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Embedding Assessment of Young Children Into Routines of Inclusive Settings:

A Systematic Planning Approach

In recent years, inclusion has become a more prevalent service delivery option for preschool children with disabilities (Odom, 2000; U. S. Department of Education, 2001). One outcome of this trend to provide services for young children with disabilities in natural environments has been the emergence of curricula with underpinnings of naturalistic interventions. This is exemplified in curricula such as *Assessment, Evaluation, and Programming System for Infants and Children (AEPS): Volume 4—Curriculum for Three- to Six-Year Olds, Second Edition* (Bricker & Waddell, 2002) and *An Activity-Based Approach to Early Intervention* (Bricker, 1998). Naturalistic interventions are well suited to young children and teachers in inclusive environments because objectives are addressed in the regular routines of the day (Odom, 2000). Likewise, naturalistic assessment methods are appropriate for young children and teachers as ongoing performance observations occur during daily routines.

National guidelines for early childhood and early childhood special education support the premise of naturalistic assessment methods. Developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) guidelines for young children (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997) endorsed by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) require that assessment be purposeful, systematic, and age appropriate. Recommendations established by the Goal 1 Early Childhood Assessments Resource Group (Shepard, Kagan, & Wurtz, 1998) suggest that assessment of young children should be beneficial to the child and tailored to a particular purpose. Further, assessment should include age appropriate content, and data collection measures should be linguistically appropriate and include parental input. The DEC recommended practices guidelines for young children with disabilities (Neisworth & Bagnato, 2000) suggest that assessment be conducted within a context familiar to the child and

that materials used should reflect a child's authentic behaviors within typical routines. In addition, the guidelines reflect that a criterion-referenced tool be used for team assessment.

Addressing and integrating the various national recommendations is essential when assessing the strengths and needs of young children with disabilities in inclusive environments. To achieve implementation of recommended practices, the early childhood special education consultant must respect the philosophy of the early childhood teacher without losing integrity of programming and accountability for young children with disabilities. Thus, an authentic assessment approach coupled with a criterion-referenced measure for accountability, but administered within a natural context, supports educators in meeting national standards.

The purpose of this article is to provide a planning guide to support early childhood educators in implementing authentic assessment for young children with disabilities in inclusive settings. Before detailing the planning guide, however, brief definitions of the various types of assessment measures currently available to early childhood special educators is provided and followed by a more focused description of the critical characteristics of authentic assessment.

Defining Assessment Measures

Assessment, actually an umbrella term, varies in its definition

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according to the purpose of the assessment activity (Burton & Watkins, 2002; Cohen & Spenciner, 1994). Screening, for example, is a form of assessment that determines the need for further evaluation. A formal evaluation is conducted to determine eligibility and guide decisions about placement. An informal classroom assessment allows a teacher to gather information on each child for individualized program planning.

The assessment purpose determines whether a criterion-referenced or norm-referenced measure will be used in the process. A norm-referenced measure is appropriate for screening and formal evaluation because it produces a standardized score that allows for comparison of the child's performance with his or her peers to determine eligibility. The assessment procedures are highly structured and precise, and require that the items be presented exactly as indicated in the manual (McLean, Wolery, & Bailey, 2004). Conversely, a criterion-referenced measure compares a child's performance to a previously determined criterion. The items and their corresponding criteria are selected for inclusion based on their importance

to the child's daily functioning. Criterion-referenced measures thus provide information on the child's ability in terms of specific skills rather than his or her performance relative to a peer or an age norm score (Lerner, Lowenthal, & Egan, 2003). Therefore, a criterion-referenced measure's inherent flexibility and connection to the daily tasks of childhood make it the tool of choice for determining a young child's strengths and functional needs. This same flexibility in implementation and connection to the daily routines of the child make criterion-referenced measures appropriate for a naturalistic assessment approach. Norm-referenced measures, on the other hand, would not be appropriate in a naturalistic approach because of the threats to validity and to the standard score obtained if implemented in a nonstandard format.

Authentic Assessment

An authentic assessment approach, a form of naturalistic assessment, occurs when a child is observed while performing tasks in real-life situations as they would naturally occur during the routines of the day (Losardo & Notari-Syverson, 2001). The intent of authentic assessment is to create a link between children's abilities and appropriate interventions within the context of familiar surroundings (Meisels, 1997). The informal nature of authentic assessment allows the observer to gather information across various domains and skills as children perform routine tasks (Dunlap,

1997). Therefore, systematic planning and data collection based on in-depth knowledge of child development is essential for effective authentic assessment. Systematic data collection procedures such as portfolios, audio tapes, videotapes, and photographs are suggested for documenting children's progress (McLean, Wolery, & Bailey, 2004); however, a dearth of information exists on planning for authentic assessment.

Although authentic assessment is a legitimate approach for meeting the various assessment recommendations, teachers may use a one-to-one testing situation instead of conducting assessment through an authentic approach for the same reason that Warren (1998) suggests teachers have difficulty effectively implementing naturalistic interventions; the naturalistic approach is not well understood. Teachers in inclusive settings may value authentic assessment but find it difficult to implement. This difficulty could stem from the lack of conveniently organized assessment scales and detailed planning procedures for assessing young children within the routines of the day.

Criterion-referenced measures for young children are typically organized by developmental domains (e.g., social-emotional, adaptive, gross and fine motor, cognition, and communication) and ordered from easiest skill to most difficult on individual protocols rather than according to the daily routines of young children. Given the structure of most criterion-referenced assessment

measures, conducting an assessment with one child simply by going down the list of items by domain seems logical. This type of one-to-one testing behavior, however, is diametrically opposed to the national assessment recommendations. This testing approach is not purposeful for the child, nor is it in context and does not consider the interests of the child. This method also fails to include children socially with their peers during the assessment process, which is an integral part of inclusion. Further, most measures do not provide specific strategies or instructions for completing the assessment through any other method than one child at a time.

Two possible exceptions to the limitations of such measures are the AEPS (Bricker, 2002) and the *Transdisciplinary Play-Based Assessment (TPBA)* (Linder, 1993). The AEPS provides some strategies for conducting assessment through planned activities with several children at one time. The TPBA describes the use of a play setting for gathering assessment information on individual children across the various domains. However, a need continues to exist for strategies that can be implemented with multiple children across daily routines suitable for the range of criterion-referenced instruments available, such as the *Brigance Diagnostic Inventory of Early Development—Revised* (Brigance, 1991) and the *Carolina Curriculum for Preschoolers With Special Needs* (Johnson-Martin, Attermeier, & Hacker, 1990).

Developing an Authentic Assessment Planning Guide

The "Authentic Assessment Planning Guide" simply stated provides a process for reorganizing criterion-referenced measurement items according to daily routines of young children and results in a form for recording simultaneous systematic observations of multiple children. Implementation of the Planning Guide requires five steps: (1) group common assessment items, (2) assign grouped items to routines of the day, (3) assign grouped items to planned teacher-directed assessment activities, (4) create a systematic observation form, and (5) complete the assessment data collection process. Let's look at each step using the criterion-referenced measure, the *Carolina Curriculum for Preschoolers With Special Needs* (Johnson-Martin, Attermeier, & Hacker, 1990), for illustration.

Step 1: Group Common Assessment Items

The *Carolina Curriculum for Preschoolers With Special Needs* (Johnson-Martin, Attermeier, & Hacker, 1990) is a criterion-referenced assessment, but its categories are broad, making it difficult to use for authentic assessment. Organizing items chronologically under specific categories creates a list of skills from simple to more complex, which constitutes an ordinal scale (Cohen & Spenciner, 1994). The left column of Table 1 shows a sampling

