



## **2010 Gesell Developmental Observation (GDO) Study Outcomes: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)**

*July 12, 2010*

For the last two years, Gesell Institute of Human Development has coordinated a national effort to collect baseline and exploratory data on the Gesell Developmental Observation (GDO) ©2007. The GDO is an early childhood assessment used by thousands of schools across the U.S. and abroad. Schools from around the country were recruited in 2008-2010 to participate in the GDO study and data has been collected from this diverse sample of over 1,350 children, families, and teachers from each region of the country.

The new data will provide current information and updated trends indicating what children can and cannot do at various developmental stages. New products and materials for the GDO are currently under development based on this data, and a number of questions have come up from our customers, friends, and colleagues. If you have a question that is not answered in this FAQ sheet, please contact us through our website at <http://www.gesellinstitute.org/contact.html>.

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**1. Is there a new GDO?**

Yes and no. The GDO ©2007 is still available in limited quantities. The revised edition, the GDO-R (Revised) ©2010, will be available in Fall 2010 and is highly consistent with the GDO ©2007. Content and administration remain mainly the same, with minimal changes guided by current technical data from the national study for 3-6 year olds. The GDO-R also has a more streamlined design, easier-to-use materials, and current developmental trends by task based on the new data. In addition to the GDO-R, there is now a new and different product. A new screener has been developed consisting of a selection of developmental tasks and a few academic items from the original GDO. This instrument will have objective scoring based on the new data and will be a true screener.

**2. How has the GDO been improved?**

The most significant improvement is that the GDO is now a multi-dimensional assessment system with updated baseline and normative data. The new Teacher and Parent questionnaires enable the examiner to collect information from the multiple environments in which children are immersed. This system meets IDEA and Head Start requirements for assessing the whole child. While the content of the GDO tasks has not changed drastically, the new design is more complete, user-friendly, and streamlined for better understanding and interpretation.

The new professionally designed Examiner's Script contains the same instructions, but in a more user-friendly "flip-book" format, complete with Copy Forms, Visual 1, and Color Forms tasks bound inside the flip-book. No more fussing with putting cards in order or fumbling in the bag! The Child Recording Form has a bound (saddle-stitched) design so that pages stay put and include select perforated pages for the child. Additionally, examiners will notice user-friendly grids for more efficient tabulation and documenting of process and behaviors.

**3. Do I need the new manual?**

Yes, in order to administer and score the GDO-R in a valid manner based on the current technical data, the new Examiner's Manual is required. If you completed a 3-day GDO training workshop in the last five years, you can purchase the new manual at a discounted price.

**4. Can I still use my old GDO kit and forms?**

Yes, the ©2007 GDO kit and Recording Forms can still be used, even with the new data. They will still be available for purchase until supplies run out.

**5. How do these changes affect the 3-day workshops?**

The core content of our 3-day GDO training workshops is not changing, though of course the updated materials will be used in the workshops once they are released in Fall 2010. The training workshops will include scoring using the updated normative data collected in the 2010 study. Also included will be an overview of the proper application of the information obtained through the Teacher and Parent/Guardian Questionnaires.

**6. Will my recent workshop training still be valid for the GDO-R?**

Absolutely – since the content of our GDO workshops is not changing and the content of the assessment itself is changing only minutely, training completed in the last five years remains valid for users of the GDO-R ©2010.

**7. How can I get the new materials if I was trained last year with the “old” materials?**

If you completed a GDO workshop in the last 5 years, you are eligible to purchase the updated GDO-R manual at a discounted price. The ©2007 materials and forms used for administering the assessment can still be used and will be available for sale until supplies run out. Our new professionally designed Examiner’s Script, Child Recording Forms, and GDO-R ©2010 Manual are now available for pre-order with distribution planned for Fall 2010. Teacher and Parent Questionnaires are available for purchase now. Visit our new on-line bookstore to order the questionnaires ([www.gesellinstitute.org/bookstore](http://www.gesellinstitute.org/bookstore)) or call us at 1-800-369-7709 to place a pre-order for the new materials.

**8. Will training workshops still be required in the future?**

Yes and no. Our comprehensive training workshops will continue to be required for examiners of the GDO-R who want to obtain a Developmental Age for each child. No specific training is needed to administer the Gesell Screener, though it is helpful to have some professional training or background to properly administer the screener. The new manual includes some helpful tips and pointers for new examiners as well.

**9. Why does Gesell Institute require training in order to buy the GDO-R?**

We believe that a child is “more than a score.” Dr. Gesell said, “The examiner who is truly imbued with a developmental point of view is keenly sensitive to the past history of the child, and looks upon the... examination, not as a series of proving tests, but as a device or stage for evoking the ways in which this particular child characteristically meets life situations.” Our in-depth training workshops provide examiners with comprehensive information about child development and how to understand a child’s behavior in multiple contexts (home, school, assessment). Workshop participants observe live demonstrations and gain hands-on practice administering and scoring tasks and determining a Developmental Age.

