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The AEPS: An Overview

Chapter 1 provides important contextual information to users or potential users of the *Assessment, Evaluation, and Programming System for Infants and Children (AEPS)*[™]. In particular, the what, why, and who of using the AEPS is addressed. In addition, a Quick Start section on how to use the AEPS is offered to assist new users of the AEPS. The AEPS has a number of components, and new users of the system may experience difficulty in deciding where to begin and how to orchestrate the many pieces into a cohesive approach. Previous users of the AEPS will find few procedural changes.

WHAT IS THE AEPS?

The AEPS is more than an assessment/evaluation measure and more than a curriculum. The approach of the AEPS is counter to the use of standardized and normed measures, which yield scores or outcomes that do not provide information that can be used to develop educational goals or outcomes and intervention content. In contrast to standardized norm-based tests, the AEPS is a comprehensive system that ties together assessment, goal development, intervention, and ongoing monitoring and evaluation. The test components of the AEPS yield educationally relevant, meaningful, and functional information that can be used to formulate developmentally appropriate goals/outcomes and objectives/benchmarks for children. These goals and objectives, in turn, link directly to intervention content and procedures offered in the curricular components of the AEPS. The test and curricular components of the AEPS form a comprehensive and linked system that permits using assessment results to develop intervention content and to monitor child progress.

The AEPS is not a screening tool nor is it a norm-referenced measure that yields a developmental age or IQ score. The primary purpose of the AEPS is to assist professionals and parents/caregivers in identifying and monitoring children's developmentally appropriate educational targets and planning individu-

alized intervention; for this reason, the AEPS can be of enormous assistance in assessing children's functional repertoires, developing quality goals, formulating intervention content, and monitoring child progress over time.

WHY USE THE AEPS?

There are four essential reasons to use a linked assessment, goal development, intervention, and evaluation system such as the AEPS:

1. The test portions of the AEPS yield functional and educationally relevant developmental information that can be used effectively and efficiently to develop individualized plans and intervention content.
2. The AEPS Test results make the formulation of goals/outcomes and objectives/benchmarks and intervention activities straightforward and accurate.
3. The AEPS provides materials that permit and encourage the active input and participation of family members in the assessment, goal development, intervention, and evaluation processes for their children.
4. The AEPS supports placement of children in inclusive environments and fosters collaboration among teachers, specialists, family members, and other caregivers.

Ms. Jones, the teacher, and Mr. Robart, the county early intervention specialist, jointly completed an AEPS Test on 4-year-old Michael upon his entry into the Acme Child Care Program by observing him across several days and many classroom activities. In addition, Ms. Martinez, the speech-language pathologist, assisted with the completion of the Social-Communication Area of the AEPS. Soon after Michael's entry in the child care program, Michael's parents were asked to complete the Family Report while observing Michael at home. Ms. Jones, Mr. Robart, Ms. Martinez, and Michael's parents did not have to ask Michael to engage in activities that were meaningless for him, nor did they have to use irrelevant and unhelpful information to formulate his individualized education program (IEP). The information gathered during typical daily routines provided information about Michael's skills and abilities in important developmental areas, and, therefore, formulating appropriate and functional IEP goals/objectives for Michael was straightforward. In addition, Michael's parents were able to actively contribute to the selection of goals/objectives. Because the AEPS permits a direct link between the selected goals and curricular content, Ms. Jones had significant help in choosing daily intervention activities and procedures that would appeal to Michael and target his IEP goals/objectives.

By using the AEPS, members of Michael's IEP team (i.e., Ms. Jones, Mr. Robart, Ms. Martinez, Michael's parents) saved valuable time because they were able to select appropriate and functional goals and intervention content for Michael without having to remove him from his usual daily activities. The selection of developmen-

tally appropriate and meaningful IEP goals and intervention content helped ensure that Michael will make timely developmental progress.

WHO SHOULD USE THE AEPS?

The previous vignette makes clear that the AEPS was designed to be used by teachers, specialists, and caregivers. The caregiver¹ components of the AEPS are written in straightforward language that avoids jargon and complicated descriptions. Caregivers are asked to observe the children as they engage in daily activities and then indicate the children's ability to perform important behaviors.

Using the AEPS enhances interventionist and caregiver understanding of development in young children. The layout of the AEPS provides basic information about developmental milestones and the general sequence in which they appear. The AEPS, however, does require that some members of each professional team have adequate training in child development and child learning to correctly interpret child performance in critical areas.

The AEPS is designed to be used by specialists as well as early childhood, early intervention, or special education teachers and interventionists. Items and curricular activities are divided into six areas so that, for example, a communication specialist can assist in completing the Social-Communication Area and a physical or occupational therapist can assist in completing the Fine and Gross Motor Areas. Division into areas permits efficient test completion by team members, whereas commonalities across areas and cross-referencing provide a solid basis for collaboration.

