

Embedding Assessment into Daily Activities and Routines

SETTING THE STAGE FOR ONGOING ASSESSMENT

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What's Going on in the Classroom?

In preparation for creating an ongoing curriculum based assessment system for the classroom, it is first necessary to review the developmentally appropriate learning opportunities and practices from which assessment activities may be identified and/or embedded.

- **Child Initiated Activities:** Child initiated activities provide an opportunity for children to self select activities they find highly enjoyable. These activities typically take place during “center-time” or “free-choice time” and are designed by the teacher to provide opportunities for children to become fully engaged with specific media or materials allowing plenty of time for practice and mastery of multiple skills. These types of activities provide an excellent opportunity to assess the progress or mastery of certain skills and provide a natural context in which children are likely to spontaneously exhibit the target skill without being directed to perform a task.
- **Adult Directed Activities:** For a portion of the preschool day children spend time in activities that are designed and directed by the teacher or other adults. Most often these activities are conducted through whole or small group instruction and, on occasion, individual instruction. Adult directed activities provide opportunities for the introduction of new concepts and a starting point for new skill development. These activities can be used to gather information regarding the type of targeted support a child may need to actually master new information.
- **Whole Group Activities:** Once or twice during a preschool session children may be gathered into one group to participate together as a classroom community. Circle time is one example of such an activity. Whole group activities promote a sense of community membership, provide an opportunity to practice group skills, and at times introduce themes and topics that will be expanded on throughout the course of the preschool day/week. Assessment within whole group activities provides more of a challenge for the teacher and therefore should be used minimally for this purpose. Whole group activities can be used to assess group membership skills such as sitting and listening to someone while speaking, choral responses, etc., but may not provide reliable opportunities for assessing content specific skills.
- **Small Group Activities:** Small group instruction is used to introduce new concepts or skills to a group of two to five children. Activities taking place in small groups provide excellent opportunities to assess children’s learning rate when they are presented new information. Small group activities also provide an opportunity to determine the types of assistance individual children need to acquire new skills, overall skill development

and mastery of the identified skills to be learned. It is important to keep in mind during which children are to be assessed must be *highly motivating*.

- **Individual Instruction:** In some instances and situations it may be appropriate and necessary to provide instruction to a single child. These situations should be limited to instances to support children in mastering very specific skills or tasks. This can also provide the adults in the classroom the opportunity to complete focused assessment. A critical feature to individual instruction will be the transfer of skills to general classroom activities and routines.

Example of Small Group Assessment Activity:

The following picture shows students playing Hasbro's Candyland Castle™, a highly preferred activity in a preschool classroom, and one that provides opportunities for children to practice multiple skills across domains. In the small group pictured below, one child working on learning new skills, one child was practicing emerging skills, and the third child was generalizing skills previously mastered with a different game. For the students pictured, the teacher targeted the following skills for assessment, reflecting the range in their development.

- Fine motor: use of 3 finger grasp of small implement; use of both hands to perform different movements
- Gross motor: standing with support
- Cognition: understanding of colors, shapes, spatial and temporal relations concepts; sequencing; problem solving; engaging in game with rules
- Social communication: using language for various functions (e.g., to request, inform, direct, ask questions); using various grammatical forms (nouns, verbs, pronouns, descriptive words)
- Social: initiating and responding to social interaction; turn taking



- **Routine Activities:** Some activities take place every day as a part of the normal preschool routine. Routine activities such as arrival, snack, transitions, outdoor play, bathroom and dismissal provide opportunities for multiple observations of target skills. At times teachers may embed additional learning activities within a given routine to provide extra opportunities for practice or assessment of certain skills. For example during transition times between activities the teacher may engage children in short listening/imitation games where a small number of skills can be exhibited.

Helpful Idea: Transitions

Teachers can utilize smaller portions of the day to embed opportunities for practice and mastery of skills, which in turn lend themselves for data collection. One such example is transitions between activities. The challenge of a successful group transition is keeping children positively engaged until the next activity occurs with limited “sit and be quiet” wait time. Songs and movement activities used as part of the transition provide a perfect opportunity for additional practice and measurement of skills.