**10. What is Developmental Age?**

Developmental Age (DA) is an interpreted score based on in-depth, systematic observation of the child during the GDO assessment. It is determined by a trained examiner, using accepted developmental patterns of behavior, language, and thinking associated with *chronological* age (child’s age in years and months.) Thus, a child’s Developmental Age reveals how far along a child is on the path of development (physically, intellectually, and socially), irrespective of their chronological age. Many children do not experience consistent growth across the various areas of development, and few children exhibit behaviors that are entirely characteristic of any one Developmental Age. For example, a 4-year-old child may exhibit behaviors and cognitive responses more like a typical 3½-year-old, which can be completely normal. Similarly, a child’s language skills may reflect an older Developmental Age while his or her motor or social skills may be more characteristic of a younger age. A Developmental Age provides a unique profile for each child, and provides more information about what a child is capable of in various domains of development so that teachers can customize appropriate curricula for each child.

**11. How do the GDO-R and the Gesell Screener differ?**

Like the GDO ©2007, the GDO-R is an in-depth, multi-dimensional child assessment. Its purpose is to help educators, parents, and other professionals understand characteristics of child behavior in relation to typical growth patterns. The GDO-R is designed for use with 2½- to 9-year-olds and includes all original GDO ©2007 items with only a few minor edits. These changes include revised interview questions and the substitution of “mews” with “meows” in the Action Agent task. The GDO-R continues to provide a Developmental Age based on in-depth interpretation of the developmental items, just as before. The Gesell Screener is an early screener, based on selected GDO ©2007 items. It provides a quick look at the child and is intended for use with 3- to 6-year-olds. It has fewer items than the GDO-R, is scored objectively, and results in a simple, three-tiered scoring rubric.

**12. What does the Gesell Screener's "three-tiered scoring rubric" mean?**

Based on the national 2010 technical data sample, the simple scoring rubric for the Gesell Screener generates one of three levels for the child. Children scoring in one tier have responses that are essentially average or above average for their age level, indicating no concerns about development at the time of the screening. Scores in a second tier indicate a pattern of incorrect responses relative to the child's age level that prompts mild concern. A child scoring at this tier may need more attention or more individualized instruction, and it would be appropriate to watch the child more closely and retest. Children who score at the third tier exhibit responses well below average for their age level and may benefit from an in-depth assessment and observation.

**13. Will the GDO-R or the Gesell Screener give me a numerical score?**

It is important for any test examiner to be able to interpret a child's test performance in a meaningful way, in relation to some established criterion and/or in relation to his or her peers. Numerical scores can help teachers determine how a child performs compared to other students and can provide a way to aggregate children's performance within or across groups of children.

Each child will receive a numerical score on each GDO-R task based on his or her performance of the items that comprise the task. To aid in the interpreting of the task scores, each task will have a benchmark that reflects the performance that can be expected of a child in each age band. In addition to the task score and benchmark, the technical data supporting the GDO-R—based on a large, diverse, national sample of children—provide the percent of children meeting the benchmark for each developmental task (cubes, copy forms, completing a drawing of a person, etc.) and the p-values for each item for each age band. These technical data provide information that aids in comparing an individual child's performance to a sample of same-age peers.

The Gesell Screener, which is a shorter screening instrument containing 10 developmental and academic tasks, will also have numerical scores and benchmarks. The same research sample and statistical data support the Gesell Screener, and the objective scoring rubric is intended to guide teachers toward further diagnostic testing, subsequent re-screening, or no concerns about development. For both the GDO-R and the Gesell Screener, the scores, benchmarks, and 2010 technical data help users interpret children's responses by ages and stages, but these scores must be interpreted appropriately by experienced educators who know, as Dr. Arnold Gesell said, that "a child is more than a score."

**14. If the Gesell Screener is easier and shorter, why would I use the GDO-R?**

The screener provides a quick, first look at children ages 3 to 6 years old. It can be completed in approximately 15-20 minutes and provides a broad picture of where the child is compared to other children of the same age. The GDO-R, for ages 2½ to 9, is a comprehensive observational assessment of the child, and when combined with information from the accompanying Teacher and Parent Questionnaires, provides a multi-dimensional assessment system. The GDO-R provides in-depth information about the child and includes scoring and interpretation for a Developmental Age. Ideally, the Gesell Screener and GDO-R are used together in an early childhood setting. All children entering preschool or Kindergarten can be screened first using the Gesell Screener for a quick indicator of skills and behaviors, and then later given the complete GDO-R in order for the teacher to fully understand the child's development and to plan appropriate curriculum.

**15. Why would I use the Gesell Screener if the GDO-R is so much more in-depth?**

Both the GDO-R and the Gesell Screener provide knowledge about the child. However, the Screener does so in a much more quick and easy way for the 3-6-year-old child. It is truly a quick screener. As such, it does not provide the in-depth information that the GDO-R provides. The screener provides a quick look at the child with objective academic and developmental tasks, in approximately 15-20 minutes. The Screener also flags if further testing is necessary. What's more, the Screener meets federal mandates for Head Start and IDEA requirements as a quick screener. It not only helps obtain the information needed under these mandates but also helps to meet documentation requirements.

