

Teaching Strategies GOLD®: Assessment for Development and Learning of Young Children [11/1/14]

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Introduction

Assessing and evaluating children are critical in the educational process to measure children's learning and development. Assessment results can be used to guide classroom decision making, to identify children who might benefit from special services, and allow professionals to be accountable to communicate with other adults about the children for whom they are responsible. Typically, assessment procedures are used as a part of program evaluations based on formal and informal, norm-referenced, and standardized assessments. Therefore, most of the assessment tools should be valid, reliable, free of bias, and culturally appropriate.

In the United States (U.S.), many assessment tools are available for young children such as BRIGANCE Early Childhood Developmental Inventory (BRIGANCE), Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT-IV), Ages and Stages, Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R), and Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) to name a few. These tools were developed in the eighties and nineties. However, with the current educational movements and initiatives, such as the enactment of Goals 2000: Educate America Act, the launch of new Early Childhood Learning Standards with the emphasis on technology, school readiness initiatives, kindergarten screening efforts and statewide testing against academic benchmarks, some of these assessment tools do not address these requirements anymore. Furthermore, the dramatic increase in culture and linguistic diversity among school children produced a pressing need to improve assessment practices for young English language learners [ELLS] (Abedi & Gandara, 2007). According to The National Center for Education Statistics,

the percentage of ELL in 2002-02 was 8.7%, and in 2011-12 it increased to 9.1% or an estimated 4.4 million students. (2014). Teaching Strategies Curriculum GOLD is one of the assessment programs that possibly address this concern (Teaching Strategies GOLD, 2013).

Teaching Strategies GOLD®

Teaching Strategies GOLD® is an observational assessment system to evaluate children's development and learning from birth through kindergarten (Lambert, Kim & Burts, 2014). It is designed to help teachers discover what children know and can do as well as their strengths, needs, and interests (Heroman, Burts, Berke, & Bickart, 2010). "The assessment is grounded in 38 research-based objectives that include predictors of school success and are aligned with state early standards *in the United States* (emphasis added)" (Dodge, 2011, p.1). *Teaching Strategies GOLD®* covered diverse aspects of curriculum and involve a range of activities.

The assessment may be implemented with any developmentally appropriate curriculum using either web-based or conventional systems. The system is widely used across the U.S. (Hyson, 2008) in Head Start child care centers, and school-based programs, such as Project HELP. In 2012 there were about 257,000 (approximately 80%) early care and education centers utilizing Teaching *Strategies GOLD®* Assessment System (National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral, 2014).

Teaching Strategies GOLD® is appropriate for children with disabilities, children who are English-language learners and children who demonstrate competencies beyond typical developmental expectations (Heroman, Burts, Berke, & Bickart, 2010). However, it is not intended to use as a screening or diagnostic measure, an achievement test, or a program evaluation tool (Lambert, Kim & Burts, 2014).

The Components of *Teaching Strategies GOLD®*

Teaching Strategies GOLD® has four components: Objectives for Development and Learning, Child Assessment Portfolio, Assessment Opportunity Cards, and On-the-Spot Observation Recording Tool. Figure 1 illustrates a brief description of each component.

	Components	Descriptions
1	Objectives for Development and Learning	There are 38 objectives, organized into four areas of development and learning (social-emotional, physical, language, and cognitive) and six content learning standards (literacy, mathematics, science and technology, social studies, the arts, and English Language acquisition).
2	Child Assessment Portfolio	The portfolio is used to record and document assessment information over the course of a year. The portfolio can be in a form of electronic, box, or binder.
3	Assessment Opportunity Cards	The assessment contains 10 selected activities that can be integrated into everyday classroom activities to help teachers focus on the observations and collect information related to particular objectives. The cards explain how to structure additional opportunities for children to demonstrate what they know and can do in relation to particular objective.
4	On-the-Spot Observation Recording Tool	The on-the-spot observation recording tool streamlines the overall process of recording information about physical development, literacy, and math skills. It is used when teachers need to date when a behavior or skill was observed for a particular objective.

Figure 1. Brief Descriptions of *Teaching Strategies GOLD*® Component.

