**INTRODUCTION:**
FirstSTEP Screening Test for Evaluating Preschoolers is an individually administered screening test designed to identify young children from the ages of 2 years, 9 months to 6 years, 2 months who have a developmental delay.

**PURPOSE AND USE OF FirstSTEP:**
The purpose of FirstSTEP is to determine in which areas of development, if any, require a more comprehensive assessment. The screen is designed to be used as a companion to the MILLER ASSESSMENT FOR PRE-SCHOOLERS or other preschool assessment instruments.

FirstSTEP looks at the domains of Cognition, Communication, Motor, Social Emotional and Adaptive Functioning and is designed to be administered in about 15 minutes time.

**ORGANIZATION OF FirstSTEP:**
The FirstSTEP kit which sells for $175.00 from the Psychological Corporation, comes in a plastic case and contains the FirstSTEP manual, Stimulus booklet, a small package of toys, Record Forms, Score Sheets for the Social Emotional Scale, Adaptive Behavioural Checklist and Parent/Teacher Scale. The examiner is required to obtain some materials such as pennies, ruler and tape.

The screen consists of 72 items grouped into the five domains of Cognition, Communication, Motor, Social-Emotional and Adaptive functioning. Three of the Domains Cognitive, Communication and Motor have been further subdivided into subdomains. Each of these subdomains have been given a “Game Name” to make them more user friendly to the child. An example of a game name is the “Listen Game” which assesses auditory discrimination. In this game the child is required to “listen as the examiner names and points to three pictures with names that sound similar, such as bone, bow and boat. Then the examiner tells the child to point to one of the pictures. This task measures the child’s ability to perceive the sounds being spoken by the examiner.” (FirstSTEP Manual, pg. 7)

The other two domains Social-Emotional and Adaptive Behaviour functioning are tested using rating scales. The testing of these domains is optional and the scores are not included in the composite score. The social-emotional scale is filled out after the child has been tested. In this rating scale the examiner rates the child based on the direct observation of the child during the administration of the test. The scale looks at such things as cooperation, mood and temperament using a 4-point scale ranging from Always to Rarely.

The Adaptive Behaviour Checklist must be completed in conjunction with the child’s parent or someone who is very familiar with the child’s daily routine including feeding, dressing, grooming etc. This checklist comes in three variations depending on the age of the child. In this rating scale the examiner rates the information that was provided by the parent on a 3 point scale from rarely to never independently to usually to always independently.

There is also an optional Parent/Teacher scale. This is used as a supplement the other information obtained from the screen. It is used to help determine the child’s typical behaviour.

**SCORING:**
Instructions for administering scoring individual subdomains are clearly documented in the manual. Raw scores for the 3 domains are obtained by adding the scores from each item and recorded in the appropriate spot on the record form. The examiner then looks at the appropriate column to obtain the domain score. The composite score is obtained by adding up the three domain scores from the cognitive, communication and motor domains.

The social-emotional scale is scored by circulating the appropriate rating on the score sheet, adding the number of ratings for each category, transferring the score to the appropriate box and then multiplying the total by the number listed at the bottom of the score sheet. The three sums are then added to obtain the raw score.
The adaptive behaviour checklist is scored by again circling the appropriate rating on the score sheet. Adding up the scores that go with the rating ie. 0 for rarely, 1 for sometimes and 2 for usually to obtain a raw score.

The parent/teacher scale is scored in a similar manner by circling the rating, adding the columns and multiplying the sum by the appropriate number at the bottom of the score sheet. The raw score is the sum of the three columns multiplied by the appropriate numbers.

INTERPRETATION:
A Colour Classification system is used to help the examiner interpret the child’s composite scores. If the child’s score falls within the green shaded area, it means that the child’s performance is within the acceptable limits and no further investigation is needed. If the child’s score falls within the Yellow shaded area, this means that the child’s performance is below acceptable limits but not so poor to definitely warrant referral. The examiner will have to take into consideration all factors to determine whether to investigate further. If the child’s score falls within the Red shaded area this means that the child’s performance is below limits and requires further assessment.

STANDARDIZATION:
FirstSTEP was developed from research information on the Miller Assessment for Preschoolers. It was developed to meet the need for a reliable, valid and well standardized instrument that can accurately predict children who have a developmental delay.

A random and stratified sampling was used to select the 1,433 children that were part of the norming sample. The sample which included equal numbers of boys and girls was divided into 7 age groupings designed to reflect the U.S. population. The field researchers were selected to reflect the anticipated uses and included professionals such as educators, speech pathologists and occupational therapists.

VALIDITY:
The screen appears to be properly validated. Content validity was done through three approaches. First the items were reviewed by over 50 consultants, second the items were reviewed by a panel of 10 content experts and third the items were evaluated through the standardization process.

Validity of the cut off scores was shown to be approximately 80% meaning that the screen appropriately screens children who have delays or not.

Concurrent validity has also been demonstrated by the high correlation of FirstSTEP to the scales of other assessments.

RELIABILITY
In terms of reliability, the standard error of measurement is generally small indicating that the score obtained is the child’s true score. The test-retest and interrater reliability coefficients were generally high suggesting that FirstSTEP is a stable instrument over time and produces accurate scores.

SUMMARY:
FirstSTEP is an excellent tool to screen children. It fulfills its stated purpose which is to identify children between the ages of 2 and 6 with a developmental delay. FirstSTEP is designed only as the “first step” in identifying children and as stated in the manual is a companion tool of other preschool assessment tools such as the Miller. Not only is the tool user-friendly for teachers, parents and other professionals who wish to use it, but it takes very little time to complete. The screen is easy to administer and scoring procedures for the scales are clearly described in the manual. Interpretation can also be done quickly based on the colour coded system which is apparent right on the record form. The rest has been standardized on a population which although non-Canadian, is similar in many ways. The author has also done extensive work to ensure the test meets the usual criteria for validity and reliability. All in all this would be a great tool to have in any childcare setting to screen your individual or groups of preschool children.

REFERENCE: