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Special Education Service Agency Newsletter



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Letter from the Editor

Jennifer Schroeder, SESA MD and DB Specialist

Happy Valentine's Day!

February can be a very LONG month when it comes to schools. Even though it has fewer days than every other month, it seems that it has enough disruptions and things that are due which can seem to last forever. This month, I have gotten to see and visit with many people at the Alaska State Special Education Conference (ASSEC), went to a few Valentine's class parties, participated in parent-teacher conferences, and helped some of my teachers get started planning for their kids for next year. Yup, a very long and very full month!

As I talk to teachers, support staff, and parents, one of the themes that is coming up a lot at this time of year is "Is my student ready for next year? If not, what do we need to do now so that they are?" For many teachers, this is more than just showing them the new classroom or introducing them to a new teacher. This means looking at where your students are now, where you want them to be, and what the steps are to get there. For some of my kids, that means talking about what communication needs are coming up and how do we get the kids ready for them? For others, it might mean looking at adapting a curriculum or an alternate curriculum in order to teach needed skills. And for some, it means helping the student learn how to work for longer periods of time, or in a more structured way.

Assessment is not always easy when it comes to our students with special needs. The assessments that teachers use for the majority of the class may not show the "right" information for our students. I recently spoke to a teacher who asked about using the typical kindergarten checklist with a student with multiple disabilities. After talking it through, we decided that it wouldn't be helpful; the list ends up being a list of "can't do" instead of a list of "can do". Writing up a narrative, looking at the IEP goals, and using

other means of identifying what the students knows (and it is a lot!) are more helpful for everyone. This month, we want to look at different types of assessments that can be used (and what they can be used for) for students with special needs.

Thanks,
Jennifer Schroeder
SESA Multiple Disabilities and Deafblind Specialist

Specific Assessments

Lyon Johnson, SESA Emotional Disabilities Specialist

Assessments in the field of special education serve specific purposes. It is important to know the differences amongst them. All relevant sources of assessment information or data should contribute to each stage of the process.

Norm-referenced Assessments:

Norm-referenced assessments are standardized because they require the learner to respond to the same situations or questions and are scored in a consistent manner. Additionally, norm-referenced assessments compare a learner to his or her closest age-group to determine if performance is within normal limits or significantly different from peers. Norm-referenced tests are a staple for initial special education evaluations and re-evaluation.

A school diagnostic team uses a standardized psycho-educational assessment (cognitive ability, adaptive behavior, social/emotional behavioral, language and motor skills) or a diagnostic assessment, along with other sources of information. Sometimes, specialized, diagnostic tests are used to help identify a disability area, such as an autism spectrum disorder.

Importantly, norm-referenced tests typically do not sample enough items from a particular performance area for programing purposes. Therefore, they are supplemented by other types of standardized assessments described below.

Criterion-Referenced Assessments:

Designed to measure student performance against a fixed set of pre-determined learning standards or mastery of skills, these tests can be excellent sources of information for program development. Tests sample enough items in a particular skill area to determine individual needs, annual goals and objectives. Examples of criterion referenced tests include the Brigance, Verbal Behavior Milestones Assessment Placement and Programming (VB-MAPPS), and Assessment of Basic Language Skills and Learning-Revised (ABLLS-R), Assessment and Evaluation, and Programming System for Infants and Children (AEPS). Many criterion-referenced assessments can be used for tracking or progress monitoring, if they sample enough items from a curriculum or typical developmental pathway.

Specialized Assessments:

Specialized assessments serve an important purpose in special education. Examples include functional behavioral assessments (FBA) to inform a learner's behavior intervention plan (BIP). The assessment methods used in FBA development include direct FBA methods, such as structured direct observations using Antecedent-Behavior-Consequences (A-B-C) recordings. Indirect FBA assessment methods include, open-ended questions and rating scales (e.g., Functional Assessment Checklist for Teachers and Staff, Functional Assessment Screening Tool, Questions About Behavior Function, etc.).

Social and Behavior Goals How to Pick, Track, and Progress

By John Barrowman, SESA Autism Impairment Specialist

Introduction

Writing a social or behavior goal can often be tricky because the usual district curricular assessments do not cover these topics. Also, it can be tricky to know how or what to assess when it comes to social skills. Frequently, these kinds of goals wind up being about behaviors that staff want to have stop, and less about new behaviors that are to be taught. There are however a variety of tools available to make it easy to rapidly assess a student's overall social and behavior skills as well as linking those needs to strategies. When teaching these skills it is essential to approach every student with the idea that there are strengths that can be fostered and weakness that can be shored up.

How to Pick

Use a social skills assessment or checklist tool when starting out with a student's program. These tools are easy to use and tend to take 15 minutes when done by a person familiar to the student. My personal favorite is from the book *Social Skills Training* by Jed Baker and is a simple checklist. I like to have staff mark a plus for any skill that is a strength, a minus if it is a weakness, and a question mark if anything is unclear. The assessment looks at skills in the areas of conversation, cooperative play, friendship management, self-regulation, empathy, and conflict management. After completing the assessment, every skill that is measured is connected with an activity to teach it. Simple, Fast, and Easy.

