



Using AEPS[®] Assessment Activities for Individual and Group Assessment

By Jennifer Grisham-Brown, Ph.D., Kristie Pretti-Frontczak, Ph.D., & JJ Johnson, Ph.D., with assistance from the EMRG Board of Directors

Suggested citation:

Grisham-Brown, J., Pretti-Frontczak, K., & Johnson, J. (2007). Using AEPS[®] activities for individual and group assessment. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

Development of the AEPS[®] Assessment Activities was supported in part by funding from the following projects:

Project LINK: A Partnership to Promote LINKages among Assessment, Curriculum, and Child Outcomes. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children & Families (90YD0128/03). Jennifer Grisham-Brown and Rena Hallam, Principal Investigators; Robyn Brookshire, Heather Ryan, and Allison Loftis, Staff; Tom Ely, Consultant.

PROJECT PLAY: Promoting Positive Learning Outcomes through an Activity Based Approach with Young Children with Severe Disabilities. US Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (H324M0100304). Jennifer Grisham-Brown and Kristie Pretti-Frontczak, Principal Investigators; Sarah Hawkins, Brooke Winchell, Robyn Ridgley, and Maria White, Staff.

INTRODUCTION

The *Assessment, Evaluation, and Programming System (AEPS®) for Infants and Children* is a comprehensive system that provides procedures and content for assessing and intervening with young children who may be experiencing developmental problems or delays. A critical component of the system is the AEPS Test, which permits authentic assessment of children in six essential areas of development. The ideal method of assessment is through observation of children at play and while they negotiate their daily routines. This process may be time consuming, and, therefore, an alternative, more efficient method of assessment using the AEPS assessment activities has been developed. The use of assessment activities may permit the more rapid yet valid assessment of one or more children at a time. This paper describes the AEPS assessment activities and how to use them.

Less experienced AEPS users are encouraged to begin assessment with one child and to focus on a single area of development at a time. To the extent possible, assessment should be conducted during daily or typical routines and activities, and child assessment should be conducted with familiar adults and materials whenever possible. At times, however, activities may need to be constructed to make available materials and equipment that relate to assessment items from a particular developmental area. For example, assessing items from the Gross Motor Area of the AEPS Test might involve having riding toys, steps, and room to run and jump. To assess the Cognitive Area of the AEPS Test, an activity might be planned that provides the child with many opportunities to demonstrate his or her understanding of concepts such as color, shape, and size.

As familiarity with AEPS increases, teams can use more efficient means of assessment, such as assessing one child across multiple developmental areas simultaneously. For example, while assessing a child's gross motor skills, team members may also assess his or her language and social skills (e.g., the expressive language forms and functions used during play and the type of interaction with peers observed). Team members needing to assess groups of children may choose to assess several children across one developmental area, or, for even greater efficiency, they may assess several children across a range of developmental areas at the same time.

WHY USE ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES?

Due to the number of AEPS Test items, team resources that may be available, family preferences, and children's needs, there are limits to the number of areas and children that can be assessed simultaneously; however, being able to assess a single child across developmental areas or several children simultaneously saves time and allows teams to observe trends and patterns among children as well as the interrelated nature of child development. To assist AEPS Test users in assessing a single child across areas or in assessing more than one child at the same time, sets of AEPS assessment activities have been developed for both home- and center-based

use. These sets of assessment activities are available for use to subscribers of AEPSinteractive™ (AEPSi™), the web-based management system for AEPS, and they complement the stand-alone assessment activities contained in the AEPS print volumes.

WHAT ARE ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES?

The assessment activities contained in AEPSi are semi-structured (i.e., activities and materials are suggested but specific procedures or questions to children are not used) and allow teams to use observation as the primary method of gathering information. Using the seven or eight activities contained within each set, teams may assess all items that appear across all six areas of the AEPS Test. Using these assessment activities to complete the AEPS Test should result in economies that permit beginning intervention earlier. The intent of the assessment activities is to assist individuals and teams in structuring observations by embedding AEPS Test items into commonly occurring home and classroom activities. The assessment activities contained in AEPSi ensure that all items from the AEPS Test Level I and AEPS Test Level II can be assessed either during seven typical home routines or eight daily classroom activities. Specifically, AEPSi contains two types of assessment activity sets that AEPS users can use to efficiently and effectively assess children: *home-based assessment activities* and *center-based assessment activities*.

