

# Embedding Assessment into Daily Activities and Routines

## INTRODUCTION

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## Embedding Assessment into Daily Activities and Routines

Early interventionists and early childhood special educators are often asked why they are doing what they are doing. One answer can be that their professional organization has identified certain practices as evidence-based and best practices. This packet reflects recommendations from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) of the Council for Exceptional Children.

Information contained in this technical assistance packet supports the following NAEYC professional guidelines for professionals in early childhood education (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

- Guideline 3: A1. Teachers consider what children should know, understand, and be able to do across the domains of physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development and across the disciplines, including language, literacy, mathematics, social studies, science, art, music, physical education, and health (p. 20)
- Guideline 3: A2. If state standards or other mandates are in place, teachers become thoroughly familiar with these (p. 20)
- Guideline 4: Assessment of children's development and learning is an essential for teachers and programs in order to plan, implement, and evaluate the effectiveness of the classroom experiences they provide. Assessment also is a tool for monitoring children's progress toward a program's desired goals. ... Teachers cannot be intentional about helping children to progress unless they know where each child is with respect to learning goals (p. 21-22).
- Guideline 4:A. Assessment of young children's progress and achievements is ongoing, strategic, and purposeful. The results of assessment are used to inform the planning and implementation of experiences, to communicate with the child's family, and to evaluate and improve teachers' and the program's effectiveness (p. 22).
- Guideline 4:C. There is a system in place to collect, make sense of, and use the assessment information to guide what goes on in the classroom (formative assessment). Teachers use this information in planning curriculum and learning experiences and in moment-to-moment interactions with children—that is, teachers continually engage in assessment for the purpose of improving teaching and learning (p.22).
- Guideline 4:E. Assessment looks not only at what children can do independently but also at what they can do with assistance from other children or adults. Therefore, teachers assess the children as they participate in groups and other situations that are providing scaffolding (p. 22)

Information contained in this technical assistance packet supports the following DEC recommended practices for professionals in early childhood special education and early intervention (Sandall, Hemmeter, Smith, & McLean, 2005).

- A13. Professionals use multiple measures to assess child status, progress, and program impact and outcomes (e.g., developmental observations, criterion/curriculum-based, interviews, informed clinical opinion, and curriculum-compatible norm referenced scales). (p. 53)
- A15. Professionals rely on materials that capture the child’s authentic behaviors in routine circumstances (p. 54).
- A17. Professionals assess children in contexts that are familiar to the child (p. 54).
- A20. Professionals assess the child’s strengths and needs across all developmental and behavioral dimensions (p. 55).
- A24. Professionals assess not only immediate mastery of a skill, but also whether the child can demonstrate the skill consistently across other settings and with other people (p. 56).
- A27. Professionals and families rely on curriculum-based assessment as the foundation or “mutual language” for team assessments (p. 57).
- A28. Professionals conduct longitudinal, repeated assessments in order to examine previous assumptions about the child and to modify the ongoing program (p. 57).
- A41. Professionals monitor child progress based on past performance as the referent rather than on group norms (p. 60).
- A44. Professionals and families conduct an ongoing (formative) review of the child’s progress at least every 90 days in order to modify instructional and therapeutic strategies (p. 61).
- A45. Professionals and families assess and redesign outcomes to meet the ever changing needs of the child and family (p. 61).
- A46. Professionals and families assess the child’s progress on a yearly (summative) basis to modify the child’s goal-plan (p. 61).

One of the most important yet neglected responsibilities in the field of early childhood is the ongoing assessment of individual and group progress in relation to the classroom curriculum. Ongoing assessment refers to the frequent and systematic collection and analysis of data to determine child progress and make instructional decisions that will support and promote the achievement of identified child outcomes. Early childhood professionals often report they do not have enough time to continually assess and reassess all of the children for whom they are responsible. While the creation of a system for ongoing assessment of child progress may seem daunting, early childhood professionals cannot absolve themselves of this important responsibility. Not only are there legal requirements for reporting progress to parents of children with IEPs (at least as often as progress reports are made to students in general education, IDEA 2004), recommended practices for early childhood special education call for repeated assessment of children across “all developmental and behavioral dimensions” (Sandall, Hemmeter, Smith, & McLean, 2005, p. 55) in order to “examine previous assumptions about the child, and to modify the ongoing program” (Sandall, et al., p. 57).

