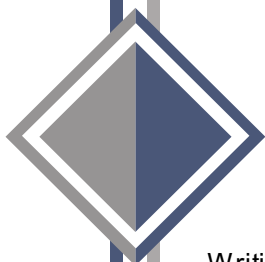
PART II

SELF-ASSESSMENT AND THE CHANGE PROCESS

In the sections that follow, you will find strategies for beginning and sustaining the change process. The first section is a guide for making change with recommendations for conducting a self-assessment of your current report writing and creating a change plan for making small, step-by-step changes. In the section on supporting and sustaining change are suggestions for dealing with barriers that may arise and recommendations for administrators who are interested in facilitating change for their staff.







Section 1:

A Guide for Making Change

Writing is hard! Few of us have been prepared for the task of conveying assessment information in writing. Mostly, we learned on the job from those who came before us.

Change is hard! We grow comfortable with the style we use and seldom think about whether the style has ever changed to meet the needs of the children and families we are serving now.

Make it easy! Neither writing nor change should be approached as an all-or-none effort. Both written communication and a change in the style with which information is conveyed can be improved through approaching the task slowly and with specific, small goals in mind.

Step-by-step. We advise against attempting to change all at once. Select one element to work on (assessment situation portrayal, tone, background information). Work with that element until you have achieved the change you desire.

Begin with strengths. Begin your change process at your comfort level. If composing by developmental area is your strength, then evaluate your reports using the criteria that address reporting findings. Or, choose an element to change because it is personally meaningful rather than one fraught with problems. In order to maintain momentum for change, it is important to experience success. This will allow you to begin in strength; you can push the envelope as you gain confidence.

Select relevant criteria. Not all criteria should apply to all reports. Use the criteria relevant to this child, this child's family, and the purposes of this report.

Self evaluate. Examine several reports that you have composed and compare your composition to the criteria for the area you have selected. This will provide you with a baseline to monitor your progress.

Conducting a Self-Assessment

Self-study, including self-assessment and change plans, are part of a professional's role as a life-long learner. The process enables you to grow in your own practice, improve outcomes for the children and families your serve, and enhance your organization. As the first step in the change process, self-assessment provides you with ownership of the change process and

personal benchmarks for evaluating change. The self-assessment process will allow you to examine your own reports, identify strengths and needs, and determine areas to improve.

We recommend that you select one area to assess (background information, procedures and tools, findings, conclusions and next steps). Once you have chosen an area that you want to work on, select two reports that you have written in the past.

Then, rate the extent to which the criteria for the area you have chosen are present in your reports. [A self-assessment form appears in Appendix AI.] Remember to consider each indicator in relation to the particular child, the family, and the purposes of the specific report.

Strength indicates that this indicator is a strength in this report.

Needs change indicates that this indicator is present but needs improvement.

Missing indicates that this indicator is not present but should be.

Not needed indicates that this indicator is not appropriate or applicable to this report.

After evaluating both reports, examine the self-evaluation form for indicators consistently marked Needs Change or Missing. This will help you to pinpoint what you may want to change. Remember, not all criteria should apply to all reports.

You can repeat this self-assessment process to evaluate progress toward change in report writing and to select new areas to target for change.

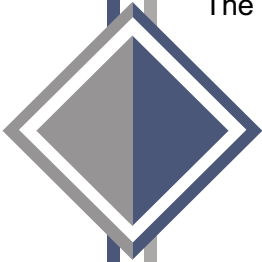
Writing a Change Plan



THE POWER OF CHANGE

- * **Crystalize your desire to change into clear steps**
- * **Identify and use key people to execute those steps**
- * **Focus your resources on achieving those steps**

Change plans should be simple. They involve setting a goal, identifying several activities to meet the goal, and creating a way to evaluate progress toward the goal. By having a written plan for improving your report writing practice, you can avoid trying to change too much at time. You can monitor closely your progress in the area you have selected. A change plan form appears in Appendix A.

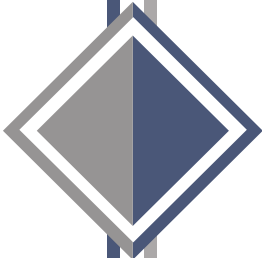


The steps in creating a plan are listed below.