Home-Based Assessment Activities

The home-based assessment activities are designed primarily for use when assessing a single child across more than one area of development. Presently, there are a total of seven home-based routine activities in a set, which together contain all items from the AEPS Test Level I. The activities are designed to be conducted in a home but can be conducted in other familiar settings (e.g., a child care center, family day care home).

Center-Based Assessment Activities

The center-based assessment activities are designed primarily for use when assessing groups of young children across developmental areas. Presently, there are a total of eight center-based activities in a set, which together contain all items from AEPS Test Level I or AEPS Test Level II, depending on the selected set. By having center-based activities that cover both levels of the AEPS Test, children spanning a wide range of abilities are able to participate and be assessed during common activities. The center-based assessment activities are designed to be easily incorporated into the structure of a playgroup, a child care center schedule, or a preschool setting's typical routine.

THE ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES

Table 1 lists the home- and center-based assessment activities included in AEPSi. Regardless of type or setting, any of the assessment activities can be used to assess a single child or groups of children across areas of development.

Table 1. *Assessment Activities Currently Available in AEPSi*

Home-Based Activities	Center-Based Activities
Daily Transitions & Routines	Classroom Transitions & Routines
Feeding & Meals	Meals & Snack
Quiet Time	Story Time
Rough & Tumble	Outdoor Play
Mystery Box	Dramatic Play
Busy Hands	Play dough & Manipulatives
Conversation with Caregivers	Book About Me
	Conversation with Familiar Adults

An assessment activity recording form with instructions has been developed for each home- and center-based activity contained in the sets. Each assessment activity recording form contains a brief description of the activity, suggested materials and procedures, and a scoring form for the associated AEPS Test items that can be assessed and scored with that activity. The *brief description* provides an overview of the activity and the types of developmental skills that can be assessed. *Suggestions regarding materials* include examples of common toys and objects related to the activity or those needed to successfully assess items targeted within a given activity. *Suggestions regarding procedures* include examples of how to elicit demonstrations by the child of the targeted AEPS Test items through the choice of key materials, the actions of familiar adults and peers, or verbalizations by adults and peers. Lastly, users can view the targeted AEPS Test items and associated criteria on screen as well as print the assessment activity recording forms.

HOW TO USE THE ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES INCLUDED IN AEPSi

Before using the assessment activities, team members should determine who will engage with the child or children (preferably someone familiar) and conduct the activity to elicit the behaviors targeted by AEPS Test items and who will observe and score the child's or children's performance. Whether using the home- or center-based assessment activities, observing and

scoring a child's or children's performance can occur 1) live, with information entered directly onto the assessment activity recording form; 2) by videotaping and scoring at a later time; and/or 3) by taking notes during the live observations and assigning scores and notes through retrospective conversations and debriefings. Users can record scores, scoring notes, and other relevant comments on the printed assessment activity forms or directly on-line into AEPSi when connected to the Internet.

To begin, individuals or teams should determine whether to assess a child or children using Level I or Level II of the AEPS Test. Once a level has been selected, individuals or teams should review the assessment activities associated with each level to determine which set can best be incorporated into the child's or children's schedule. Keep in mind that there should be a match between children's areas of development that need assessing and the potential items targeted on an assessment activity. Further, teams may need to modify or alter the assessment activities to ensure that they are individually and culturally sensitive and relevant. After the assessment activities are selected for a child or group of children, team members should consider the room arrangement, appropriate equipment and materials, and other resources that may be needed to complete the activity. Then teams should conduct the activities and observe the child's or children's skills and behaviors that correspond to the AEPS Test items for each activity.

Refer to the AEPSi User's Manual for technical procedures for using the assessment activities in AEPSi.