Table 1

Reorganized Assessment Items

Broad Categories— Items Developmentally Listed	Specific Categories— Items Grouped
<p>1. <i>Attention & Memory</i></p> <p>h. Says or sings at least 2 nursery rhymes or songs in a group or with an adult (2.5/3 yrs)</p> <p>i. Identifies from 4 or more pictures 1 seen briefly (3/3.5 yrs)</p> <p>j. Names 1 of several objects or pictures shown, named, and then hidden (3/3.5 yrs)</p> <p>k. Repeats a sequence of 3 digits or words (3/3.5 yrs)</p> <p>l. Repeats 4-word sentences with adjectives (3/3.5 yrs)</p> <p>m. Remembers and names which of 3 objects has been hidden (3.5/4 yrs)</p> <p>n. Describes familiar objects without seeing them (3.5/4 yrs)</p> <p>o. Recalls 1 or 2 elements from a story just read (3.5/4 yrs)</p> <p>p. Matches both color and shape of an object or picture seen only briefly (3.5/4 yrs)</p> <p>q. Sings songs or says rhymes of at least 30 words (4/4.5 yrs)</p> <p>r. Recalls 3-4 elements from a story without prompts (4/4.5 yrs)</p>	<p>1. <i>Attention & Memory: Rhymes/Songs</i></p> <p>h. Says or sings at least 2 nursery rhymes or songs in a group or with an adult (2.5/3 yrs)</p> <p>q. Sings songs or says rhymes of at least 30 words (4/4.5 yrs)</p> <p>2. <i>Attention & Memory: Stories</i></p> <p>o. Recalls 1 or 2 elements from a story just read (3.5/4 yrs)</p> <p>r. Recalls 3-4 elements from a story without prompts (4/4.5 yrs)</p> <p>3. <i>Attention & Memory: Digits/Words</i></p> <p>k. Repeats a sequence of 3 digits or words (3/3.5 yrs)</p> <p>l. Repeats 4-word sentences with adjectives (3/3.5 yrs)</p> <p>4. <i>Attention & Memory: Objects Seen Briefly</i></p> <p>i. Identifies from 4 or more pictures 1 seen briefly (3/3.5 yrs)</p> <p>j. Names 1 of several objects or pictures shown, named, and then hidden (3/3.5 yrs)</p> <p>m. Remembers and names which of 3 objects has been hidden (3.5/4 yrs)</p> <p>p. Matches both color and shape of an object or picture seen only briefly (3.5/4 yrs)</p> <p>5. <i>Attention & Memory: Objects Unseen</i></p> <p>n. Describes familiar objects without seeing them (3.5/4 yrs)</p>

Note: The assessment items are adapted with permission from Johnson-Martin, Attermeier, & Hacker (1990).



of items as they appear on the assessment scale. The first step in planning for authentic assessment is to cluster criterion-referenced assessment items into categories with a focus on ease of observation. That is, categories emerge as the assessment items are examined and the teacher recognizes items that logically could occur with similar materials (e.g., books); require similar actions (e.g., singing or saying rhymes); or relate to the same concept (e.g., matching shapes, pointing to shapes, naming shapes).

See the right column of Table 1 for an example of how the items are categorized by similarities. Rather than having the cognitive assessment items listed by age under the broad category of attention and memory, the items are grouped by more specific categories. The specific categories include attention and memory of rhymes and songs, of stories, of digits and words, and of objects seen briefly. This reorganization allows the teacher to focus observations, prepare and access needed materials easily, and observe children of varying developmental levels simultaneously. This same organizational principle could then be applied to gross motor, fine motor, language, social, and adaptive assessment items, for example.

Step 2: Assign Grouped Items to Routines of the Day

After clustering items from a criterion-referenced measure, the

teacher continues to develop an authentic assessment guide by determining which clustered items can be observed during routines of the day. Most teachers structure their classrooms through the use of predictable daily routines. Although routines vary across classroom environments they may include arrival, a large group activity, center time, snack time, bathroom time, story time, music, transitions, outside play, and departure. By aligning items from the criterion-referenced measure with appropriate routines of the day, the teacher sets up a systematic approach for observation. Thus, the teacher reflects on what naturally occurs during each routine and then determines which clustered assessment items from each of the domains correspond with each routine. Table 2 illustrates the types of assessment items that may be observed during classroom routines.