1. Briefly summarize the aspect of report writing that you have identified for change through your self-assessment at the top of your change plan;
2. List three actions you could take to move toward accomplishing your goal for change.
3. Identify the time frame for accomplishing your intended change and any resources (human or material) you might need to complete the change. Resources might include securing email access to other team members, identifying a peer to read passages that you have composed, or obtaining more timely access to equipment. [A form for identifying resources available at your site appears in Appendix A.]
4. Identify any potential barriers to implementing your change plan. Keep in mind the universal barriers:
 - It always takes longer than you expect.
Solution: Cultivate persistence.
 - Great expectations fall in the face of reality
Solution: Take baby steps. Remember, you are not trying to cure but to move in the desired direction.
 - Don't do it unless you can do it perfectly.
Solution: Perfection is for the next life, not for this one. You will make mistakes, but celebrate your progress.
5. Now it is time to implement your change plan. Work with the element you have identified for several weeks, through several reports. When you feel comfortable with the change you have made, conduct another self-assessment. Select two newly written reports and repeat the self-assessment process.

Sample Change Plan

Strand: Background Information		
FINDINGS: little information available regarding child's family to put in the report		
Plan of Action	Timeline	Resources
Step 1: review intake form for specific family information	6/30	child find team for discussion; secretary for typing team
Step 2: revise form	7/30	
Step 3: use revised form in assessment process and resulting report	9/30	
Barriers [list potential barriers to change them] busy time for holding discussions with others some team members may find this process intrusive		



Section 2:

Supporting and Sustaining Change

James Belasco, in his book *Teaching the Elephant to Dance*, describes the change process in corporations and bureaucracies as working with elephants which have been shackled and taught to move in one and only one way. Then, when you remove the shackles, the elephant moves in one and only one way. To produce change you need to light a fire under the elephant to get him to move in different ways without burning down the circus tent. The shackles we are all familiar with: "We have always done it that way!", "But the law says...", "We tried that. It didn't work.", "We already do that.", or "It's a good idea, but..."

THE POWER OF VISION



- * **Focuses attention**
- * **Inspires commitment**
- * **Guides action**

The purpose of a Vision Statement is to light the fire. It is a statement about what we want assessment reports to look like and should permeate everything that we do. A good quality vision statement focuses our attention on where we want to go. It inspires us to do the painful work to get there. And it also provides us with a guide for action. The vision statement by the Learning Community guided our work in generating criteria and assembling this technical assistance document. It can assist you as you strive to sustain change as you ask yourself: Are my actions contributing to the vision?

A Report that Makes Sense

Reports in early childhood reflect the partnership among families and providers and are guided by the families' priorities, questions, and concerns. Reports present a shared vision of the child, convey useful and understandable information, and strike a balance among consumers' needs unique to each child.

The New Mexico Learning Community in Report Writing
June, 2001

Problems to Anticipate

All systems and all work environments contain elements which can constrain progress in making change. It is important to identify as part of constructing your change plan any barriers that you foresee. A barrier not named will not be noticed in time to do something about it or avoid it.

Sometimes barriers are HOT buttons; they need to be worded carefully on your change plan. For example:

For an equity barrier in which the family believes in teacher expertise and you believe in partnership, instead of writing “family resistance to partnership,” try “clear separation of family and teacher roles.”

For a superficial review of family rights, instead of writing “the school is not interested in families,” try “the school is not ready to change its family involvement model.”

Rarely are barriers as simple as the two or three-word phrases we use to describe them. For example, you might identify district resources as a barrier to active family involvement. Often the solutions to such apparently simple barriers will need researching, perhaps a change in team composition, may need thinking outside of the box.

Then, there are predictable barriers such as those that field testers encountered when using the report writing criteria. It is very likely that you will encounter similar barriers.

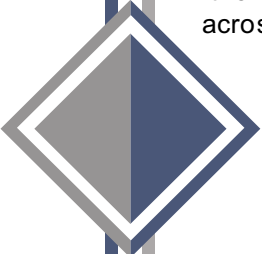
Time

Time is a barrier to almost every innovation. There is never enough time to do what we need to do or what we think we should do. Case loads rise; evaluations stack up; someone resigns and we inherit their cases; the district is behind so we have 17 IEPs next week. And time marches on.

One of the ways to make time less burdensome during the change process is to break the task into very small steps. Change is not accomplished all at one time. Rather, change is one step at a time. And each of those steps need to be celebrated. So, if you find yourself unable to begin because you are overwhelmed by not enough time, stop. Pick something to do that is very small. Perhaps read the section of the document that addresses an area in which you have interest. Then, stop. You have just made a change. Recognize it. Celebrate it. Then, pick something else that is very, very small.

High case load

High case loads can be particularly difficult in any attempt to change how we practice what we do. Even when we are successful in selecting a small piece for change (e.g., active, first person verb structures), attempting to implement the change in all assessment reports can be overwhelming when case loads are too high. The situation can become even more complex if



the choice for change involves learning a new skill such as writing results that are integrated across assessment tools.