NAEYC guidelines (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009) suggest that all early childhood teachers should be highly intentional in their focus on the key skills and behaviors children need to acquire in order to make optimal progress. Teachers can only be intentional if they know where each child is performing in relation to curriculum goals. This calls for a system for collecting, recording, interpreting, and using assessment information to improve teaching and learning in the classroom. To benefit from early childhood programs, young children must be engaged in learning opportunities that are developmentally and individually appropriate, child centered, actively engaging and challenging (Sandall, et al., 2005). This cannot be done randomly, and therefore requires purposeful planning, based on ongoing assessment that is anchored in child development and linked to curricular content. Although not a curriculum, the Kansas Early Learning document (2009) provides an overview of the sequential skills and behaviors young children should have and can learn in order to be successful in kindergarten and beyond.

There is a plethora of information and guidance regarding recommended practices for ongoing assessment of progress for young children with disabilities (Sandall, et al., 2005; Sandall, Giacomini, Smith, & Hemmeter, 2006; Sandall & Schwartz, 2008) Likewise there are guidelines and resources to support ongoing assessment of children who are typically developing in preschool settings (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). What is needed to support the inclusion of children with IEPs in settings with their typical peers are specific, effective strategies for monitoring the progress of *all* children in a classroom toward the accomplishment of general education curriculum goals.

Therefore, the purpose of this packet is to suggest strategies for ongoing assessment that can be carried out within the context of a developmentally appropriate preschool classroom that includes children with a wide range of abilities, some with IEPs. Sample activities are

provided to illustrate ways in which teachers can effectively and efficiently collect and use data to make instructional decisions aimed at improving outcomes for *all* children. Proactively designing and scheduling ongoing assessment activities linked to the curriculum and early learning standards helps to ease the burden felt by early childhood professionals, and allows them to collect the information needed to continually adapt learning opportunities and interventions for individuals and groups of children in their classroom.

### [The Good News](#)

One of the most difficult tasks in designing a system for monitoring ongoing progress is choosing assessment tools and strategies that are appropriate for young children and will provide meaningful and useful information. The good news for special education professionals in Kansas is that, due to the ECO reporting requirement, programs serving young children with disabilities should already be collecting information and using assessment tools designed for this purpose. In 2006, school districts serving young children with disabilities were required to select and begin using a curriculum based assessment (CBA) tool from one of the following eight approved measures:

- Assessment and Evaluation Programming System (AEPS)
- Carolina Curriculum
- Child Observation Record (High Scope)
- Creative Curriculum
- Hawaii Early Learning Profile (HELP)
- Individual Growth and Development Indicators (IGDIs)
- Transdisciplinary Play Based Assessment
- Work Sampling System

Districts were instructed to use their selected CBA as a part of the initial evaluation and subsequent re-evaluation of children entering and exiting a Part B (Preschool) program. Kansas requires the CBA be administered at only two points (entry into the Part B Program, Part B Program), however these tools can be much more useful to programs when they are administered more frequently with the express purpose of monitoring goal attainment and to document progress in a general education curriculum aligned with state early learning standards.

While having and using a CBA is a major step toward developing an ongoing assessment system, teachers and other early childhood professionals must have a good understanding of where such measures fit into the overall standards-based curricular framework. They must also be able to identify how their CBA tool can be used as a developmentally appropriate assessment practice

embedded in everyday activities/routines, and be able to prioritize the skills and knowledge that children should demonstrate as they move through the early childhood programs. They must be able to employ a system that allows children’s performance to be easily assessed, recorded and analyzed. Many of the Kansas approved CBA tools provide these elements. The Assessment, Evaluation, and Programming System (AEPS) is one such tool.