Only those items that naturally and logically fit into the routines should be included. Do not force items into a routine if their inclusion results in making a natural routine no longer natural. The focus in this step is to take advantage of naturally occurring opportunities that allow children to exhibit their proficiency of skills being assessed.

Step 3: Assign Grouped Items to Planned Teacher-Directed Assessment Activities

With some children and some skills, observation or use of these

Table 2

Types of Assessment Items Embedded Into Daily Routines

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Arrival</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Adaptive/Undressing:</i> taking off coat, hat, mittens, & boots, unbuttoning, unzipping, & unsnapping • <i>Gross Motor:</i> walking up stairs • <i>Social:</i> responding to a greeting 	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Departure</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Adaptive/Dressing:</i> putting on coat, hat, mittens, & boots, buttoning, zipping, & snapping • <i>Gross Motor:</i> walking down stairs • <i>Social:</i> responding to parting remarks
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Large Group Activity</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Cognition:</i> calendar/weather, time, patterns, numbers, counting, same/different, size, shape, color, opposites, rhyming, classifying, sequencing, prepositions • <i>Language:</i> grammar, verbal expression, questions, listening • <i>Social:</i> attending, performing for others, responsibility (jobs), participation • <i>Adaptive:</i> solving problems, making rules 	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Center Time</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Social:</i> level of social & cognitive play, responsibility, selecting materials, cleaning up, following rules & procedures, sharing • <i>Fine Motor:</i> stringing beads, putting together puzzles, imitating/copying block and peg designs, manipulating clay, drawing, printing, painting, lacing • <i>Cognition:</i> size, shape, color, counting, opposites, rhyming, classifying, sequencing, prepositions
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Snack</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Adaptive/Feeding:</i> using a spoon, fork, & knife, pouring, requesting food, using manners (please/thank you), cleaning up • <i>Language:</i> pragmatics/conversational turn taking, staying on topic 	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Bathroom</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Adaptive/Toileting:</i> bowel/bladder control • <i>Adaptive/Grooming:</i> washing/drying hands • <i>Adaptive/Dressing:</i> buckling/unbuckling, zipping/unzipping, snapping/unsnapping • <i>Language:</i> indicating toileting needs
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Story Time</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Cognition:</i> memory of story content, concepts delineated in the story, shapes, colors, same/different, opposites, rhyming words, numbers, counting, size, length • <i>Language:</i> listening, answering questions about the story, completing a partial story • <i>Social:</i> attending, participation 	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Music</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Cognition:</i> memory of rhymes & songs, imitating actions & words • <i>Language:</i> listening to & following directions • <i>Social:</i> attending, participation • <i>Gross Motor:</i> walking on a line, hopping, jumping, skipping, running, marching
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Transitions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Gross Motor:</i> standing on one foot, walking on a balance beam, hopping, jumping, skipping • <i>Cognition:</i> concepts/shapes & colors, memory of rhymes & songs • <i>Language:</i> following directions, listening 	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Outside Play</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Gross Motor:</i> running, running around obstacles, walking on a line/ balance beam, walking backwards, throwing, catching, & kicking a ball, jumping, climbing, hopping • <i>Language:</i> following directions, listening

natural opportunities alone is insufficient to assess certain cognitive and fine motor items such as identifying colors and shapes, copying symbols, wrist rotation, pincer grasp, and cutting. Therefore, the teacher selects these assessment items and creates developmentally appropriate opportunities for the children to demonstrate proficiency in these areas. The teacher can administer selected cognitive and fine motor assessment items that do not fit into daily routines by using fun, game-oriented activities. This activity approach provides purpose and motivation for the children to complete the task and also takes the children's interests into consideration. Sample assessment activities for cognition and fine motor are listed in Table 3. Items from the assessment measure selected by individual teachers will dictate the game-oriented activities needed to motivate children to perform each task.

