TECHNOLOGY

Hawaiian Early Learning Profile Checklist

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Introduction to the Hawaiian Early Learning Profile Checklist

In the vibrant and culturally rich islands of Hawai'i, early childhood development is viewed through a unique lens—one that honors the deep connections between **'ohana** (family), land, language, and community. The **Hawaiian Early Learning Profile Checklist**(often referred to as HELP) is a culturally grounded developmental assessment tool designed to support the growth and well-being of keiki (children) from birth to five years old. Unlike generic developmental checklists, this profile integrates Hawaiian values, traditions, and expectations, ensuring that children's milestones are measured in a way that respects their heritage and environment.

For parents, educators, and early intervention specialists, the Hawaiian Early Learning Profile Checklist serves as a practical roadmap for observing, tracking, and nurturing a child's progress across multiple domains. It offers more than a simple list of skills—it provides a holistic framework that acknowledges the child as part of a larger system of relationships and responsibilities. This article explores every aspect of the checklist, from its core components and cultural foundations to practical strategies for using it effectively with keiki and their families.

Understanding the Hawaiian Early Learning Profile (HELP)

Origins and Cultural Foundation

The Hawaiian Early Learning Profile Checklist was developed with the specific needs of Hawai'i's diverse communities in mind. While many developmental screening tools are based on Western norms, HELP was created collaboratively by local educators, cultural practitioners, speech-language pathologists, and early childhood specialists. The goal was to produce an assessment that reflects the **Hawaiian worldview**, where concepts such as *aloha* (love, compassion), *kuleana* (responsibility), and *laulima*(cooperation) are woven into the definition of healthy development.

The checklist is grounded in the belief that every child is a gift—a *keiki o ka ʻ –æ*(child of the land). Consequently, developmental expectations include not only cognitive and motor skills but also the ability to engage in reciprocal relationships, show respect for elders (*k · Væ*), and participate in simple daily tasks that benefit the **'ohana**. This culturally responsive approach makes HELP an invaluable resource in early childhood settings across Hawai'i, from public preschools to Native Hawaiian immersion programs.

Who Can Use the HELP Checklist?

The Hawaiian Early Learning Profile Checklist is designed for a wide range of users:

- Parents and caregivers who want to understand their child's developmental milestones in a culturally meaningful way.
- Early childhood educators working in Hawaiian-focused programs, Head Start, and family childcare homes.
- Speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, and physical therapists who need a culturally sensitive baseline for assessment and intervention.
- Childcare providers seeking to align their observation practices with the values of the families they serve.
- Early intervention specialists who screen children for potential delays and coordinate services under Part C of IDEA.

Key Components of the Hawaiian Early Learning Profile Checklist

The HELP checklist is organized into developmental domains that cover the full range of early childhood growth. Each domain includes specific behavioral indicators that are observable in natural settings—during play, daily routines, and interactions with family and community. Below are the primary components, with examples of what a parent or professional might look for.

1. Social-Emotional Development: Building Pilina (Relationships)

In Hawaiian culture, the ability to form strong, loving relationships is considered a cornerstone of healthy development. The checklist assesses a child's social-emotional skills through indicators such as:

- Responds to familiar voices and faces with smiles or coos (infant).
- Shows preference for primary caregivers and seeks comfort when distressed.
- Participates in simple hula or movement games with others (toddler).
- Expresses empathy—e.g., pats a crying playmate or offers a toy.
- Demonstrates respect by saying "thank you" (mahalo) or using gentle touch with elders.

2. Language and Communication: ‘ ÆÆVÆò † wai'i and English

Language development in HELP respects both English and Hawaiian languages. The checklist includes milestones for bilingual or immersion settings, such as:

- Imitates simple sounds and words in Hawaiian ("mama," "papa," "wai").
- Uses two-word phrases that combine languages (code-switching is noted as a strength).
- Follows simple directions given in Hawaiian or English.
- Retells a short story or sequence from a familiar mo'olelo (Hawaiian legend).
- Engages in call-and-response chants (oli) with peers.