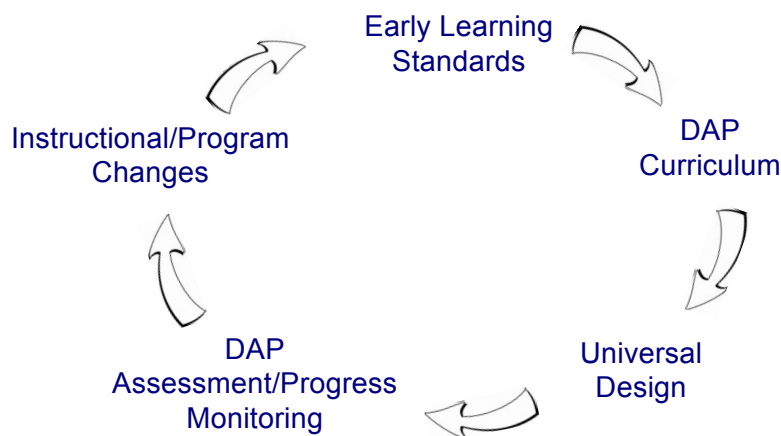
Based on the first author’s extensive classroom experience with the AEPS, and because it has been aligned with the Kansas Early Learning standards (downloaded 6-3-11 from [http://www.aepsinteractive.com/state\\_standards.htm](http://www.aepsinteractive.com/state_standards.htm), it is used to illustrate how districts can utilize a CBA as a focal point for creating an ongoing assessment system. The use of the AEPS examples does not imply an endorsement of this measure by KITS over other CBA tools.

Information about all eight of the curriculum-based assessments approved for use in reporting child progress on Early Childhood Outcomes can be downloaded from <http://www.kskits.org/ta/ECOOutcomes/Index.shtml>

### Standards Based Curricular Framework

A standards based curricular framework is the blueprint for implementing state identified early learning standards. State standards are implemented through the use of an aligned curriculum that is utilized to meet group and individual needs through a system of ongoing assessment and data analysis. Therefore all the components of the framework are linked and move in a continuous improvement pattern.

The following provides a more in-depth look at the specific elements within a standards based curricular framework outlining how each step contributes to quality programming for all young children and their families.



## Early Learning Standards

Professionals and families are well aware of the standards movement that has swept across our nation's elementary and secondary school systems in the last decade. States were directed to develop and implement high academic standards from which yearly progress could be gauged and overall performance of the educational system could be evaluated. The idea of high standards did not stop with elementary and secondary school systems. With the passage of "No Child Left Behind" and other education initiatives states were once again directed to develop and implement learning standards, this time for its youngest citizens. Kansas began the task in 2003, published the Kansas Early Learning Document (KSELD) in the fall of 2006, and revised the document in 2009. It is available for download from <http://www.ksde.org/Default.aspx?tabid=3321>

The KSELD is divided into two sections: 1) Early Learning Guidelines (KSELD-ELG), and 2) Early Learning Standards (KSELD-ELS). The KSELD-ELG provides a general overview and examples of some of the skills and knowledge children should possess at certain ages. The KSELD-ELS provides broad statements of what children should know and be able to do as a result of attending a high quality early learning program.

## A Closer Look at the KSELD-ELS

The KSELD-ELS was created by a diverse group of early childhood stakeholders using current research and evidence regarding early learning. It serves as a framework for designing and implementing meaningful curricula and intentional learning experiences by outlining a specified scope and sequence from which broad learning goals and individual needs can be identified and measured against. It was created with an understanding that young children grow and develop at a wide and variable rate, and reflects the need to connect learning to both developmental and content areas (Grisham-Brown, Hemmeter & Pretti-Frontczak, 2005).

The KSELD-ELS is divided into eight developmental content areas:

- Physical Development
- Social Emotional Development
- Communication & Literacy
- Approaches to Learning
- Science
- Mathematical Knowledge
- Social Studies
- Fine Arts

Within each of the content areas specific standards, benchmarks and indicators are provided. The standards are statements describing the expectations for skills and knowledge that young children ages birth through five should know and be able to do as a result of participating in high quality

early childhood programs. Benchmarks break the standard down into increments, and are used to gauge child progress toward meeting the standard. Indicators follow each benchmark and are example behaviors of knowledge or skills that children might demonstrate at different levels of development in order to meet the benchmark.