One of the features of the *Teaching Strategies GOLD*® assessment system is that each of the objectives has 9 rating scales that can be used to assign a value to the child's level on a particular progression. Rating 1 indicates the lowest and 9 is the highest score (see Figure 2 below). There is also a rating of "Not Yet" before rating 1, which can be used to indicate that the

child has not yet achieved in the observed learning objective. Color-coding is used to indicate the age or class/grade ranges for the expectations. The colors red, orange, and yellow code each year of life for the first three years; green, blue, and purple code classes/grades for the next three years. The ratings and color coding are very easy to use by the teachers to determine a child's level of development for each objective. The teacher can use this information on how to plan for the appropriate activities for the child. A sample list of the objectives for Social Emotional, 1a: Regulates Own Emotions and Behaviors: Manages Feelings is shown in Figure 2 below.

Objective 1 Regulate own emotions and behaviors

a. Manage feelings

NotYet/ Year Of Life	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
		<p>Uses adult support to calm self</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calms self when touched gently, patted, massaged, rocked, or hears a soothing voice • Turns away from source of overstimulation and cries, but is soothed by being picked up 		<p>Comforts self by seeking out special object or person</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gets teddy bear from cubby when upset • Sits next to favorite adult when sad 		<p>Is able to look at a situation differently or delay gratification</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When the block area is full, looks to see what other areas are available • Scowls and says, "I didn't get to paint this morning." Pauses and adds, "I have an idea. I can paint after snack." 		<p>Controls strong emotions in an appropriate manner most of the time</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asserts, "I'm mad. You're not sharing the blocks! I'm going to play with the ramps." • Says, "I'm so excited! We're going to the zoo today!" while jumping up and down 	

Strengths and Limitations of the Assessment

Teaching Strategies GOLD® is convenient, practical, and efficient to use (Decker, 2013). It offers teachers the ability to create online portfolios and easily upload scans, photos, observation notes, and video clips. Teachers can capture photos, videos, audio clips, and text notes; tag documentation with objectives, dimensions, and children's names, and send data to *Teaching Strategies GOLD*®. It includes multimedia examples and is a simple way to document more than one aspect of a child's development and learning. With generous storage space for large files, teachers can upload a wide variety of documentation to support each child's developmental profile.

Teaching Strategies GOLD® also provides a free app, called *Teaching Strategies GOLD*® Documentation created exclusively for teachers using the *Teaching Strategies GOLD*® online assessment system. Using an online portal, families can access and contribute information about their child's learning and development as well. However, for locations where technology supports and internet access are limited, using *Teaching Strategies GOLD*® can be a challenge to educators and families. Teachers have to use the paper and pencil version of the assessment and save the data in paper form as well. Nevertheless, teachers who use this option should consider the issues of time and cost that involve the process, and storage of the data.

The assessment guides teachers through the process of evaluating children's knowledge, skills, and behaviors. The color-coded progressions of development and learning make it easy for teachers to compare each child's knowledge, skills, and behaviors to widely held

expectations for most children of the same age or class/grade. It also generates comprehensive report and help teachers make better decisions (Decker, 2013). It is important to note that this assessment is only to evaluate children's development and learning and not for all areas of quality of the learning program being used.

Teaching Strategies GOLD® is a criterion-based type of assessment that measures a child's performance against a predetermined set of criteria, yield performance profiles that reflect the child skills at a certain developmental level and aspect. This type of assessment may be standardized but the developmental content usually allows flexibility in administration procedures.

Teaching Strategies GOLD® assessment program can also serve as a resource for designing professional development activities for program administrators and staff as part of the implantation of early childhood best practices in early care and education. The early care and education in the U.S. are currently characterized by coordinated systems of service delivery, with assessment as a central component along with curriculum and program evaluation (National Association for the Education of Young Children & National Association of Early Childhood Specialists/in State Departments of Education, 2003). In addition, *Teaching Strategies GOLD*® also addresses the U.S. state and federal law early intervention program, called Recognition and Response (RaR). RaR is a preschool version of the Response of Intervention (RtI), a three- tier model of instruction to identify students who are not making expected progress in academic performance.

Teacher and parents acknowledge that *Teaching Strategies GOLD*® is easy to use, save time, and space. Children's information is well-organized and very informative to inform parents and stake holders about what the child can do or cannot do, easy to monitor the child

progress in development and learning including children with disabilities. A study conducted by the research team from Teaching Strategy over 400,000 prekindergarten children in 2013 revealed that children in classrooms where teachers used both *The Creative Curriculum® for Preschool* and *Teaching Strategies GOLD®* scored higher in Language, Cognitive, Literacy, and Mathematics than did children in classrooms where their teachers used a different curriculum (Teaching Strategy, 2013). This program has been proved to be one of the best assessments for preschoolers in the USA.

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