What’s Going On During Outdoor Time?

Typically, outdoor time is an unstructured period where children can engage in a variety of gross motor, fine motor and social skill activities. With a little planning, this time can be used to practice specific skills and allow for the collection of targeted curriculum assessment data.

Gross motor skills may not spontaneously occur or be easily measured in traditional free choice playground activities. Inserting a brief, five-minute planned activity at the beginning of each outdoor time along with the rotation of supplemental playground materials, can provide an opportunity for children to practice (and teachers to measure) specific gross motor skills.



Helpful Ideas: Assessing Gross Motor Skills

Traditional children's games can be modified to fit targeted goals and objectives. "Red Light, Green Light" can be modified to include a wide variety of gross motor skills: running, running around obstacles, jumping with both feet, walking on tip-toes, hopping on one foot and/or skipping. To modify the game the leader announces the gross motor skill that will be used before saying "Green Light". To assist preschool students in playing the modified version of "Red Light, Green Light" large red and green circles can be placed on large cards. The cards will provide students with a visual cue to start and stop. Picture cards with symbols and words can also be made for each targeted gross motor skill. To increase student participation, allow students to take turns choosing a specific gross motor skill from a few targeted skills. Once the game has been taught, the cards can be available during outdoor free time for students to use independently with a group of friends. Other games that can easily be modified include, but are not limited to: "Simon Says", "Ring-Around-the-Rosie" and "Follow the Leader".

Rotation of supplementary materials during outdoor time is another way to provide practice and measurement of gross motor, fine motor and social skills. Tubs of materials can be placed on the playground (e.g., assorted sizes of balls which lend themselves to throwing, catching or kicking, Frisbees, ring-toss, sidewalk chalk, koosh balls or bean bags with tubs or buckets to throw into, tricycles, scooters, sandbox toys and assorted paint brushes with buckets of water). Children will look forward to the addition of new materials, increasing the likelihood that they will participate, while the teacher has the opportunity to plan for specific skill practice/measurement.

Transition between activities is also a good time to practice or measure gross motor development. For examples, as students join circle time, have them practice standing/hopping on one foot or imitating hand gestures. Using children's music DVDs or CDs can also allow practice of gross motor skills. "The Wiggles™", a popular children's singing group has several songs that encourage children to practice gross motor movements.

Steps to Developing an Ongoing System for Measuring Progress on CBAs

Creating a Visual Map of Learning Goals/Objectives

Creating a visual map of the curriculum goals and objectives is the first step in creating a system for collecting classroom data. Many teachers report feeling overwhelmed when first reviewing the seemingly large number of goals and objectives to be covered in a single CBA tool. Typically these measures span a wide age range, sometimes including goals and objectives from birth through age five or beyond. In most classrooms, the overall number of goals/objectives can be reduced to reflect the (chronological and developmental) ages being taught. A visual map helps to narrow the focus by identifying only the goals/objectives that will be covered within the program year for a specific classroom. In addition, a visual map can help teachers familiarize themselves with the specific goals and objectives that they will be measuring. In essence, the visual map is a snapshot of the curriculum for a year.

Using the AEPS Child Progress Record as a Visual Map

The AEPS Child Progress Record II (Bricker, Pretti-Frontczak, Johnson, & Straka, 2002) provides a succinct view of the goals and objectives to be taught and measured over the span of a child's development. This form was designed to provide a visual display of current abilities, intervention targets and child progress all in one form.

Figure 1 shows the first page of the AEPS Child Progress Record II. To use this form to create a visual map, a highlighter is used to underline the arrows below each of the goals and objectives to be measured for the year. For teachers serving children in multi-age classrooms or for homogeneous classrooms of four-year-old children, this step may not be necessary (in those cases all goals and objectives would be highlighted). Teachers serving younger children may determine that not all the goals and objectives will be taught within a given school year. In those cases specific goals/objectives would be identified and highlighted with a marker and then be used as a reference point from which to plan learning activities, record group and individual progress, and analyze the overall effectiveness of the program.

