

**VALIDATION DAY:  
TIPS COMPILED FROM NAEYC'S MOST ACTIVE VALIDATORS**

NAEYC Annual Conference  
Chicago  
November 6, 2003

Melissa Werner, Ph.D.  
Snead State Community College  
Child Development  
P. O. Box 734  
Boaz, AL 35957  
MWerner@Snead.edu  
(205)706-5566

Please note: This data was collected from some of NAEYC Academy's most experienced validators. It gives their perspective on the Accreditation process. These suggestions are not intended to add tasks or to reinterpret criteria. Remember only Academy staff can interpret criteria. Programs should use NAEYC's *Guide to Accreditation* and *Accreditation Criteria and Procedures* for guidance.

**EXPERIENCED VALIDATORS SURVEY**

**What should validators do to prepare for the validation visit?**

Review the Program Description to get a "feel" for and knowledge of the program, it is important to review the Program Description when you get it, so issues can be clarified then, not the night before the visit.

Review the NAEYC Procedures, Chapter 8 of the Guide and call the Academy to clarify any issues.

Review the Validator training materials. Do you have enough observation books?

Review the *Guide to Accreditation* and *Accreditation Criteria and Procedures* for:

tasks and time lines decision rules

list of documents items needed from staff and child files

Review Section 8, *How to Prepare for the Validation Visit*

"I really look for the patterns that this center has so that I can get a feel for the center and go there feeling comfortable and as knowledgeable as one might be in a new setting."

## Check

Center profile	Study organization and structure
Staff qualifications	Number of classrooms
Staffing pattern	Ages of children
Percentages for questionnaires	All materials complete

## Discuss with the Director - in a warm and friendly phone call:

Call should establish rapport for validation visit.

Program sponsorship if unfamiliar (military, campus, Head Start)

Director's perception of validator role (especially for a first visit)

Changes since the Program Description was sent to the Academy, especially if the changes resulted in fewer/more classrooms or in any issues involving a call to the Academy

Questions from your review of materials

Arrival time, need for time to interview teachers, time available for the exit interview

Access to and location of files

Remind the director that the visit could last all day and into the evening

## Contact your co-validator regarding

Discuss Accreditation system familiarity      Task preferences for Validation day

Plan for day, get acquainted      Calls to the program, who will call

## Logistics

Detailed directions, parking, and close by accommodations; a map is helpful

After hours / emergency phone numbers for validators and/or the center

Special issues or events (last day of school, special field trip)

Survival kit of post-its, pens, white out, calculator, note cards, highlighter

## **What can directors do to prepare for the validation day?**

**Prior to the visit** - All validators love centers that are prepared!

Assemble and label documents in one place with the name and criterion number

If the center has waited a long time for a visit, refresh the files to make sure they reflect the current situation.

Remind staff of the language of the observation instrument so if a validator asks a teacher: Tell me what you do in your classroom to foster positive identity or encourage pro-social behavior?, the teacher will be comfortable answering the question.

Keep a copy of the Program Description

For large centers, mark the classrooms on a site map (use Program Description names)

Arrange a place for validators to work; nice if it is private, necessary if there are two validators

Assemble classroom schedules (best times to observe), revised list of ages of children in each class (oldest, youngest)

Prepare Program Description revisions if there are new staff or if classrooms have changed

Have an enrollment list and a staff list to assist in a random review of files

Make sure your staff files are up to date: resume, transcript, training, evaluation, TB, emergency contact, references pediatric, First Aid, CPR/choking, level of education

Review the children's files: physical, immunization, emergency contact and pick-up information, health history, medical emergency plan, and evaluation

If you won't be present when the validator arrives, designate a person to greet/tour the validator

### **Prepare the Staff:**

If the staff have been waiting some time for the visit, or it is a new program year, you may need to "rekindle the flame" about why we are passionate about quality for children.