3. Cognitive Development: Problem-Solving and Exploration

The cognitive domain in the Hawaiian Early Learning Profile Checklist emphasizes hands-on exploration, natural materials, and culturally relevant problem-solving. Indicators include:

- Explores objects by mouthing, shaking, or banging (infant).
- Matches shells, leaves, or stones by size or color.
- Completes simple puzzles with images of native Hawaiian plants or animals.
- Engages in pretend play that reflects daily life—e.g., "fishing," "pounding poi," or "caring for baby."
- Solves a problem by asking a kupuna (elder) for guidance.

4. Motor Development: Gross and Fine Skills for Active Keiki

From crawling on the beach to picking up ‘opihi (limpets), motor skills are assessed in natural contexts. The checklist tracks:

- Rolls over, sits independently, crawls, and walks (gross motor milestones).
- Climbs on low rocks or playground structures (with supervision).
- Picks up small objects like shells or seeds using a pincer grasp.
- Uses tools such as a small spoon, paintbrush, or ‘umeke (calabash) for scooping.
- Balances on one foot while singing a simple song.

5. Adaptive and Self-Help Skills: Kuleana Begins Early

Hawaiian families often encourage children to take on small responsibilities from a young age. HELP includes adaptive milestones that reflect this value:

- Feeds self with fingers or utensils (progressing to using a spoon).
- Helps put away toys or clothes (ho’onoho – to put things in order).
- Washes hands independently (with reminders).
- Assists in simple food preparation, such as husking a banana or washing taro leaves.
- Shows awareness of safety rules, such as staying near an adult near the ocean.

How to Use the Hawaiian Early Learning Profile Checklist with Keiki

Step 1: Observe in Natural Settings

The most effective use of HELP is through naturalistic observation. Parents and teachers are encouraged to watch the child during everyday activities: mealtime, free play, circle time, or family gatherings. The checklist is not meant to be administered like a test; rather, it is a guide for noticing what the child can already do and where they may need support. For example, rather than asking a child to “point to a circle,” observe if they can identify a round *p Ö† ·Ø* (stone) during a beach walk.

Step 2: Check Off Achieved Milestones

Each item on the **Hawaiian Early Learning Profile Checklist** is written in clear, observable language. Users simply mark whether the behavior is “emerging,” “consistent,” or “not yet observed.” It is important to remember that development varies widely among keiki—HELP is designed to show growth over time, not to compare children to each other. Regular documentation (e.g., every three months) allows families to celebrate progress and share insights with healthcare providers.

Step 3: Involve the ‘Ohana

One of the greatest strengths of the HELP checklist is its emphasis on family input. Parents and grandparents often have the richest understanding of a child’s abilities across different contexts. The checklist includes space for **‘ohana observations**, encouraging caregivers to note skills they see at home, during cultural events, or while visiting extended family. This collaborative approach builds trust and ensures that the child’s cultural identity is honored throughout the assessment process.

Step 4: Use as a Conversation Starter

Rather than viewing the checklist as a final report, use it as a tool for dialogue. When a child has not yet met a particular milestone, educators and families can brainstorm together: “How can we create more opportunities for the child to practice sharing with friends?” or “What natural materials in the yard might help strengthen their fine motor skills?” This problem-solving orientation aligns with the Hawaiian concept of *ho’oponopono*—working together to make things right.

Benefits of a Culturally Grounded Developmental Checklist

Aligns with Hawaiian Values

Standard developmental checklists often overlook cultural differences in child rearing. For example, direct eye contact with an adult may be considered a sign of respect in one culture but a sign of defiance in another. HELP accounts for these nuances. The checklist values **‘ohana interdependence** over strict independence; a child who seeks help from a sibling or elder is seen as socially competent, not as lacking autonomy. This cultural alignment reduces the risk of misidentifying typical behavior as a delay.

Supports Bilingual and Immersion Settings

Because the checklist includes milestones in both *‘ ÖÆVÆò †* and English, it is ideal for Hawaiian language

immersion programs (*P ¶æ æ Æ}Vå*nd dual-language classrooms. A child who code-switches or uses Hawaiian sentence structures is not penalized—instead, their linguistic flexibility is recognized as a strength. HELP can also inform curriculum planning, helping teachers choose culturally relevant books, songs, and activities that reinforce developmental targets.

Promotes Early Identification and Intervention

When a child shows consistent difficulty with certain milestones—such as not babbling by 12 months or not walking by 18 months—the checklist provides clear documentation for referral to early intervention services in Hawai'i. Programs like the **Hawai'i Early Intervention Section**

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