Assessment at the Advantage Learning Center

ASSESSMENT AND CURRICULUM

ARTICLE 1 OF 2

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Many parents want to know about the curriculum and assessment at ALC. This series of articles is intended to familiarize parents with our curriculum and academic assessment.

"Creative Curriculum" and "Teaching Strategies – GOLD" (TS Gold) are the names of the curriculum and academic assessment used by all classrooms at Advantage Learning Center. As teachers plan a lesson for the upcoming unit, they begin by looking at TS Gold to see where each student currently needs support and focus.

That is why this series of articles begins with assessment.

When hearing the word "assessment" standardized tests and report cards come to mind. However, that is not what is meant by assessment in early childhood education programs. Assessment happens while teachers observe children in authentic, play-based situations.

Assessment is dynamic and is used to align daily and weekly classroom happenings with exactly what each child needs in order to grow and develop. To learn more about how assessments affect classrooms, see the article provided by ALC about curriculum.

Executive summary of TS Gold:

1. Collect evidence
2. Input evidence into TS Gold
    a. Code each piece of evidence
3. Complete a Checkpoint
4. Relay information to parents (parent-teacher conference for older classrooms, verbal or written report for younger classrooms)

TSGold includes objectives for major areas of growth and development (or *how* kids learn) such as:

- Social-Emotional
- Physical
- Language
- Cognitive

as well as content learning (or *what* kids learn) such as:

- Literacy
- Mathematics
- Science and Technology
- Social Studies
- The Arts

For children who are English Language Learners, there is a tenth category that focuses on the child's progress in English. (See the attached overview detailing all the objectives.)

Each category is just as important as the others. Kindergarten teachers look for readiness in academics as well as social skills. A child who can manage their emotions and engage in social situations is a child who is ready to learn.

Younger classes focus on how kids learn. "Content" objectives become more complex as children age.

First, teachers collect evidence.

They take pictures, videos, and notes whenever they see an opportunity for a child to practice or demonstrate one of the 36 objectives. Objectives are the skills that are commonly recognized as important for child growth and development.

Teachers spot evidence throughout the day. Play is a rich, complex vehicle for learning. Children practice essential learning skills through play. For example, one mathematics objective is "Uses number concepts and operations: quantifies". When a teacher hears a child say, "I have 3 trains, my train is longer than yours." while playing with the toy train set, they quickly snap a picture of the child or jot a note. The teacher recognizes the child is practicing one of the objectives.

Evidence also takes the form of work sampling. Teachers take photos of children's work whether it is 2-dimensional (such as a drawing) or 3-dimensional (such as a block tower). These records are kept in TS Gold and can be referenced later in the year to see a child's growth and development.

Second, teachers input evidence into TS Gold.

Using the TS Gold app on classroom iPads or the TS Gold website on classroom laptops, teachers upload the pictures, videos, and notes they collected.

During this step, teachers code each piece of evidence.

For each objective, a range called a "progression" of skills exists. The progression comes from decades of research and details the order and general age at which each skill is learned.

Each age has a corresponding color. Progressions show at which age children typically gain each skill by showing a band of color as seen in Figure 1 (Teaching Strategies, 2015).

In the above example, there are 14 steps identified for Objective 20 (Uses number concepts and operations: quantifies). That means that typical children usually start quantifying in late infancy by recognizing the concept of "more". This can be seen in a classroom when an infant or toddler signs for more snack. The 14th step in this objective is "compares fractions and explains them using physical models" which typically happens in third grade.

So, for our teacher who noticed a child saying they have 3 trains, they teacher will use the detailed progression chart to find that the observed behavior fits into the 4th step for this objective, which is typical for children from older toddlers through 4 years old. Using TS Gold, the teacher will choose a code level of 4 for this piece of evidence.

Each progression has a different number of steps, meaning a code of "4" has no connection to a value judgement. It is not, for example, a 4 out of 14. The numbers of each objective (progression) are used to see how the child is developing compared to what is expected of typical children of the child's same age.

(At this point, teachers can use TS Gold to check on where each child is or is not meeting expectations and plan lessons to support their development. This will be explored in detail in the next article, which will focus on curriculum.)