A QUICK START ON HOW TO USE THE AEPS TEST

At first glance, the AEPS may seem to contain an overwhelming amount of material because there are hundreds of items across six developmental areas in two age ranges of assessment and curriculum, as well as family components. Once you begin using the AEPS, however, its advantages will quickly become evident and the structure of the system will provide a clear and systematic framework for initial and ongoing assessment, intervention planning, and evaluation. Taking the time to learn the AEPS can, in fact, stimulate and organize major improvements in existing assessment procedures, team roles, and service delivery environments.

The following suggestions provide directions for a quick start to the AEPS system for first time users. There are separate sections for home- and center-based settings that provide a stepwise summary of AEPS Test administration procedures for regular users of the test and should be considered a supplement, rather than a replacement, for the detailed AEPS Test administration guidelines contained in subsequent chapters of this volume.

¹The term *caregiver* is preferred over parent because young children may interact with a variety of caregivers.

Specific Steps for AEPS Test Administration: Center-Based Settings

- **Identify the child or children to be assessed.** Review existing information to familiarize yourself with each child's age, developmental performance across areas, medical history, family concerns, and behavioral characteristics.
- **Review AEPS Test items for the areas that you plan to address.** Read through the specific goals/objectives in Volume 2 to clarify the content and criteria for each skill that you plan to assess. Some users find it useful to make notations about criteria.
- **Organize the testing environment.** Determine if you will be using the AEPS Test to observe one or more children during play, planned activities, and/or regular routines such as opening circle or snack time in the classroom. Use the Assessment Activities in Volume 2, Appendix A to develop a list of necessary materials and to schedule time and set up space for assessment in the classroom accordingly.
- **Select the data recording form that matches your assessment procedure.** The AEPS provides a variety of recording forms to meet individual users' needs. After organizing the environment, identify and reproduce the form that matches your situation; for example, if you have decided to observe a single child in a single area of development, then you may want to use the Child Observation Data Recording Form found in Appendix C of this volume. If you have decided to assess a group of children, then you may want to use the Assessment Activities found in Appendix A of Volume 2.
- **Prepare for data collection.** Designate someone to monitor play or facilitate the assessment activity and someone else to record data. Complete the Child Observation Data Recording Form cover sheet for each child, and bracket the child's performance level by eliminating goals that are clearly too easy or difficult. Score items that are developmentally below the child's current level of performance as 2R and items that are demonstrably too difficult as 0R. The R, which stands for Report, is found in the Notes section of the Child Observation Data Recording Form.
- **Record assessment data using the three-point scoring options (2 = consistently meets criterion; 1 = inconsistently meets criterion; 0 = does not meet criterion).** Observation is the preferred method of data collection. Score each goal, and then score all associated objectives for goals scored 1 or 0. Add notes and comments to qualify and explain scores.
- **Summarize child's performance across areas.** Users may summarize AEPS information numerically, narratively, or visually. Be sure that enough information has been collected to make sound decisions, and look for patterns in how a child demonstrates various skills. Many teams working in center-based programs generate narratives that can be used as the child's present level of performance or as quarterly progress reports.

Specific Steps for AEPS Test Administration: Home-Based Settings

- **Review existing information about the child to be assessed.** Familiarize yourself with each child's age, medical history, family concerns, and behavioral characteristics. Explain the importance of caregiver input in the assessment process, assist caregivers in completing the Family Report, and review developmental performance across AEPS assessment areas.
- **Review AEPS Test items for the areas that you plan to address.** Read through the specific goals/objectives in Volume 2 to clarify the content and criteria for each skill that you plan to assess. Discuss the content of assessment items with the parents or other caregivers, and answer any questions that they might have.
- **Organize the testing environment.** Talk with the caregivers to determine the best time of day to gather assessment information during a home visit and to clarify the role that they would like to take in the process. Use the Assessment Activities in Volume 2, Appendix A, and plan to identify materials and events with the caregivers for the assessment home visit(s) accordingly.
- **Select the data recording form that matches your assessment procedure.** The AEPS provides a variety of recording forms to help meet individual users' needs. The forms can be purchased separately from Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co. The CD-Rom containing these forms includes a bonus Child Observation Form with Criteria for Birth to Three Years and Three to Six Years. After organizing the environment, identify and reproduce the form that matches your situation; for example, if you are observing a single child in his or her home environment, then you may want to begin with the Family Report and then complete the Child Observation Data Recording Form found in Appendix C of this volume.
- **Prepare for data collection.** Complete the cover sheet for the child's Observation Data Recording Form, and use results of the Family Report to bracket the child's performance level. Eliminate goals that are too easy or difficult by scoring items that are clearly below the child's current level of performance as 2R and items that are demonstrably too difficult as 0R. Discuss with the participating caregivers how they will be interacting with the child during the various assessment activities. Encourage caregivers to facilitate activities as much as possible. The R, which stands for Report, is found in the Notes section of the Child Observation Data Recording Form.
- **Record assessment data using the three-point scoring options (2 = consistently meets criterion; 1 = inconsistently meets criterion; 0 = does not meet criterion).** Observation is the preferred method of data collection. Score each goal, and then score all associated objectives for goals scored 1 or 0. Use notes and comments to qualify and explain scores. Encourage caregivers to add explanatory comments. Review and discuss the child's performance with the caregivers as you assess.

