ELLCO

PRE-K

User's Guide to the Early Language & Literacy Classroom Observation Pre-K Tool

PRE-K TOOL

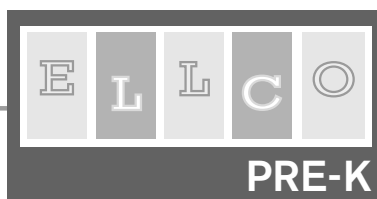Miriam W. Smith, Joanne P. Brady, & Louisa Anastasopoulos

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USER'S GUIDE to the

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by

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The *Early Childhood Language and Literacy Classroom Observation Tool, Pre-K (ELLCO Pre-K),* is intended for one-time use only and can be purchased in packages of five (under ISBN-13: 978-1-55766-947-6). To order, contact Brookes Publishing Co.

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The case studies in this book are based on the authors' experience. Names and identifying details have been changed to protect privacy.

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About the Authors

Miriam W. Smith, Ed.D., Consultant, Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC), 55 Chapel Street, Newton, Massachusetts 02458

Dr. Smith has always enjoyed working directly with young children and teachers of young children. Beginning in 1987, she collected and analyzed data for the longitudinal Home–School Study of Language and Literacy Development. Her work on that project brought her into many classrooms as an observer and researcher and propelled her interest in classroom environments and practices that promote children's early language and literacy development. Later work conducted for the Center for Children & Families at EDC cemented her commitment to working directly with teachers, supervisors, and education leaders to promote conditions that positively affect children's learning. Currently a consultant to EDC, Dr. Smith continues to engage in research, writing, and professional development with teachers of young children. An active volunteer in local schools and child care programs, she most enjoys spending time in the "living lab" of daily life with her three children.

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Ms. Brady is recognized nationwide for her contributions to the field of early childhood education. She provides leadership to a range of complex projects that focus on research, assessment, technical assistance, and professional development that translates research and recommended practice into useful programs and products for practitioners and policy makers. Her groundbreaking work with the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards has led to a

performance-based assessment to certify accomplished early childhood teachers. In recent years, Ms. Brady has concentrated her efforts on the design of professional development approaches that build teachers' knowledge and skill in content areas, especially language and literacy. Ms. Brady and her colleagues are examining the impact of literacy-related professional development on teachers' practices and children's learning. Ms. Brady presents her work at major conferences and seminars in the United States and abroad and has contributed to numerous publications, including *Critical Issues in Early Childhood Professional Development* (Zaslow & Martinez-Beck, Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., 2006).

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Ms. Anastasopoulos has extensive knowledge of early language and literacy development and a decade of experience managing language- and literacy-related research projects at the Center for Children & Families at EDC. In addition to her research experience, Ms. Anastasopoulos has codeveloped and serves as the lead instructor of an ELLCO training-of-trainers seminar that prepares teams of qualified professionals to provide ELLCO training. Ms. Anastasopoulos earned a master's degree in public policy with a focus on education from the Georgetown Public Policy Institute.

Acknowledgments

The Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation Tool, Pre-K, is built on a body of work undertaken at the Center for Children & Families at Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC), from 1997 onward. When the initial ELLCO Toolkit was published in 2002, it represented substantial contributions from many staff. In particular, the current authors want to thank David K. Dickinson, who was instrumental in the development of the initial ELLCO, for his efforts and many contributions.

Over the intervening years, many early childhood practitioners and researchers have used the ELLCO across the country. Their feedback and suggestions have helped to guide this revision. Specifically, we appreciate the thoughtful comments and careful reviews provided by Nancy Clark-Chiarelli, Julie Hirschler, Christina Silvi, and Sue Washburn. We also thank Jean Foley and Lucas Butler for their support in producing the manuscript and their unflagging attention to detail. Finally, we appreciate the editorial support and encouragement received from the Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co. team throughout the revision process. Many thanks to Heather Shrestha, Editorial Director; Astrid Zuckerman, Acquisitions Editor; and Mika Smith, Editorial Supervisor.

Finally, we wish to thank the many early childhood program directors, teachers, and literacy coaches who welcomed us into their programs and classrooms. They have been critical partners in the process, willing to share a slice of classroom life with our team.