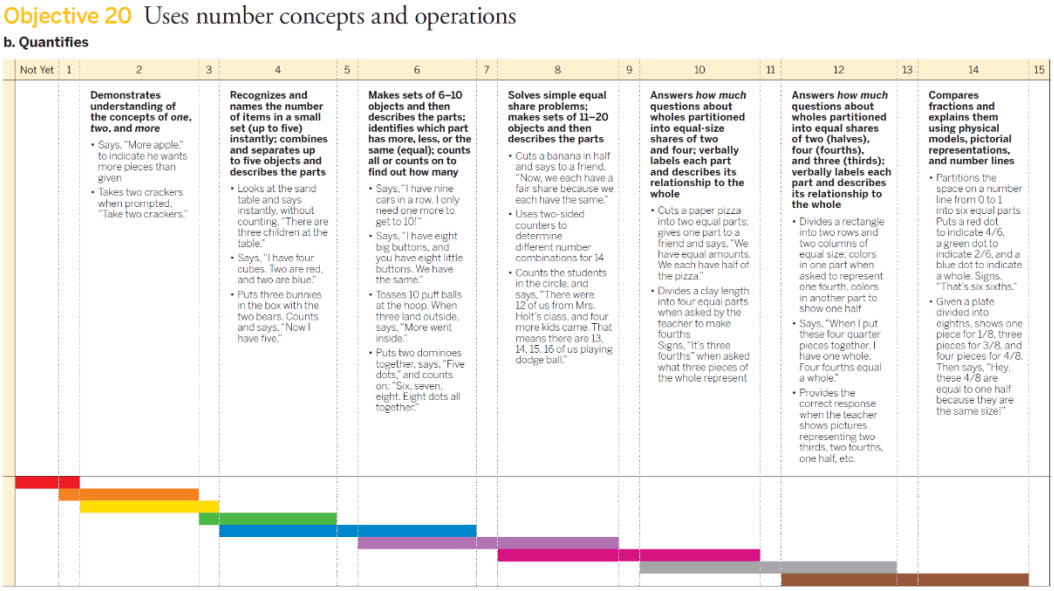

Figure 1

Third, teachers complete a "Checkpoint".

A Checkpoint is a snapshot showing where a child is in each objective. There are three Checkpoints each year: Fall, Winter, and Spring.

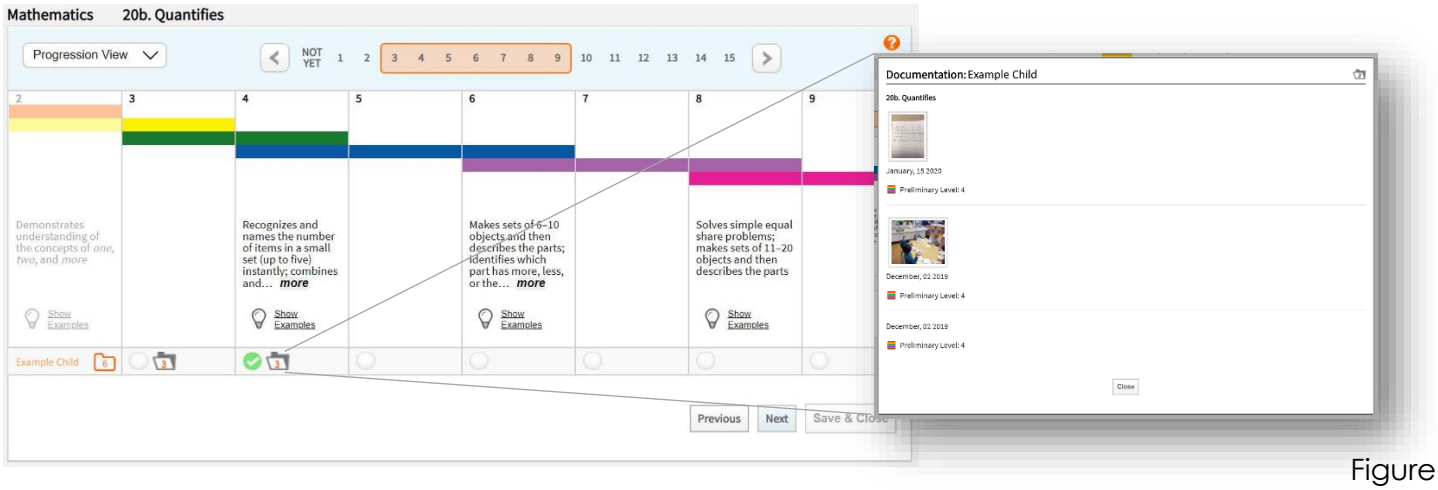

Figure 2

To complete a checkpoint, teachers focus on one child at a time. Using TS Gold, the teacher pulls up a report showing where each piece of evidence was coded for that child.

Teachers can see, in our above example in Figure 2 (Teaching Strategies Welcome!), that a child has three pieces of evidence coded level 4 (the evidence mentioned above and 2 other separate pieces collected and uploaded to TS Gold), and three pieces coded level 3. Noting the later date of the evidence scored level 4, the teacher can confidently code the child's overall skill as 4 for this objective. The teacher repeats this for all 32 objectives.

Once the Checkpoint is complete, teachers look to see any outliers for each child – areas where the child's skill is either above or below the expectation for a typical child of their age.

Or in other words, where is the child excelling, and where does the child need more support?

The fourth and final step is to relay developmental information to parents.

Parent-teacher conferences take place in Frogs, Lions, and Tigers classrooms. For younger classrooms, teachers prepare a verbal or written report.

The information relayed shows parents where their child is meeting the widely held developmental expectations for children their age as well as the areas their child needs more practice.

At this time, teachers and parents can discuss ideas about how to support the child's continued growth and development.

References

Teaching Strategies. (2015). *GOLD objectives for development & learning, Birth through third grade*. Bethesda, MD.

Teaching Strategies. "Welcome!" MyTeachingStrategies® - Log In, 2020, my.teachingstrategies.com/checkpoint/by-child/?%2F14166797%2F6051.

The other assessment used at Advantage Learning Center is the Ages & Stages Questionnaire (ASQ).

This is a straightforward checklist completed at regular intervals.

The ASQ looks at communication, motor functions, cognitive functions, and social skills. It is a screening tool used to identify a possible need for early intervention.

Teachers complete ASQ checklists and share the results with parents who can then use the ASQ results to communicate with their child's pediatrician.