Review validator tasks (will go everywhere, may not observe all rooms, will observe for an hour)

Review the validator role (does not make decisions, will not give feedback, is not a consultant)

Plan time for staff interviews about unobserved items; explain interviews are not negative

Remind staff how much has been done to get to this day and that their capabilities will show

Plan a normal day; don't include many new activities. It's realistic to see items from the Program Description

Are staff familiar with items in Classroom Observation?

### **During the visit**

Relax, be proud, be confident (and nervous); this is your day, set the tone for the staff to relax

Be available, carry on normal routines

Be frank about unusual circumstances; validators know misbehavior happens.

If the process has been one of real self-evaluation involving the whole team, the preparation will have been done. The program will be 'living the criteria' and the visit will provide an opportunity to demonstrate this to an observer."

### **The initial meeting and tour - Director**

Introduce all staff present, use their names, have name tags; have a map for large centers

Be relaxed, confident, cordial; first impressions set the stage

Review availability during day; plan for teachers' interview time after observation

Point out extra supplies/resource areas, first aid supplies, locked cleaning supplies, extra clothes, fire extinguishers, adult bathrooms

Explain any unusual circumstances (soft toys bagged due to lice, substitutes, etc.)

### **The initial meeting and tour - Validator**

Be pleasant, relaxed, positive, nonthreatening and SMILE; first impressions set the stage

Be at ease, help director feel comfortable, set stage for working relationship

See 2/3 of the children present; note any special occurrences during day

Review the day's plan; review the role of the validator (will not give feedback, does not make decisions)

Be respectful, acknowledge hard work; be responsive; be aware of your body language

### **During Classroom Observations**

#### **The Teacher**

Plan a normal day (the word normal was used by the majority of validators); be yourself

The Validator knows that children act like children; it is okay if they misbehave

Challenging child behavior is not the focus, it is how a teacher handles this competently

You know your children and how much preparation they need when strangers enter room

"If kids act out, that is your opportunity to show your ability to interact positively."

Most teachers will be interviewed after observation; this is to get additional information

Validators will talk little and write a lot; we have to complete the observation book

### **The Director**

Remind teachers this is the same observation tool you and they have worked on before

Trust your teachers, do not hover; stay out of room unless you always go in

Arrange a time for the class to be covered during the teacher interviews

Remind all teachers that some will not be observed; this can be a let down

Is there a chair for the validator to sit?

### **The Validator**

Sit and be unobtrusive

The information describes the program from the child's perspective

"Try not to flirt with the toddlers."

Be very careful of your body language; a frown because you wrote something in the wrong place can be devastating to a teacher who thinks it reflects on her

Write what you see; be accurate, leave your biases at the door

Stay for an hour.

Thank the teacher when you are finished

### **Working with Staff and Parent Questionnaires**

Count correctly!

### **The Director**

Staff questionnaires, discuss criteria at staff meeting, but rating is done by the individual

"If you need to, start a subtle IV drip of information for staff and parents so that they are informed and aware. This is not only good for the questionnaires but also for the program."

Do not let parent questionnaires leave the building (you won't get them back!). Refreshments help get them done. "I usually get 99% this way (when sent home questionnaires returned are 15%)."

The questionnaires are part of the center's accreditation and quality information campaign

Accreditation is to ensure and recognize high quality; do not worry if one parent vents

Count, recount, get someone else to count; these are very hard to redo on visit day

### **The Validator**

"The biggest problem I have on-site is a miscount of the ratings."

Check accuracy early so that it can be fixed if incorrect; review accuracy again.

Verify samples: 4 items from 10% of parent questionnaires and 25% of staff questionnaires; 75% of questionnaire responses must agree to rate for 3 rating on validation decision

### **Handling and Reviewing Documents**

Use the Academy Worksheets

Verify that staff qualifications and staffing patterns list the same people.