How to Track

Checklists and other tracking sheets are the secret to success when it comes to social and behavior goal success. When you have a tracking sheet, it not only will allow you to keep track of a skill, but more importantly, it can serve as a reminder to look for the skill. Imagine a student who is working on a goal of not interrupting. This can be tricky to remember if it has happened by the end of the day, as the behavior is subtle. Place the tracking sheet for this skill with your lesson plan or in the book you are teaching from. This way you will see it and be reminded to keep an eye out for the behavior. It may not be

necessary to take data everyday once you are in the habit of consistently checking in. However, it is important that some record be kept of the following:

1. **What skill is being taught (Saying, "Excuse me")**
2. **What behavior is being targeted (Interrupting)**
3. **What rewards are to be earned (Tech time)**

How to Progress

So after choosing a skill and tracking your efforts for a while, how do you move forward? Frequently, I hear that students will learn a skill, but not seem to use it when they need to or that they seem to have forgotten. The instruction continues to advance, but the previously mastered skills do not seem to stick. Keep the following things in mind to promote longevity and generalization:

1. **Practice previously learned skills throughout the year as a 'refresher'**
2. **When learning a new skill, practice it with different people and settings**
3. **Set goals with your students so that they can earn progressively larger rewards for continued success**

Preference Assessments

By Meriah Cory, SESA Multiple Disabilities Specialist

In education, there are many different types of assessments. It can be challenging to assess students with multiple disabilities using the "typical" assessment because many of the students do not show responses in a typical way (and for others, need a different way to see and understand what you are asking). Some assessments can be adapted, but most standardized test cannot be. When this happens, teams must work together to decide what is the best, and most functional, assessment for the student.

Having said that, this article will focus on a type of assessment that is not for determining academic, social, or functional level; it will focus on assessments to help the team determine what is motivating to a student and what is not. This information is some of the most valuable information a team can have when working with students. Once you know what a student likes, you are able to set up activities that have a clear motivator: social, academic, behavioral, communication. A preference assessment can also help the team know when interests are changing (maybe the work isn't too hard, but the reward is no longer rewarding).

As important as it is to find out what a student does like, it is just as important to find out what a student does NOT like. Just because it is something that the other kids like, or that we as adults think of as "fun", does not mean that our students will like it. I have students who would prefer a crinkly wrapper to a fun new toy and that is okay! It is also important to have several different things that a student likes; if you find only one, the student can

get satiated fast, or it might run out, and then you are stuck. The assessments below also look at how much a student likes something; is this something that a child will do absolutely anything for, or something that is just okay and better suited for a familiar task?

When doing a preference assessment make sure to include everyone on the team. Preference assessments can be checklists that are used when presenting options to students (including not just tangible objects). They can also be interview questions that are asked of people who come in contact with the student. Just keep in mind that it is important to explore a variety of options and not just limit one's self to what is already known.

Please click on the following links to view the different preference assessments, as well as the guidelines on how to use them.

[Elementary Interest Survey](#)

[Preference Assessment Data Sheet- Free Access to Items](#)

[Preference Assessment Form- 6 Item Assessment](#)

[Six Item Preference Assessment \(Basic\)](#)

[3 Part Detailed Preference Assessment \(1\)](#)

[3 Part Detailed Preference Assessment \(2\)](#)

[3 Part Detailed Preference Assessment \(3\)](#)

[Reinforcer Checklist \(can be used to get ideas for any of the above assessments\)](#)

[Reinforcer Preference Assessment for Elementary](#)

[Reinforcer Preference Assessment for High School](#)

ATCI: A Systematic Classroom Observation of Your Student with Hearing Loss

By Olivia Yancey, SESA Deaf and Hard of Hearing Specialist

Teachers, parents, and students can have useful observations and feedback about how curriculum is being accessed. When collected in a systematic approach, the information can provide the IEP team useful discussion during the Individual Education Plan (IEP) or the three-year reevaluation. Karen L. Anderson and Kathleen A. Arnoldi suggested in their book, *Building Skills for Success in the Fast-Paced Classroom* the **Access to Curriculum**

Assessment Inventory (ATCI). This is a systematic approach developed by Diane Joseph, Jane Dorn, & Sherry Landrud in 2009. The authors of the ATCI recommend this tool be used in conjunction with other formal and informal assessments for the student with hearing loss whose communication mode is listening and speaking with or without assistive listening devices.

The following observation forms or interviews included in the ATCI are:

- ATCI - Speech & Language Clinician
- ATCI - Teacher of the Deaf/Hard of Hearing
- ATCI - Student
- ATCI - General Education Teacher
- ATCI - Parent

*Sherry Landrud & Karen L. Anderson created a complimentary observation record (2011): **Observational Record of Behavior of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students***

These observation records and interview forms provide the following information for the IEP team to discuss:

- Student participation in the general education setting when compared to peers.
- Analysis of how the student accesses information.
- Student and teacher factors that influence the student's academic progress.
- Setting and acoustical conditions that influence the student's understanding.
- How the student responds to his or her peers.