One of the ways to make case load less constraining during the change process is to select only a portion of the cases on which to practice the change in report writing. As you become more fluent in the change you have selected, you can phase in a larger number of cases.

Resource allocation

Access to resources can be both a constraint and a facilitator. Resources include funding and time for scheduling meetings with other staff as well as opportunities for professional development, access to expertise, written documents, peer support for coaching and feedback, hardware and software for report production, among others.


Typically, we notice only what we do not have and the lack makes attaining the change we seek more difficult. We are less likely to notice those resources woven into the fabric of everyday practice; e.g., the laptop we drag around from site to site, the manual in the office on technical writing, the informal conversations with other staff about refining family partnerships, access to e-mail.

One of the ways to mitigate difficulties with resources is to have a thorough understanding of the resources available at your site and your pattern of using them (see Appendix A for a scale to help you identify environmental resources). Professionals who participated in the field testing frequently commented that they had not given much thought to the resources available to them. Some resources that you seldom access can be used to bypass problems in other areas. For example, when there is little opportunity for face-to-face contact with colleagues, e-mail can serve as a means of obtaining feedback and support from colleagues.

Some resource constraints present problems that cannot be bypassed easily. For example, outdated equipment that has a high rate of failure creates barriers not only to you as you implement change but also to everyone at your site who relies on that equipment. It can be treated as an insurmountable barrier that feeds office stress. Alternatively, it can be treated as an occasion for collaborative problem solving to create a plan for updating the equipment. Administrators who are informed about both the problem and potential solutions are in a better position to act toward resolution.

Information access

One of the issues that can surface as you begin to redesign your report is access to information. Perhaps you have targeted cultural and linguistic diversity within the Background Information section and you discover there is little information beyond the language spoken at home. Or you have selected addressing activities for families within Conclusions and Next Steps but can find no information on family preferences and routines. Missing or limited information can be seen as a barrier to the change process. It also can serve as a red flag for examining how information is gathered and shared among team members.



There are many reasons for access problems. Information may have been collected and stored in a written form but not circulated among team members. Or the information collected may not include items that would help you in addressing your targeted areas.

Sometimes information is collected but not stored in a format that can be readily shared across team members such as shorthand on sticky notes or information held in working memory of the team member who has had the most contact with the referral source or the family. Then, there will be times when the information is simply missing.

When you encounter information access problems, you need to identify the reason. Solutions for problems of information sharing are different from solutions for problems of missing information. Making the assumption that information is missing when it is simply not shared can lead to duplication of efforts; e.g., several team members collect the same information from the same source. Several people asking a teacher, family member, or child care provider the same question can have the unintended side-effect of decreasing participation in the assessment process.

Strategies for improving information sharing across team members have been described in the overview to Part I of this document. In addition, teams might want to consider formalizing information sharing by developing a procedure for access to intake information, child study team reports, child find data, etc.

Strategies for addressing missing information might include redesigning intake or referral forms, adding environmental components to the assessment process (family routines, classroom routines), increasing the role of families and significant others in the assessment planning process, and identifying who will collect information and how the team member will make it available to others during assessment planning.


But, writing is so hard

Yes, that is the truth. Sinclair Lewis once noted:

“Writing is just work – there’s no secret. If you dictate or use a pen or type or write with your toes – it is still just work”.

But we do many things to make it even harder than it is. We worry that it won’t sound intelligent and then decorate the passages with empty phrasing and jargon. We have flashbacks to our college writing teachers and their notorious red pens and then refrain from showing a difficult passage to a colleague for feedback. Or we surround ourselves with raw assessment data in the hope that something will rise to the surface and then become paralyzed by information overload. Occasionally, we have panic attacks, so worried that we will make a mistake that we write nothing of substance. And we force ourselves into thinking through the whole thing perfectly before we commit to writing, forgetting the wisdom of E. M. Forster: “How do I know what I think until I see what I say.”

These and other writer’s blocks are barriers we impose on ourselves, unnecessary baggage that makes writing a painful act. One way of overcoming them is to invest in prewriting activities. Using lists and charts to organize information can help alleviate information overload. Concept

maps and diagrams can help capture how a child's skills and capacities are interrelated. Some writers may find it helpful to use the criteria as stimuli for composing sections or paragraphs. When the words just won't come, talking to a tape recorder can get you past the blank page syndrome. All the information generated in prewriting activities can be pulled together into a detailed outline. Assessment reports are technical writing, not creative writing, and benefit greatly from detailed outlining. The more information that you can arrange within an outline, the easier it will be to create the draft. Sample drafts illustrating a report outline for a toddler, a preschooler, and a second grader appear in Appendix B.