Step 4: Create a Systematic Observation Form

After aligning assessment items with daily routines and teacher-directed activities, the teacher creates a systematic observation form for implementation of the assessment procedures in his or her classroom. Table 4 (see page 10) provides an excerpt from a sample systematic observation form created for items in Table 1 from the *Carolina Curriculum for Preschoolers With Special Needs* (Johnson-Martin et al., 1990). The

systematic observation form is individualized based on the criterion-referenced measure being used and routines in the existing classroom schedule. By grouping the assessment items by daily routines and game-oriented activities, the teacher maximizes the ability to observe and capture children's skills and behaviors in an efficient and natural manner.

To ensure that each item is evaluated accurately, the teacher includes on the form a shortened version of the criterion next to each assessment item (see Table 4). A description of the criterion next to each item eliminates the need to shuffle through the manual for evaluation criteria, increasing the teacher's ability to sustain the attention of young children and ultimately augmenting accuracy and efficiency in the assessment process. Finally, a grid is included on the systematic observation form that provides a line for each child's name and space for recording the date and performance of each child (see Table 4). Creating a form for the entire class streamlines assessment by having appropriate information available regardless of the specific child being observed.

Step 5: Complete the Assessment Data Collection Process

The "Authentic Assessment Planning Guide" is strictly designed for ease in observing strengths and needs of children in a naturalistic manner. The teacher transfers performance data gathered

through this process to each child's individual protocol from the criterion-referenced measure being used in the classroom (e.g., the "Assessment Log and Developmental Progress Chart" of the *Carolina Curriculum for Preschoolers With Special Needs*; Johnson-Martin et al., 1990).

Additional Applications of the "Authentic Assessment Planning Guide"

An increasingly popular approach for conducting authentic assessment is the *Work Sampling System* that provides behavioral indicators for children in early childhood and primary grades (Jablon, Marsden, Meisels, & Dichtelmiller, 1994). The *Work Sampling System* contains hundreds of behavioral indicators for

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Table 3

Sample Planned Teacher-Directed Assessment Activities

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Cognition: Identifying Colors</i></p> <p>Make colored construction paper fish and attach paper clips to each. Have the children use a fishing pole with a magnet attached to fish for various colors. Inform the children that they can take one color of each fish home. Ask children to fish for specific colors or ask what color of fish was caught so the teacher can place a fish of each color in the respective bags.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Cognition: Identifying Shapes</i></p> <p>Make sixteen 2" shapes from one color of construction paper for each child and punch a hole in the center of each shape. Cut colored straws into 1" pieces to be placed between each shape. Provide yarn and suggest that a necklace or belt be made with the shapes and straws. The children and teacher take turns naming the shapes to be strung. This provides an opportunity for each child to name and point to each shape.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Cognition: Following Prepositional Directions</i></p> <p>Hide treasures (e.g., plastic eggs with stickers or the children's names written on colorful paper) around the room so they are out of the children's sight. Have each child individually locate a treasure by following prepositional directions. The final prepositional directions yield the location of the child's treasure. Directions may vary depending on the developmental age of each child.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Cognition: Counting</i></p> <p>Shape aluminum foil into a boat and place in a tub of water. Have a child count while placing items into the boat to determine how many items are required to sink the boat. Bigger, heavier items may be used for children counting from 1 to 10.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Fine Motor: Pincer Grasp and Wrist Rotation</i></p> <p>Place a sticker in each of two small clear bottles with twist-on lids. Place the bottles about a foot from a toy that will move forward when activated with a key. Turn the toy in the direction of the bottles and have a child twist the key to activate the toy. When the toy touches a bottle, the child removes the lid and takes out the sticker. Give another sticker to the child to place in the bottle before the lid is replaced. The bottles are then ready for another child to take a turn.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Fine Motor: Copying Symbols</i></p> <p>Place a piece of carbon paper between two pieces of white paper. Tell the children that it is magic paper and when something is drawn on the top sheet, it will go through to the bottom sheet. Show the children various symbols and have them copy them.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Fine Motor: Cutting</i></p> <p>Have each child cut along a line and make a headband to which animal ears are attached. If a child is at a higher level of cutting, provide ears to cut out that have straight and curved lines.</p>