The KSELD-ELS reflects a wide range of abilities and expectations, and helps create a common language from which to discuss children's capabilities and accomplishments. It provides a framework for accountability; however, the primary purpose is to improve instruction. While standards help identify what children should know and be able to do, they don't provide methods for achieving the standard, nor do they address how progress will be assessed. Therefore, accomplishment of the standards relies on the alignment and implementation of a developmentally appropriate curriculum and authentic assessment practices. Authentic assessment refers to "the systematic collection of information about the naturally occurring behaviors of young children and families in their daily routines" (Neisworth & Bagnato, 2004, p. 203).

### [Developmentally Appropriate Curriculum Aligned to the KSELD-ELS](#)

To benefit from early childhood programs young children must be engaged in learning opportunities that are: 1) developmentally and individually appropriate, 2) child centered, and 3) actively engaging and challenging (Sandall, Hemmeter, Smith & McLean, 2005). Therefore a developmentally appropriate curriculum is designed to promote learning environments that are responsive, predictable, challenging and provide multiple opportunities for learning through activities that have been matched to the interests and needs of individual children. The following are characteristics of a high quality program utilizing a developmentally appropriate curriculum:

- Schedules are divided into segments appropriate to children's needs and include outdoor time
- Activities are balanced between active/quiet/ child-initiated/teacher directed
- Opportunities for large /small group participation, as well time alone or with friends
- Adequate time for routines (e.g. toileting, snacks and transitions)
- Learning environments are designed utilizing the principles of universal design
- The daily routine, play opportunities and transition activities are structured to promote interaction and communication
- Adults are responsive to the child and expand on the child's play/behavior

(Conn-Powers, Cross, Traub, & Hutter-Pishgahi, 2006; Sandall, et al., 2005; Fox, Dunlap, Hemmeter, & Strain, 2003; Brown, Odom, & Conroy, 2001; Schwartz, Carta, & Grant, 1996; Wolery & Wilbers, 1994). For more information on Developmentally Appropriate Practices, you can download the 2011 KITS technical assistance packet on the topic at <http://www.kskits.org/ta/Packets/DevApprPractices.shtml>



Young children learn best through learning opportunities that are integrated, build on their interests, and allow for the development of knowledge and skills in activities that are meaningful to their lives (Grisham-Brown, et al., 2005). Such learning opportunities do not happen randomly. They require purposeful planning rooted in child development and based on the most current research, all of which can be achieved through the implementation of a developmentally appropriate curriculum.

Curriculum provides specific information regarding how, when, where, and under what circumstances children will achieve the early learning standards. Curriculum provides direction for organizing and planning teaching through daily activities, identification of specific materials, environmental arrangement, and utilization of specific intervention strategies. Curriculum extends the standards by addressing additional learning goals that fit within the learning theory from which the curriculum was constructed.

While the curriculum identifies how the standards will be achieved, assessment activities help determine if learning has been accomplished, and if not, provides information regarding what still must be taught and/or what changes need to be made in specific teaching practices.

### Universal Design

*Universal design for learning* (UDL) is a broad term used to describe the proactive planning and creation of learning opportunities that allow *all* children to access, participate in and benefit from the general education curriculum as required in the IDEA amendments of 2004, increasing the likelihood of positive outcomes for *all* children (DEC, 2007). In anticipation of the wide range of abilities/differences among each and every learner, the teacher designs the learning content, environment and assessment activities in such a way that all children can be involved in the learning experiences (Rose & Meyer, 2000).

The essential components of a curriculum framework based on universal design for learning would include:

- Multiple means of representation (e.g., how information and content can be presented)
- Multiple means of engagement (e.g., how to interest students in learning and motivate them to stay interested)
- Multiple means of expression (e.g., how students can demonstrate what they have learned)

For more information about UDL visit the National Center on Universal Design for Learning at [www.udlcenter.org](http://www.udlcenter.org) or the Center for Applied Special Technology/CAST at [www.cast.org](http://www.cast.org).