HOW TO SCORE ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES

After observing a child's or children's performance during selected assessment activities and comparing the child's performance with the stated AEPS Test item criteria, the three-point scoring option (2, 1, or 0) should be employed. Scoring notes and narrative comments also can be documented. AEPSi users will have the option of: 1) printing a hard copy of the assessment activity recording form, observing children's performance, scoring onto the printed form, then returning to the computer at a later time to enter scores and comments; or 2) entering scores and comments directly into the electronic assessment activity recording form on AEPSi. Once all assessment activities within a set are complete and the assessment is finalized, AEPSi will automatically transfer scores, notes, and any comments from the assessment activity recording forms to the child's or children's individual Child Observation Data Recording Forms (CODRFs), the form typically used to score a child's AEPS Test, for up to six children at a time. For score summaries and reports based on the assessment results, AEPSi users should navigate to the individual child's record and select the report(s) needed.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR USING ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES

There are a number of considerations that team members should keep in mind when deciding to assess an individual child or groups of children with the AEPS assessment activities.

Using Multiple Methods for Data Collection

The AEPS assessment activities were designed to assist individuals and teams in collecting AEPS Test information in a more *efficient* way; however, during the assessment, teams may choose from a variety of approaches for scoring AEPS Test items. For example, some items may be scored while the child is engaged in one of the assessment activities. Other items may be scored via the AEPS Family Report. Finally, remaining items may be scored during other typically occurring activities or routines. Regardless of how items are assessed (e.g., observation of daily activities, planned assessments, report, direct test), scores should be entered into AEPSi through the assessment activity recording forms with the intent of completing each child's individual CODRF. In other words, once a full set of activities has been assessed and scored, AEPSi transfers all child-specific data from the assessment activity recording forms to the individual child's CODRF so that the AEPS Test Area Raw Scores can be calculated and reports for accountability, eligibility, and programming (i.e., to develop goals and intervention content) can be generated.

Materials, Supports, and Modifications for Home-Based Assessment Activities

Team members who choose to conduct assessments during routine activities in children's homes should attempt to use materials available in the home rather than introducing materials that are unfamiliar to the child. Teams should also ensure that home-based assessment activities are culturally relevant for individual families. Lastly, when assessing children with disabilities, it is important to consider the types of supports and modifications that may be needed regarding the materials, procedures, and even AEPS Test item criteria to ensure a child is not penalized for his or her disability.

Collaborating with Families

Families and other familiar adults should be invited to participate throughout the assessment process and can be involved in using the assessment activities in a number of ways. First, family members and other familiar adults may provide information useful to scoring AEPS Test items that may be difficult to observe. Second, families and other familiar adults can be participants in the administration of the assessment activities. Specifically, they can engage children in activities and elicit behaviors that relate to specific AEPS Test items. Third, families and other familiar adults can participate by helping to compare a child's performance to the stated item criteria and

assigning a score, summarizing assessment information, and interpreting results. One home-based assessment activity (e.g., Conversations with Caregivers) and one center-based assessment activity (e.g., Conversations with Familiar Adults) are included with each set of assessment activities to help teams assess items that may difficult for teams to observe. These activities also provide a systematic means of involving those who are most familiar with the child in the assessment process.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: Do I have to use the assessment activities included in AEPSi?

A: No, the assessment activities are provided to assist individuals and teams but are not required to complete the AEPS Test or to generate desired reports. You are encouraged to use the assessment activities because they efficiently elicit a child's or children's performance on all AEPS Test items and because scores are automatically transferred to children's individual CODRFs. Additional assessment activities can be found in the *AEPS Test for Birth to Three Years and Three to Six Years*, and teams are encouraged to create their own assessment activities. (Scores that results from these activities would need to be entered by the user into a standard CODRF. Future releases of AEPSi may allow you to create your own on-line assessment activity recording forms.) Remember that most items from the AEPS Test can be observed and recorded at any time. It is not necessary to wait to elicit a skill during a specific activity if there are other opportunities to do so or if the child performs a skill spontaneously.

Q: If I use the assessment activities, do I have to use all of them to complete the AEPS Test and/or obtain desired reports?