The information collected is useful to determine how aware the student and his or her team members are of hearing loss impacting school performance. The results of the ATCI can be used in a summary report and in the Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance in the IEP if the team determines it is appropriate. This information can help the team determine goals, services, and accommodations/modifications needed for the student to access the general education curriculum.

How can I view the ATCI to determine if it will be helpful for my student?

As of January 2018, the some of these forms can be found by an online search of ATCI in a search engine (e.g., Google).

The complete ATCI and examples of how to administer and summarize the information is in Karen L. Anderson and Kathleen A. Arnoldi's book *Building Skills for Success in the Fast-Paced Classroom: Optimizing Achievement for Students with Hearing Loss*.

- Our [SESA Library](#) has a copy to borrow for those interested in learning more about the ACTI.
- This book is also available for purchase at [Supporting Success for Kids with Hearing Loss](#)

Assessing a Student with Low Vision

By Angel Black, SESA Vision Impairment and Multiple Disabilities Specialist

Students with low vision/blindness have all the same required assessments that any other student has. Expectations should be high and any accommodations/modifications should be made according to need. However, this population of students also have what is called the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) which should be assessed yearly. ECC is comprised of nine unique areas that concentrate on the knowledge and skills needed by students with low vision/blindness due to their unique needs. These nine areas include:

- **Compensatory Skills**
- **Sensory Efficiency**
- **Assistive Technology**
- **Orientation & Mobility (if needed)**
- **Independent Living Skills**
- **Social Skills**
- **Recreation & Leisure**
- **Career & Vocational**
- **Self-Determination**

By assessing these areas either informally (casual observations), or formally (data collection, testing) the information gathered will help provide the team with the information needed to specifically address the needs of that student. These areas are vital in order for students with low vision/blindness to be successful and independent adults.

My SESA Story

My name is Debbie Messecar. I am the SPED Teacher in Kwigillingok, AK. I have been a teacher here for 3 years now. I have had both Jennifer Schroder and Meriah Cory here working with my aide and I and our students.

They have both been so helpful in explaining things that we didn't understand, giving us helpful hints and tools to use to best help our students, and tons of encouragement. They model how to provide the services as well. I have received books that they have created for my nonverbal students that have significantly changed how those students are communicating. They are wonderful at troubleshooting as well. They are also very friendly. They bring some of the outside world into our little village. I know that my students and I have benefitted immensely from the services that they have provided for us.

SESA Library Resources

Anne Freitag, SESA Librarian



Behavior checklist [kit] / Hawthorne Educational Services, Inc., 2004.

Description: Scale contains areas for documenting student behaviors at school, in the areas of: academic performance/functional academics, emotional or physical well-being, group behavior, hyperactive/impulsive, inappropriate behavior, interpersonal relationships, listening, motivation, organization, personal hygiene, rules and expectations, social interactions.



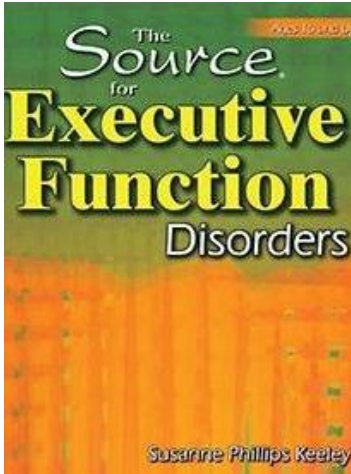
Home Life Checklist: Adolescents and Young Adults / developed by Home Programmers ; revised by Kim Andis and Nancy Dalrymple. Indiana Resource Center for Autism at the Institute for the Study of Developmental Disabilities at Indiana University, c1987.

Description: Consists of checklists that can be copied and used to determine what tasks a student can do independently, with a verbal, physical or environmental cue, or will refuse, and the frequency the student will do the task. There is space for comments.



MacArthur-Bates Communicative Development Inventories [kit] / by Larry Fenson ... [et al.]. 2nd ed. Paul H. Brookes Pub. Co., c2007.

Description: "...professionals can tap into parents' ... day-to-day knowledge and respond to legislation that requires parental input in child evaluations. Top language researchers developed these standardized, parent-completed report forms ... designing the forms to focus on current behaviors and salient emergent behaviors that parents can recognize and track. ... three components: words and gestures form, ... words and sentences form ...vocabulary checklist..."-- Publisher's website. For children ages 8-18 months.




The Source for Executive Function Disorders / Susanne Phillips Keeley. LinguSystems, c2003.

Description: "Executive functions perform a collective service that comes into play with all facets of cognitive processing. Patients with executive function disorders have difficulty with: planning and organization ; identifying what needs to be done carrying out the steps in an orderly way ; identifying the beginning tasks ; maintaining attention ; evaluating how they're doing on a task ; taking feedback or suggestions. This manual provides a structured framework for therapists to guide the evaluation process and treatment of patients with executive function disorders..."

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