## Developmentally Appropriate Assessment Practices

The term assessment refers to the “process of gathering information for the purposes of making decisions” (McConnell, McEvoy, Carta, Greenwood, Kaminski, Good, Shinn, Ysseldyke, & Goldbert, 1998, p. 2.). Evaluation, on the other hand, is the process of making a decision based on specific assessment information (Bagnato, Neisworth, & Munson, 1997). Therefore, assessment and evaluation imply that, at some point, decisions will be made and some action will follow that will facilitate learning.

In the field of early childhood there are five general purposes for assessment and evaluation.

- 1) **Screening** – (a) developmental screening: quick assessments used to determine if a child’s development/skills fall within an age expected range and if not determines a need for more comprehensive assessment and evaluation, (b) universal screening: quick assessments used to determine general skill levels within core curriculum areas. These assessments are administered to an entire class, grade level, etc. at specified times in the year (generally fall, winter, spring), and provide information that can be used to identify groups in need of further supplemental or intensive instruction.
- 2) **Eligibility Determination** – Evaluation information and procedures used to determine if a child meets certain requirements that entitle him/her for specific services (e.g. early intervention/ special education).
- 3) **Program Planning** – Assessments used to identify a child’s present level of function/ performance within the overall learning program, as well as specific strengths, needs, interests, or other information that can be used in the development of an individualized program (e.g. IEP).
- 4) **Progress Monitoring** – Ongoing assessment methods and strategies used to track performance on specific targets, skills, or processes. This information is collected and analyzed frequently (e.g., alphabet awareness) or continuously (progress on CBA) in order to adapt teaching methods and facilitate learning, as well as for more formal reporting requirements (e.g. IEP progress monitoring as required by IDEA).
- 5) **Program Evaluation** –Systematic assessment of the effects of the broad overall program practices on individual or groups of children. Information is used to evaluate program goals, highlight effective practices, identify the need for change in areas of weakness, plan for program improvement, determine professional development needs of staff, and ensure stakeholder satisfaction.

As mentioned earlier, curriculum-based assessment (CBA) is an effective way to gather information used for program planning and monitoring child progress in the general early education curriculum. CBA is a form of criterion-referenced measurement, which utilizes curriculum objectives as the “criteria” that serve as targets for instruction from which to assess status and monitor performance (Bagnato, 2007). CBA breaks up the curriculum into developmental hierarchies and domains, and often provides tools for recording achievement and mastery. These assessments illustrate where a child’s skills fall within each domain, providing a starting point for instruction and baseline information for ongoing assessment of progress.

CBA tools are either curriculum-referenced or curriculum-embedded. Curriculum-referenced assessments measure specific skills common to most curricula, but are not created from a specific curriculum. Curriculum-embedded assessments use specific curriculum content and objectives for assessment and teaching purposes. Therefore, professionals using a curriculum-embedded tool assess children using classroom activities and not a separate procedure, alleviating concern that children’s skills are being measured accurately and reflect a child’s true abilities (Bagnato, 2007). All eight of the Kansas approved CBAs are curriculum-embedded assessments and can be used for developmentally appropriate program planning and progress monitoring.

The AEPS tool is used in this packet to demonstrate how assessment can be embedded within curriculum based activities. However, the general steps and processes outlined here can be applied to *any* CBA to allow for continuous monitoring of objectives and learning goals.

### [Instructional/Program Changes](#)

A final link in the process of ongoing assessment is the use of information that has been collected for the purpose of changing instructional practice for individual children and/or the entire class. For individual children who do not seem to be making appropriate progress, teachers can adjust/modify the environment, interactions, or activities and experiences to positively impact learning. When a large number of children are unable to reach identified learning goals in a specific domain, it may be necessary for the teacher to re-evaluate the appropriateness of the specific learning goals in question. If it is believed that the learning goals continue to be appropriate, then changes in the daily schedule, teaching strategies, styles of interactions, interest area arrangements, materials, or the design and implementation of small group work may be what is required. This information can also be used to re-evaluate the effectiveness of the overall curriculum (e.g. average performance of children within domains), and shared with family members, boards of directors or others who may support the ongoing needs of the preschool program.