

**Measuring the Engagement of Children With Disabilities in Early Childhood Settings:
A Guide for Inclusive Practice**

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SYNOPSIS

Learning occurs as children engage with people, activities and materials. It is important, therefore, that practitioners working with children with disabilities in early childhood settings ensure that these children are engaged in the activities provided. While engagement data can be useful for both research and practice, no individual engagement measure was found that practitioners could easily use to program for the children with disabilities attending their early childhood centre-based settings. The main purpose of the research reported in this thesis was to develop a simple, reliable and valid measure of engagement that could be useful in early childhood practitioners' daily practice. The *Individual Child Engagement Record* (ICER), which was developed following an examination of the existing measures and a review of the research, was trialed using observations of children with disabilities in an inclusive childcare centre. The results supported the potential of the ICER for both research and practice. After the ICER was revised (ICER-R), and validated as an indicator of learning opportunity, practitioners were trained in its implementation in order to investigate the use of the measure in inclusive early childhood practice. Data gathered through the training process indicated the practical value of the ICER-R.

Following an examination of the data for the one child with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) included in the pilot study and a subsequent review of the literature relating to the engagement of young children with ASD, children with ASD who attended both segregated and inclusive early childhood settings were observed using the ICER-R to examine learning opportunities available in the two types of settings. Both the strengths and weaknesses of the two types of settings were identified. The implications of the findings for practice were discussed, including the use of ICER-R data to program for an increase in learning opportunities provided in early childhood centre-based settings.

STATEMENT OF CANDIDATE

I certify that the work in this thesis entitled “Measuring the Engagement of Children With Disabilities in Early Childhood Settings: A Guide for Inclusive Practice” has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree to any other university or institution other than Macquarie University.

I also certify that the thesis is an original piece of research and is my own work. Any help and assistance that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself have been appropriately acknowledged.

In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

The research presented in this thesis was approved by Macquarie University Ethics Review Committee, referenced number: HE24SEP2004-PG03265 on 28 October 2004; HE27MAY2005-R04126 on 18 January 2006; and HE24MAR2006-D04595 on 21 April 2006.



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STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTION

This is a statement of my contribution to this thesis and the jointly written papers included in it. The following is a list of the papers written in conjunction with my principal supervisor Dr Coral Kemp and my associate supervisor Associate Professor Mark Carter.

1. Kishida, Y., & Kemp, C. (2006a). A measure of engagement for children with intellectual disabilities in early childhood settings: A preliminary study. *Journal of Intellectual and Developmental Disability, 31*, 101-114.

I conducted the study with advice from Dr Kemp, and wrote the paper with input from Dr Kemp.

2. Kishida, Y., & Kemp, C. (2006b). Measuring child engagement in inclusive early childhood settings: Implications for practice. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood, 31*(2), 14-19.

I wrote this review with input from Dr Kemp.

3. Kishida, Y., & Kemp, C. (2006c). *Measuring child engagement: Implication for inclusive practice*. Paper presented at the Seventh Biennial Conference of Early Childhood Intervention Australia: Whose Landscape is it? Adelaide, South Australia.

I wrote this conference paper with suggestions from Dr Kemp.

4. Kishida, Y., & Kemp, C. (2007). Training staff to measure the engagement of children with disabilities in inclusive childcare centers. *Manuscript submitted for publication*.

I conducted this study with input from Dr Coral Kemp. This study was supported with an iMURS.

5. Kishida, Y., & Kemp, C. (2008). Engagement of children with autism spectrum disorder in early childhood centre-based settings: An investigation of learning opportunities. *Manuscript submitted for publication.*

I wrote this review with input from Dr Coral Kemp.

6. Kishida, Y., & Kemp, C. (in press). The engagement and interaction of children with autism spectrum disorder in segregated and inclusive early childhood center-based settings. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education.*

I conducted this study with input from Dr Coral Kemp. This study was supported with an iMURS.

7. Kishida, Y., Kemp, C., & Carter, M. (2008). Revision and validation of the individual child engagement record: A practitioner-friendly measure of learning opportunities for children with disabilities in early childhood settings. *Journal of Intellectual & Developmental Disability, 33*, 158-170.

I conducted this study with advice from Dr Kemp, and wrote the paper with suggestions from Dr Kemp and with input from Associate Professor Carter as reflected in the order of authorship. This research was supported with an *International Macquarie University Research Scholarship (iMURS)*.

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