A: You will need to complete either a set of home-based assessment activities or a set of center-based assessment activities in order to enable the AEPSi system to automatically complete the child's CODRF, from which various reports can be generated. Users can combine methods and assessment strategies to collect observation data for a given child or groups of children, but the results should be entered into a complete set of assessment activity recording forms or into a child's standard CODRF. If you elect to do some assessment activities and some data collection through other means, you must do all your AEPSi data entry through the child's CODRF. The AEPSi system may at a later date enable a more automatic means of mixing and matching data from multiple sources.

Q: Can I use the assessment activities for eligibility, accountability, or programming purposes?

A: Because the AEPS assessment activities assess all of the same items assessed with the AEPS Test, yes, you can. Once you complete a set of assessment activities for a child or group of children, AEPSi will automatically complete the child's or children's CODRF(s). From there,

you can continue with any further reporting or AEPSi functions such as the Eligibility Cutoff Scores Report or the IFSP/IEP Summary Report.

Teams using the AEPS Test for eligibility, accountability, or programming purposes may find that they do not wish to observe and score all AEPS Test items; however, skipping certain items may prevent you from using the AEPS Test results as planned. To use AEPS Test results for eligibility purposes, the AEPS developers highly recommend scoring all **goals** across the six areas for the Level that is appropriate for the child's age, and AEPSi requires scores for all goals in order to generate the Eligibility Cutoff Scores Report. (Please see *Determining Eligibility for IDEA Services with AEPS* for more information.) To use AEPS Test results for accountability purposes (i.e., OSEP Child Outcomes reporting), you must assess and score all **items** (goals and objectives) for the Level that is appropriate for the child's age, and AEPSi requires scores for all items in order to generate an AEPS Outcome Raw Score for each OSEP Child Outcome. (Please see *Meeting Accountability Mandates with AEPS* for more information.) Although use of the AEPS Test results for programming does not require that all six areas of the AEPS Test be assessed and scored, it is recommended that users assess and score all items from the appropriate Level to obtain a comprehensive and accurate picture of a child's development.

Q: Do I have to follow the suggested materials and procedures provided for each assessment activity?

A: No, the suggested materials and procedures for the AEPSi assessment activities are just that, suggestions. It is important to use materials that are familiar and interesting to the child or children whenever possible. Any variations or substitutions to the stated materials or procedures are acceptable so long as the intent of the item is maintained.

Q: Do the assessment activities have to be completed or conducted in a particular sequence?

A: No, the assessment activities do not need to be completed in a particular sequence. Team members are encouraged to tailor the sequence to accommodate children's interests, tolerance, and developmental levels in addition to personnel resources and the length of time available for conducting the activities.

Q: How many people are needed to do the assessment activities?

A: The number of people needed is dependent upon a number of factors, including how familiar personnel are with AEPS, how many children are involved, and the children's developmental levels and behavioral repertoires. In some cases it is helpful (and sometimes essential) to have one person score the AEPS Test and one person manage the activity. However, as personnel become more familiar with the activities and the AEPS Test items associated with each activity, it may be possible for them to elicit behaviors and score the AEPS Test items simultaneously.

Q: When using the assessment activities, how many children can be assessed at the same time?

A: While the home-based assessment activities are designed for assessing a single child across multiple developmental areas, users may find that the activities are also appropriate for assessing small groups of children, two or three at a time. The assessment activity recording forms for the center-based assessment activities provide space for scoring up to six children at the same time; however, users may find that assessing a single child or smaller numbers of children in a group setting is easier when first learning and becoming familiar with the AEPS. Ultimately, the center-based assessment activities can be used with as few as one child and as many children as a team feels it can manage. The developers of AEPS suggest starting with a small group of children, preferably two or three, for those unfamiliar with the AEPS Test and then gradually increase the group size to four to six children for greater efficiency.

Q: At what age children can be assessed using the assessment activities?

A: AEPS Test items span typical child development from birth to age six. The AEPS Test was developed to be used with children from birth to age three (Level I) and with children ages three to six (Level II). Refer to the *AEPS Administration Guide* for guidance on determining which Level of the AEPS Test to use for older children and/or children with delays.