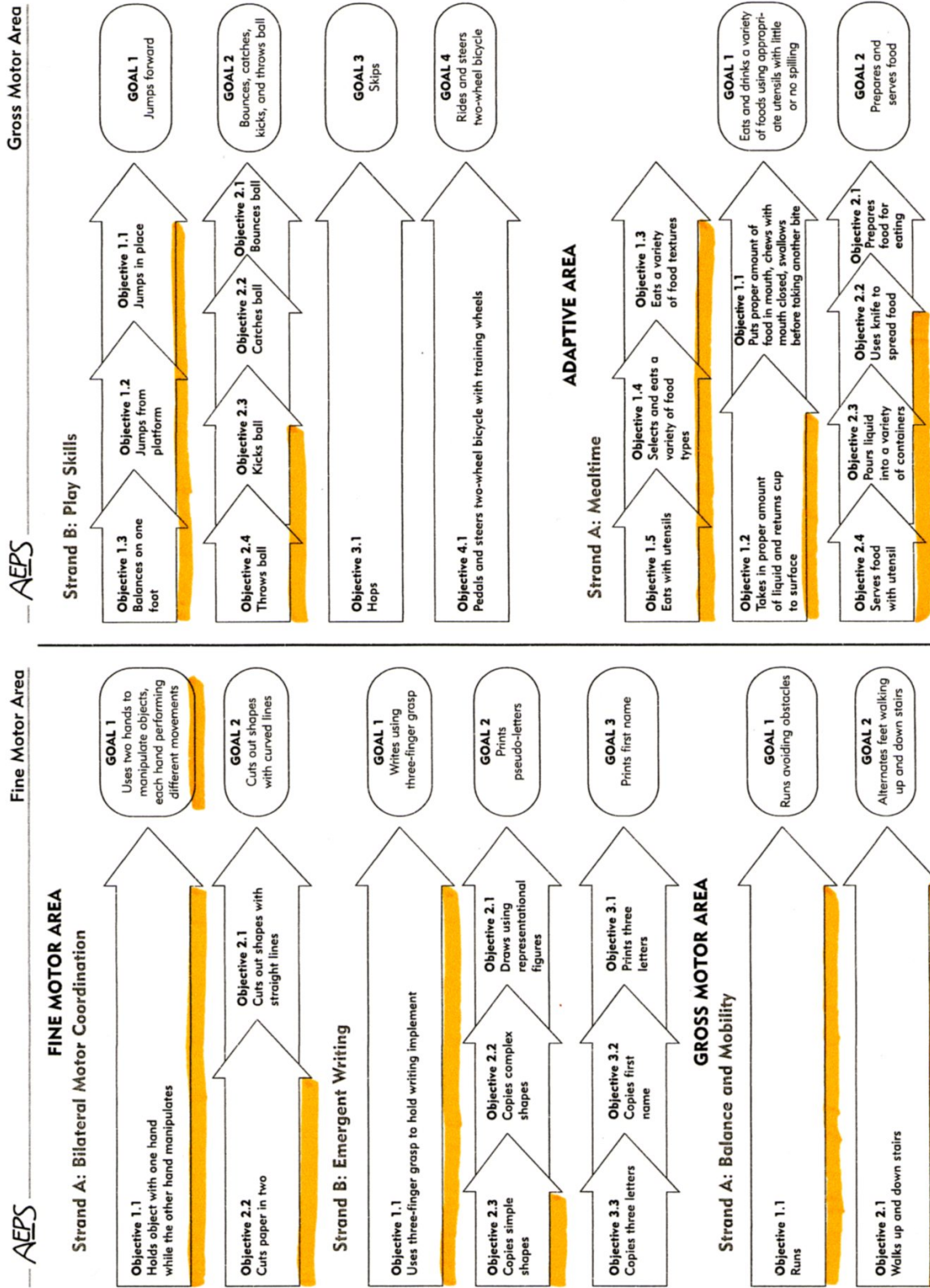
Teachers using a CBA that does not provide a visual record for documenting child progress can create their own graphic display of their curriculum goals and objectives using the AEPS Child Progress Record format as a template. Teachers may want to expand on the AEPS display format to create a visual map of their own that incorporates

goals from additional curricular materials (i.e., supplemental literacy or social skills curricula) and provides a visual alignment with the Kansas Early Learning Document (KSELD) Early Learning Standards (ELS). The publisher of the AEPS has created a visual alignment of the tool with the KSELD/ELS, available for download from http://www.aepsinteractive.com/state_standards.htm.