the teacher to remember. To make this authentic assessment measure less cumbersome, the teacher can simply reorganize the behavioral indicators according to his or her daily classroom routines. Reorganizing the content of this assessment measure consists of determining the daily routine during which each indicator can best be observed and writing the routine next to the indicator. When all the indicators have been assigned a routine, the teacher lists the indicators grouped by their respective routines, creating a systematic observation form. This authentic assessment form assists the teacher in systematically focusing observation during each routine and reduces the frustration of trying to remember all of the behavioral indicators throughout the day.

Another example of the applicability of the planning process described in this article is to implement the process using state standards for quality early childhood programs. In this time of accountability and educational standards, a systematic approach is needed to document progress on each standard. Using the "Authentic Assessment Planning Guide" to embed state standards into the routines of the day can meet this need. The teacher determines the best times of the day to observe behaviors related to the standards and then lists them by the respective routines. This reorganization creates the systematic observation form that will assist the teacher in naturalistically assessing behaviors that meet the state standards.

Table 4
Systematic Observation Form Excerpt

Assessment Planning Guide		Ben	Juan	Tira	Reem
Music		Date	Date	Date	Date
<i>Attention & Memory: Rhymes/Songs</i>	<i>Criterion</i>				
h. Says or sings at least 2 nursery rhymes or songs in a group or with an adult (2.5/3 yrs)	Most words correct				
q. Sings songs or says rhymes of at least 30 words (4/4.5 yrs)	Words may be repeated				
Story Time					
<i>Attention & Memory: Stories</i>	<i>Criterion</i>				
o. Recalls 1 or 2 elements from a story just read (3.5/4 yrs)	Without question prompts				
r. Recalls 3-4 elements from a story without prompts (4/4.5 yrs)	Without question prompts				
Teacher-Directed Activities					
<i>Attention & Memory: Digits/Words</i>	<i>Criterion</i>				
k. Repeats a sequence of 3 digits or words (3/3.5 yrs)	2 different sequences				
l. Repeats 4-word sentences with adjectives (3/3.5 yrs)	5 different sentences				
<i>Attention & Memory: Objects Seen Briefly</i>	<i>Criteria</i>				
i. Identifies from 4 or more pictures 1 seen briefly (3/3.5 yrs)	Several different occasions				
j. Names 1 of several objects or pictures shown, named, and then hidden (3/3.5 yrs)	5 occasions				
m. Remembers and names which of 3 objects has been hidden (3.5/4 yrs)	3 or more occasions; errors rare				
p. Matches both color and shape of an object or picture seen only briefly (3.5/4 yrs)	5 times; no errors				
<i>Attention & Memory: Objects Unseen</i>	<i>Criterion</i>				
n. Describes familiar objects without seeing them (3.5/4 yrs)	Uses 3 accurate descriptive terms (questions allowed)				

Key: +/Emerging/-

Note: The assessment items are adapted with permission from Johnson-Martin, Atermeier, & Hacker (1990).

Conclusion

This article provides a process for reorganizing criterion-referenced assessment items, behavioral indicators, and state educational standards according to the daily routines of a child's day. Using the "Authentic Assessment Planning Guide" is most appropriate for children with mild disabilities who, according to Odom (2000), are the majority of young children receiving services in inclusive settings. Although it is initially time consuming for a teacher to create an individualized planning guide using this systematic process, the guide enables classroom teachers to effectively conduct authentic assessment with ease. One drawback to this process is a potential threat to validity due to reorganizing the assessment items from a standard protocol. Therefore, this procedure is not recommended for instruments that have been standardized. The use of a systematic assessment planning guide, however, increases reliability by assessing a child within a context that is

natural and familiar rather than in a contrived testing situation.

Note

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