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Introduction

Since the mid-1980s, it has become increasingly apparent that literacy development begins well before children enter kindergarten. A growing body of research demonstrates the positive role that high-quality early childhood classrooms can play in nourishing children's language and literacy skills (Peisner-Feinberg et al., 1999; Whitehurst et al., 1994) and preventing later reading difficulties (Ramey & Ramey, 2003; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Although many researchers agree that some programs are doing a good job in many ways, there is widespread recognition that programs could be made even better—especially by improving practice in key early learning areas such as literacy (Barnett, 2002; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Head Start Bureau, 2003; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Project Team FACES, 2003). In an era when early learning standards are being set in place, the Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation Tool, Pre-K (ELLCO Pre-K), provides an effective way for practitioners, researchers, and others concerned with quality improvement to gauge progress and focus their program improvement efforts.

The ELLCO was first published in 2002 as the ELLCO Toolkit, Research Edition, and has been revised to incorporate the most recent research on early language and literacy development. Now part of a suite of products, the ELLCO Pre-K is an observation instrument that has been expressly designed for use in center-based classrooms for 3- to 5-year-old children. An additional observation instrument completes the set: The ELLCO K–3, Research Edition, is available for use in kindergarten through third grade. A similar tool that was derived from the ELLCO, the Child and Home Early Language and Literacy Observation (CHELLO; Neuman, Dwyer, & Koh, 2007) has been developed for use in family child care and other home-based settings. Together, these items provide practitioners and researchers with tools that describe the extent to which chil-

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dren at different stages of development are receiving optimal support in specific settings for their language and literacy development.

ORGANIZATION OF THE ELLCO PRE-K

The ELLCO Pre-K consists of an observation instrument and a teacher interview designed to supplement the observation. The observation contains a total of 19 items, organized into five main sections.

- Section I: Classroom Structure contains four items that address classroom organization and contents, children's access to and use of materials, management practices, and adult roles and professional focus.

- Section II: Curriculum consists of three items that address the curriculum environment, instructional strategies, opportunities for child choice and initiative, and responsiveness to and reflection of diversity.

- Section III: The Language Environment includes four items that focus on the discourse climate in the classroom, opportunities for extended conversations, vocabulary development, and efforts to develop phonological awareness.

- Section IV: Books and Book Reading contains five items that address the organization and use of the book area, the characteristics of books available, the presence and use of books across content areas of the curriculum, and the quality and frequency of book reading.

- Section V: Print and Early Writing includes three items that focus on the availability of writing materials, opportunities that build awareness of print and varied purposes of writing, instructional strategies, and use of environmental print.

The ELLCO Pre-K is scored and tabulated so that there are two main subscales. Sections I and II combine to create the *General Classroom Environment* subscale. Sections III, IV, and V join together to create the *Language and Literacy* subscale. These subscales are intentionally differentiated, with the emphasis placed on the *Language and Literacy* subscale, which contains the majority of items (12), whereas the *General Classroom Environment* subscale includes the remaining items (7).

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UNDERLYING ASSUMPTIONS OF THE ELLCO PRE-K

The ELLCO Pre-K is based on several central assumptions about the nature of children's early literacy development and the conditions and opportunities in classrooms that either support or detract from such development. These central premises follow.

- Opportunities to use and practice oral language and emergent literacy skills are fostered in classrooms that are structured to support children's initiative, actively engage children in learning experiences, and blend goals for other content areas with literacy learning goals.

- Teachers are responsible for encouraging and capitalizing on young children's emergent interest in language and print.

- Teachers are responsible for engaging children in learning activities that teach and reinforce appropriate skills.

- Teachers have a responsibility to understand, evaluate, and respond appropriately to the different literacy skills and learning needs of individuals.

- Connections are made among children's oral language use, the opportunities children have to engage in extended talk, and their emerging early literacy skills.

- Decisions about classroom organization, provision of materials, and scheduling of time are made thoughtfully, with the intent of fostering language, literacy, and learning.

- Teachers plan curricula that support children's language, writing, and reading development and infuse their classrooms with literacy and language.

- Teachers use a range of ongoing assessment techniques to evaluate learning, adjust instruction, communicate with specialists, and coordinate resources and staff efforts.

WHO SHOULD USE THE ELLCO PRE-K?

