

# PREFACE

Preschool language evaluation has assumed a more prominent and potentially important status since longitudinal information demonstrating the positive effects of good preschool programs<sup>1</sup> and new mandates for service (such as PL 99-457) have come into being. The evaluation of preschool children offers a unique opportunity for early identification and intervention. It also presents unique challenges.

Preschool children are going through a period of rapid growth and development of communication, cognitive, and social skills. Their lives are still primarily family-centered. Their experience with test taking may be limited or nonexistent and they may be shy around strangers. Some of these preschoolers may not be speaking, and their communication problems may be part of other developmental, neurological, emotional, or genetic difficulties.<sup>2</sup> This suggests that as practicing clinicians we must acquire information and skills beyond that traditionally provided in our training.<sup>3</sup> We must become knowledgeable about child development, the family, cultural differences, and the other types of disorders that may be reflected in or associated with communication deficits.

Not only must we bring additional knowledge to the evaluation process, we must be able to adapt the process itself to account for the special needs and limitations of preschoolers and their families.<sup>4</sup>

Each article in this issue of *Seminars in Speech and Language* has been carefully selected to bring you current information about these areas. The issue can be divided into three general sections:

1. developmental information regarding play, phonology, literacy, and communicative intention;
2. family and cultural issues and;
3. specific handicapping conditions: hearing impairment, mental retardation, and emotional disturbance.

Throughout the issue several themes emerge. The importance of understanding and observing the developmental level and relationship of the child's language, cognitive, and social skills is one of those themes. Another is the necessity of accounting for the dynamic nature of the

preschool child and his interactions with his environment. The environment under consideration may be linguistic, social, cognitive, physical, or nonverbal. A child may demonstrate very different abilities depending on the familiarity of the participants, the materials, the activity, and the level of the task. To provide adequate assessment of communication skills, it has been suggested that the preschool child must be observed in addition to being given formal tests.

Providing appropriate speech and language evaluation for the preschool child means that we must look at the *whole* child using information and techniques that will allow us to understand his strengths and needs. Such assessments can provide a basis for individualized, meaningful intervention.

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### REFERENCES

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