- **Summarize child's performance across areas.** Users may summarize AEPS information numerically, narratively, or visually. Be sure that enough information has been collected to make sound decisions, and look for patterns in how a child demonstrates various skills. Teams working in home-based programs may summarize the child's performance visually by completing the Child Progress Record found in Appendix E of this volume.

Optional Strategies for Using the AEPS Test

- **Start with a single activity or center that is designed specifically for exploring use of the AEPS Test.** Select a few assessment activities from Volume 2, Appendix A for use in either home or classroom settings; for example, set up the Washing Babies activity in the dramatic play area or at home. Use the assessment activities to experiment with administering the AEPS Test. Identify the specific goals/objectives associated with each activity and practice embedding opportunities for children to perform the skills during the activity. Once you are comfortable and confident with facilitating the activities, begin collecting data on children's performance of the skills using the Child Observation Data Recording Form in this volume, Appendix C.
- **Identify a single child for whom existing assessment information is inadequate, and use a portion of the AEPS Test to gather additional information.** Select one or two areas of the AEPS Test that seem to address specific areas of interest to caregivers and professionals; for instance, both the Cognitive and Social-Communication Areas will provide detailed information for a child with identified delays in language. Read the section on scoring in Chapter 3 of this volume. Read through the test items in Volume 2 for each selected area, and observe the child engaging in activities where he or she will have opportunities to perform the skills (e.g., during free play with peers, during parent-child interactions). Use the Child Observation Data Recording Form from Appendix C in this volume to record your observations of specific skills in each area using the three-point scoring options and notes. Refer to Volume 2 for detailed information on test items (e.g., specific item criteria) and consult the assessment activities in Volume 2, Appendix A for ideas on activities that can be used to observe target skills.
- **Use the AEPS Test to assess a child who enters the program in the middle of the year.** Give the child time to acclimate to the home visitor or the classroom setting, and then arrange to observe during the next few consecutive home visits or classroom activities. Use the Child Observation Data Recording Form from Appendix C in this volume to record your observations of specific skills across all areas using the three-point scoring options and notes. Ask caregivers to complete the Family Report to gather additional information on the child's performance, and compare your observations with their ratings. Refer to Volume 2 for detailed information on individual items and to the Assessment Activities (Appendix A) for assessment activity ideas.

Optional Strategies for Curriculum Implementation

- **Start with a single activity or center that is designed specifically for using the AEPS Curriculum.** Use the Routine and Planned Intervention Activities from Volumes 3 or 4 to design intervention activities for use in either home or classroom settings that may provide an opportunity to address a number of existing IFSP/IEP goals for children in your program. Facilitate each activity several times to practice embedding a range of specific goals/objectives within a single activity. Once you are comfortable with facilitating the activities, try using the Child Observation Data Recording Form from Appendix C in this volume to record observations of children's performance on specific IFSP/IEP goals/objectives.
- **Use the AEPS Curriculum items to address existing IFSP/IEP goals/objectives within daily activities.** Compare existing IFSP/IEP goals/objectives for children in your program with the IFSP/IEP Goal and Objective Examples in Appendix B of this volume; for example, review the Balance and Mobility strands in the Gross Motor Area of Birth to Three Years to find functional skills associated with goals such as "Walks without support," or "Runs." Select AEPS skills that match existing goals/objectives, and use the curriculum items to identify teaching strategies in the context of daily activities. Use the Routine and Planned Intervention Activities from Volumes 3 or 4 to design intervention activities at home or in the classroom.

SUMMARY

This chapter has presented a range of overview information designed to assist the user or potential user of the AEPS in understanding what the system is, who might use it, and why. This information addresses the essential issues that potential users of any curriculum-based measure should address prior to adopting an approach. A final section lays out step-by-step procedures for beginning users of the AEPS. For additional information about using the AEPS, please see <http://www.brookespublishing.com/tools>.