The developers of ELLCO Pre-K recommend that potential users have strong background knowledge of children's language and literacy development as well as experience teaching in preschool classrooms. The previous version (the

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ELLCO Toolkit, Research Edition) has been used by a range of professionals across the country for a variety of purposes, including the following:

- Researchers who are engaged in evaluating the quality of language and literacy practices in early childhood classrooms

- Supervisors and coaches/mentors, trained in early literacy, who are involved in supporting the development of preschool teachers

- Professional development facilitators who are interested in fostering a shared vision of effective early literacy instruction and who want to use a tool that can provide both a springboard for discussion and a means for systematic documentation of progress

- Teachers who are interested in a reflective tool for assessing their classroom practices and strategies

HOW DOES THE ELLCO PRE-K COMPARE WITH THE ELLCO TOOLKIT?

Thanks to the widespread use of the original ELLCO Toolkit, Research Edition, and feedback from a diverse body of users, we have incorporated a range of changes. These changes serve to make the ELLCO Pre-K more focused than the original ELLCO, as well as easier to use and score. Items from the Literacy Environment Checklist[1] and Literacy Activities Rating Scale have been integrated into the architecture of the observation itself. The purpose of this substantial change was to make several of the observation items more robust by including the details previously gathered by the Literacy Environment Checklist and the Literacy Activities Rating Scale and to reduce some of the previous reliance on counting literacy materials and activities that tended to skew results toward classrooms that had more "stuff," regardless of whether or how that stuff was used. The ELLCO Pre-K explicitly values *how* materials are used by teachers and children more than whether materials are merely present in the classroom. We have also increased the specificity and range of important early literacy skills that are observed, such as phonological awareness, efforts to increase spoken vocabulary, and uses of environmental print. The most significant and requested change is the inclusion of detailed descriptive indicators for each of the five scale points (rather than just for three of the scale points), which will help observers more clearly and reliably decide how to score each item.

[1]The Literacy Environment Checklist will continue to be made available by Brookes Publishing. See http://www.brookespublishing.com/ellco for details on obtaining the Literacy Environment Checklist. This will enable grantees to supply the U.S. Department of Education with the necessary data required by the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (PL 103-62).

CONTENTS OF THE USER'S GUIDE

The remaining six chapters of this user's guide provide detailed support to enable practitioners and researchers to understand how to score the ELLCO Pre-K and use it for different purposes.

- Chapter 2, "Effective Elements of Early Literacy: Kendra's Story," uses a series of vignettes of a preschool child's experiences in the classroom to illustrate key components of early literacy. It also demonstrates the way that everyday events can be translated into evidence to support ratings of ELLCO Pre-K items.

- Chapter 3, "Structure of the ELLCO Pre-K," addresses the content of each section, the architecture of items, and the contents of the Teacher Interview.

- Chapter 4, "How to Conduct an ELLCO Observation," offers specific guidelines for scheduling and preparing for a classroom visit, general strategies for rating items, and ways to avoid bias in scoring items.

- Chapter 5, "A Review of Sample Items," walks the user through the steps in rating three different items. Classroom vignettes, sample evidence, and explanatory text simulate how an observer translates what was seen and heard into a score for specific items.

- Chapter 6, "Using the ELLCO Pre-K for Professional Development," discusses how the instrument itself and various components of the user's guide can be used as an effective vehicle for promoting teacher reflection and collective responsibility for children's learning. It offers guidelines for building the ELLCO Pre-K into an ongoing professional development initiative and provides practical ideas that are tied to each of the five sections of the tool.

- Chapter 7, "Using the ELLCO Pre-K in Research," describes the characteristics of effective data collector training, including criteria for selecting observers, approaches to achieving and calculating interrater reliability, and recalibrating observers in the field.

A technical appendix principally describes the psychometric properties of the ELLCO Toolkit, Research Edition, in preschool classrooms, including information on interrater reliability, internal validity, test–retest reliability, correlations among the tools, and correlations with other early childhood observation instruments. A matrix also is provided in the technical appendix (Table A.15) that illustrates the comparability of the constructs measured in the ELLCO Toolkit, Research Edition, and the ELLCO Pre-K. The resources list at the end of the book is devoted to a variety of resources, including an annotated set of web sites, web-based resources, articles, and books that are relevant to early literacy research and practice.

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