If you use other curriculum materials, contact the publisher to ask if they have completed (or are willing to complete) an alignment with the KSELD/ELS. For additional information on curriculum alignment with the KSELD/ELS, download Section V How to Use the Kansas Early Learning Standards <http://www.ksde.org/Default.aspx?tabid=3321>.



Figure 1



Assessment, Evaluation, and Programming System for Infants and Children (AEPS[®]), Second Edition, edited by Diane Bricker © 2002 Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., Inc. All rights reserved.

Assessment, Evaluation, and Programming System for Infants and Children (AEPS[®]), Second Edition, edited by Diane Bricker © 2002 Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., Inc. All rights reserved.

Bricker, D., Pretti-Frontczak, Johnson, J. J., & Straka, E. (2002). *Assessment, evaluation, and programming system for infants and children: Administration guide* (Vol. 1, 2nd ed., pp. 284-285). Baltimore: Brookes. Adapted with permission

Reviewing Classroom Schedules/Routines to Embed Assessment Activities

Once the visual map has been created, the next step is to take a closer look at the classroom schedule, routines and activities and identify the specific learning goals and objectives to be assessed. The following are just a *few* examples of possible learning objectives from the AEPS that could be assessed within a typical preschool schedule:

- **Arrival:** Greeting, responding, interacting, dressing/undressing, sequencing
- **Free Choice:** Most skills, depending on the activity, e.g., engaging in cooperative, imaginary play, problem-solving, using language for different functions, initiating and responding to requests for social interaction, initiating and completing age-appropriate activities
- **Circle Time:** Group membership skills such as following rules, participation in a group, social communication, recalling events, counting
- **Bathroom time:** Personal hygiene, dressing/undressing, sequencing
- **Snack:** Social communication, eating with utensils, group participation, knowledge of self and others
- **Transitions:** Classroom rules, following directions, cooperation, recall, sequencing, one-to-one correspondence
- **Outdoor:** Gross motor skills, social interaction, follows rules/safety, dressing
- **Small Group:** Most skills, depending on the activity, e.g., using two hands to manipulate objects, cutting, writing, demonstrating understanding of concepts, phonological awareness, asking and answering questions that require reasoning, use of verbs, nouns, pronouns, descriptive words, word endings
- **Dismissal:** Dressing/undressing, sequencing, recall



The AEPS includes sets of assessment activities to help teachers assess individual children across a variety of settings, or to facilitate assessment of a group of children simultaneously. The activities are included in *Appendix A* of the *Volume 2 Test: Birth to Three Years and Three to Six Years* (Bricker, et al., 2002). They are also available online with a subscription to the AEPSi. Read about the rationale for creating and using assessment activities that fit within the daily schedule at home or in centers at www.aepslinkedssystem.com/pdf/Activities.pdf.

Teachers using different CBAs may find the AEPS assessment activities helpful in designing similar types of assessment activities based on their own CBA.

It is important to remember that while all learning activities serve a purpose, not all lend themselves to curriculum assessment. In general, the best activities for measuring progress are highly motivating, open-ended, elicit a variety of skills across a number of domains, and provide the “biggest bang for the buck” in terms of assessment. Illustrations of strategies for embedding skills assessment into popular learning centers are provided in the next section.

Learning, Practice, Mastery

Children need ample time to learn, practice, and master newly introduced skills or information. Teachers must keep this in mind when assessing mastery of new skills. We recommend that children attending a four or five day-a-week preschool program be given approximately three weeks from the time a new skills/information has been introduced before assessing for skill mastery. Within this three-week period, teachers will observe children provide scaffolding to support their learning and mastery. Not all children being assessed will exhibit mastery at the same time. Your assessment results, however, will provide the information needed to make appropriate instructional changes for groups and individual children.