**16. How can I be sure that the 2010 data sample is representative of the children in my school and that the GDO-R is appropriate for my school's needs?**

Understanding a child's developmental profile is an important step in understanding how to customize appropriate early school curricula and experiences. Demographic data collected from the 2008-2010 GDO Study approximates the US Census distribution at a national level. A sample of public, private, urban, and suburban schools, 55 sites spanning 23 US states participated in the study and collected child and family data for over 1,300 children ages 3-6. The Technical Manual for the GDO Study will be available electronically in Fall 2010 and will include additional details regarding sampling procedures and all related statistical analyses. Overviews of both the GDO-R and Gesell Screener will also soon be available for download on our website and will include appropriate and proper uses of both measures.

**17. When will the GDO-R materials and Gesell Screener be available for purchase?**

The updated GDO-R materials and Gesell Screener are available for pre-order now, with distribution planned in October 2010.

**18. Why should I purchase the GDO-R or Gesell Screener?**

The updated technical data and resulting child trends now qualify our assessments to meet the rigorous standards set by the federal government and the American Psychological Association for appropriately meeting the early learning needs of children. By choosing to purchase the GDO-R or the Gesell Screener, you are endorsing not only a respect for child development but a method of child study that dates back to Arnold Gesell's historic work at Yale and as the country's first school psychologist. Data from the 2010 national GDO study backs each and every item on both instruments, including two sub-studies for scoring and interpretation of Developmental Age. Both GDO products support Gesell's view that "a child is more than a score."

**19. How do the GDO-R and the Gesell Screener meet IDEA and Head Start mandates?**

The GDO-R system and the Gesell Screener kit meet evaluation requirements for both Head Start (§ **1304.20**) and Section 614 of **IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act)**. **Namely, both systems meet the following guidelines.**

- In collaboration with each child's parent...obtain linguistically and age appropriate screening procedures to identify concerns regarding a child's developmental, sensory (visual and auditory), behavioral, motor, language, social, cognitive, perceptual, and emotional skills.
- Screening procedures are sensitive to the child's cultural background.
- (Assessment system) utilizes multiple sources of information on all aspects of each child's development and behavior, including input from family members, teachers, and other relevant staff who are familiar with the child's typical behavior.
- Use technically sound instruments that may assess the relative contribution of cognitive and behavioral factors, in addition to physical or developmental factors.

**20. Why should I include the GDO-R or Gesell Screener in my college or university assessment course?**

Assessment courses typically involve exposing students to an array of measurement types and methodologies through currently used assessment tools. Gesell assessments have been widely used across the country for 70 years. The Psychological Corporation published the first version of the GDO in 1940. The current assessment system, titled the GDO-R, has been updated with 2010 technical data from a national sample of 3-6 year olds. The Gesell Screener ©2010 consists of a subset of GDO-R tasks and provides a quick developmental profile for the 3- to 6-year-old child. The GDO-R, a longer but more comprehensive developmental assessment, requires a training workshop for in-depth scoring and interpretation. Both measures are excellent additions to any assessment course, and both are currently available for pre-order, with anticipated distribution in Fall 2010.

**21. What kind of validity and reliability do the GDO-R and Gesell Screener have?**

Content validity was derived by asking experts in the early childhood field the following questions. Does the content of the GDO reflect the information teachers need/want to know? Is the GDO content age appropriate? Is the method for soliciting the information appropriate for children? Is the method for soliciting the information appropriate for teachers? Is the method for soliciting the information appropriate for parents/guardians? Is there any bias for gender, race, age, disability, or socio-economic status? An online survey and a subsequent focus group of current users of the GDO ©2007 were asked similar questions.

Evidence of construct validity comes from the GDO-R and Gesell Screener being based on established theories of child development. Inter-item correlations of the GDO-R and Gesell Screener also provide evidence of construct validity. Reliability was established by calculating internal consistency coefficients and conducting an inter-rater reliability study.

**22. I teach developmental theory but I'm not that familiar with Gesell. Why is Gesell theory important? Could I be missing something?**

Arnold Gesell, PhD, MD was a pioneer in child development, beginning his groundbreaking work in the early 20th century. He developed a set of norms illustrating sequential and predictable patterns of growth and development, used as the basis of the Gesell Developmental Observation. Dr. Gesell was the first director of the Yale University Clinic now known as the Yale Child Study Center, as well as the nation's first school psychologist. He was also a founding member of the National Association for Nursing and Education, now known as the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

Working at Yale from 1911 to 1948, Gesell used innovative methods of observation and cinematography to delineate the *process* of the ages and stages of normative development. Gesell was the first to recognize these stages, which have since become well established in modern day pediatrics and psychology. Gesell sought to document the process of growth for the *whole child*, believing, as we do today, that "a child is more than a score." Additional details about Gesell's maturational theory are provided in the updated GDO-R Examiner's Manual, along with how this theory ties into the work of other well-known theorists such as Piaget and Vygotsky.

*Thank you for your interest in our study outcomes and newly updated products!  
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