How Administrators Can Help

In their examination of supports for change, the Division for Early Childhood observed that recommended practices are more likely to be used when administrative support is present. For example, change happens when policy, structure, and resources promote the practice.

Change is painful; we are comfortable with what we do. Change is anxiety producing; we worry about not being able to do what we need to do. Change is risky; we worry about the consequences of failing. Yet, change is motivated by pain (I wrote a terrible report), anxiety (what if they misinterpret what I wrote), and risk (I have to find a way to do this better). Administrators who are successful in promoting change recognize that it requires more than aligning policy, structure, and resources with the desired outcomes. It also requires creating a work climate aligned with self-directed change. There are three primary things administrators can do to support the change process in assessment report writing: examining local documents, fostering family partnership, and supporting professional development.

Examining local documents

The early childhood field emphasizes a participatory role for families in all levels of policy—federal, state, and local. In keeping with this position, families were part of the learning community which generated the report writing criteria, the vision statement, and the principles of report writing. Families also served as reviewers for this technical assistance document. But policy is not just federal and state regulations, interagency agreements, and technical assistance documents. It also includes local procedures and documents.

One issue that emerged during the field test of the criteria was the perception that their sites (Part C and Part B) did not have written philosophy and procedures at the local level that addressed report writing and the family's role within that task. For some sites, it may not be addressed. For others, it may be part of orientation but not part of the ongoing staff development process. For still others, it may be part of mentoring but not incorporated within the vision or mission documents.

Having access to a written statement of the program's philosophy regarding the family's role in the assessment process (including report writing) enables staff to share that information with families. It also helps staff in making decisions about professional growth. It also can be a vehicle for breaking down interpersonal barriers within the staff stemming from issues of territorialism, cross disciplinary communication, and professional trust.

Administrators can support the change process by

- Evaluating current program policy against early childhood recommended practices for policy (see annotated bibliography for recommended practices)
- Reviewing and revising program vision and mission statements in the company of stakeholders such as families, service providers, specialists, diagnosticians, other administrators (see annotated bibliography for additional information on vision/mission).
- Ensuring that written policies are part of the orientation for new personnel
- Enfolding written policies into staff problem solving activities
- Using written policies as part of the program review process

Fostering family partnerships

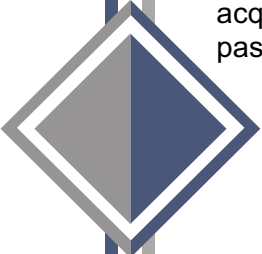
Consistent with the 1997 revision of IDEA, the early childhood field has articulated a choice-based role for families in all phases of assessment: planning, team composition and style, information sharing, conducting assessments, interpreting information, etc. The perception held by field testers was that their sites (Part C and Part B) supported a singular role for families within the context of report writing: the recipient of the report. This perception can present a major barrier to change for those professionals who seek to enhance family partnerships in the area of assessment report writing.

Administrators can support the change process by:

- Becoming familiar with the ways in which partnerships with families can enhance both service delivery and systems change (see annotated bibliography)
- Reviewing program policies and procedures to ensure that written philosophy is in accordance with family centered context
- Providing for site-based inservice training opportunities family partnerships that include all the disciplines and families
- Examining human and material resource deployment for aspects that impinge on a participatory role for families (e.g., scheduling, caseloads, hardware deployment, telephone restrictions)

Supporting professional development

One of the characteristics of providing early childhood services (birth to age 9) is meeting the challenge of solving complicated problems within complex environments. Whether assessment or intervention, much of the work is completed in professional isolation. Opportunities to engage in reflective dialogue that seems to be a foundation for successful self study are rare. Yet, mutual support can be instrumental in maintaining the momentum for change. Peer support and coaching can aid professionals in (a) keeping change targets small and manageable, (b) clarifying

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targets for change and steps to attain change, (c) providing encouragement during the acquisition and practice stages, (d) listening to feelings and frustrations, (e) reviewing passages and providing feedback, and (f) celebrating accomplishments.

Administrators can support the change process by

- Recognizing self study in report writing as part of official professional development
- Disentangling self study in report writing from mechanisms of staff evaluation
- Providing mechanisms for peer coaching separate from traditional supervisory practices (see annotated bibliography for additional information)
- Encouraging partnerships for peer coaching that are voluntary and arise from common interest