Documents need to be in one place; this demonstrates preparedness of the center

It is helpful if documents are marked with criteria numbers

Use reference pages in the *Guide to Accreditation* to prepare documents

Make a list of required items in child and staff files; put at front of the folder

If an agency has concerns with having documents accessible to validators, clear this with Academy staff before visit

"If all documents are in a simple crate and marked as to the questions they answer, I can guarantee you'll pick up half an hour of time."

It's easier to have tabbed sections of personnel policies with the required items marked than to spend time reading through the personnel manual

Directors should keep the following in mind: "As a validator you will not evaluate the source of evidence. You will simply verify that the document exists and that it contains the information that is requested in the criterion that is being evaluated": *Validator Manual*

### **Discussion of non-validated items**

#### **Director and Validator**

Be clear that all parties understand the meaning of validated and non-validated

A non-validated item means a difference between what was observed that day and what was submitted on the program description

Verify all non-validated items; review decision rules for program size

Respond to all non-validated items; take the time to discuss and write specific comments

Do not be defensive and do not argue; agree to disagree

If there are major problems or discrepancies or a need for clarification call the Academy

We are on the same side, providing high quality programs for young children

### **Director**

Consider having another staff member with you during the exit interview

Be clear and concise in written responses to non-validated items

Take notes or make copies of the pages where explanations were written

Take time to compose your reply so the commission has a clear picture of the situation

In writing your response to non-validated items, read aloud to see if your response states your intent

It is important to give a full and complete reply for the commissioners to read

### **Validator**

Restate the role of the validator: "The validator's role is to verify the accuracy of the Program Description that will be received by the Commission. Validators do not make accreditation decisions": *Validator Manual*

Give specifics of what was seen, not what was not seen; paint a word picture

Be professional, straightforward and non-threatening

Be tactful; state only what was observed, no more, no less

Help the director discuss and formulate the reply for the commission for non-validated items as the director's response is developed

### **Additional comments for directors**

"The director is the leadership of that program. The director must maintain a positive, courageous attitude about accreditation so that the staff and parents do the same"

This is a learning process, think of non-validated items as areas for future in-service development

Do not submit the program description until you are ready and have made the improvements and changes you want

If your program is consistently high quality it will show

Do not be afraid of a deferral; you can't flunk self-study

Talk to others who have been through the process

Go about your day as normally as possible

### **Additional comments for validators**

Be objective; leave your biases at the door. Enjoy your visit; this is a great learning experience

Do not give advice or consultation

Comment only on what was observed, not what was not observed

"The validator's job is to be the eyes and ears for the academy and report what is seen on the day of the visit."

Smile and be gracious; enjoy your visit

Be organized, prepared and knowledgeable

This is a complex job and can be emotional

"Be flexible, avoid judging too fast or too harshly. Also, don't gloss over problems because you know they have worked hard."

### **Some Comments for Academy staff**

I must admit that the validators who responded love the process, believe in it wholeheartedly and know it produces high quality for children.

"I continue to love doing the validation visits. When I walk in the door in the morning, I know this will be a growing program, one interested in quality. Validating is one of the best professional activities I have done in my 45 year career."

"Thank you for giving me the opportunity to be a part of a program which makes such a difference in the lives of children."

### **The 15 day window for Validation visits**

When it is time for a validation visit, a program can exclude up to 6 days (within a 3-month-period) when it will be closed or does not want the visit to occur. (Visits will not be scheduled on national holidays or days of major religious observances.) The academy will then notify the program of a 15 business-day window during which the visit will take place. In addition, the program will be contacted on the business day before the visit.

## **A Final Word to the Wise**

The system is in the process of major revisions. If you have always meant to do the self-study but haven't gotten around to it, DO NOT WAIT ANY LONGER. There will be a new system in 2005.

And please go to the web site and give feedback for the new suggested criteria. It is very important that the Academy hears from the field about the new and exciting proposed changes.

Melissa Werner, Ph.D., Snead State Community College, P.O. Box 734, Boaz, AL 35957,  
MWerner@Snead.edu. (205)706-5566

[Home](#)

---