

COVID-19 Early Learning Assessment Resource: Concrete Authentic Observation Strategies to Collect Data for KEP-Approved¹ Assessments, Especially In Hybrid and Distance Learning

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This resource provides early learning practitioners with strategies and concrete examples to obtain data, via authentic assessment, that will help them understand the knowledge and skills children possess across multiple domains of learning. The *Framework for Planning for Authentic Assessment* will be of particular value for programs operating in a hybrid or distance learning model. Authentic assessment relies on educators obtaining work samples and observations of a child in the context of their ‘regular educational routine’ (i.e. daily routines and activities in the classroom and home) and then appropriately documenting them. This data serves as the basis for informing and individualizing future instruction, determining proficiency in a skill, and identifying the next step in their learning progression. The use of KEP-approved assessments during COVID-19 will help educators maintain their focus on their students’ social and emotional well-being and reinforces the family’s role as critical partners in their child’s learning and development. KEP-approved assessments are designed to rely on a collaborative team-based data collection process, including families. *MDE considers data (i.e. notes, photos, and videos) uploaded to an online assessment system or family engagement platform to be part of that child’s educational record.*

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Figure 1: Framework for Planning for Authentic Assessment

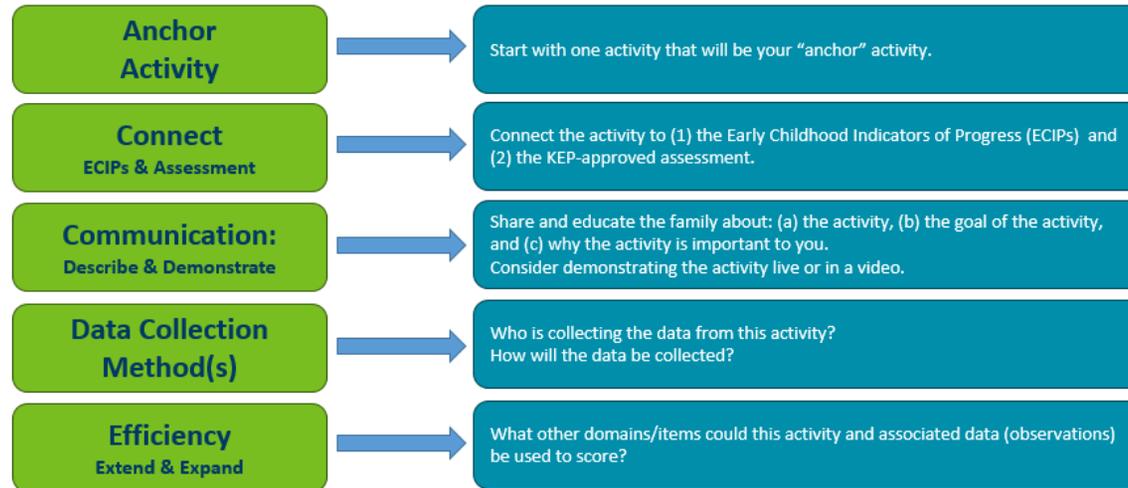


¹ KEP-Approved Assessment: [Kindergarten Entry Profile Approved Assessments](#).

I. Framework for Planning for Authentic Assessment

The Framework, below, was developed to aid practitioners in being planful and efficient as they collect and use authentic assessment observations.

Figure 2: Framework for Planning for Authentic Assessment with Explanation



The tips on authentic assessment², below, are relevant for practitioners using the Framework for Planning for Authentic Assessment (Figure 1, above).

- Plan ahead as much as possible so that you know (a) who you will team with to obtain the information, (b) what to look for and document in an activity, and (c) how (the modality – i.e. text, phone call, video, or email) you will collect the data.
- Be flexible: things will not always go as planned (an observation can still be valuable even if unplanned!).
- Individualize when working with families (use technology and strategies that respond to the unique circumstances and preferences of a family).
- Keep observation notes brief or develop simple observation checklists that are easy to use.
- Limit the number of videos and pictures you upload. It could be faster to describe the picture/video than to upload it.
- One authentic observation may provide evidence for multiple items on your KEP-approved assessment.
- Be positive and objective. Focus on what a child is able to do/can do (strengths and abilities), not what she is not able to do/cannot do.
- Set a goal of finishing your data collection at least one to two weeks prior to the end of the rating period, which will provide you with a cushion to obtain documentation and rate items that are missing.

² MDE would like to acknowledge the valuable input provided by the Minnesota Head Start Association for this document.

II. Tools and Resources to Assist in the Collection of Authentic Observation Data

- Phones:
 - You can choose between audio and video as well as text (there are synchronous and asynchronous opportunities).
 - May provide access to an application (App) that can be used with families.
- Other pieces of technology (tablets, Chromebooks, iPads, etc.).
- Surveys (Google Forms, Survey Monkey, etc.):
 - This is a way to ask (survey) families about their preferences and comfort with different modes of communication.
 - Determine how comfortable a family is with different types of technology.
 - This is also a way to learn more about routines, activities, and available materials at home (that may be used for an anchoring activity).
- Mini-interview with families:
 - Ask open-ended questions to start the interview and ask follow-up questions (sometimes open-ended) to gather more details.
 - Allows the family/caregiver share the details of the activity; try to obtain details about what was observed (this will help you understand how the activity may need to be modified for the skill you are trying to observe).
- Family engagement Apps:
 - Used to primarily to communicate with families (i.e. SeeSaw, Living Tree), these can also be used to document authentic observations.
 - Allow teachers and families to work as a team to upload videos, audio recordings, photos, and messages.
 - Word of caution: try to avoid asking families to use too many different Apps, especially families not comfortable with technology.
- A self-created teacher blog may be a way to share information with families and minimize email.
- Voice to text recorders and Apps can help minimize typing.
- Interpreters/Language Lines, Cultural Liaisons, and staff who speak other languages can help you communicate with families who may not be proficient or comfortable with English. Cultural Liaisons may help explain the value of photographs and videos to families reluctant to share them or discover other methods that might work for the family to share useful information. The use of trained interpreters and Language Lines are recommended for communications where nuance and detail are important.
- Tools like Google Translator can help you communicate short, concrete pieces of information with families in their home language.
- Pair teachers who are experienced with the assessment tool and collecting data via distance learning with teachers who are inexperienced.
- Create a Personal Learning Community for teachers so that they are able to share ideas and best practices around authentic assessment and the collection of authentic observation data.
- Attend a [KEP-Approved Assessment Training](#) (these trainings occur mostly in the fall, late spring, and summer).
- Reach out to a [Certified KEP Assessment Certified Trainer](#), these professionals are certified to train by the publisher of the assessment and are ready to partner with you to provide the training and supports necessary to successfully implement and use a KEP-approved assessment
- Explore the website of your KEP-approved assessment for resources and read updates sent via email from the publisher (i.e. the COR Advantage, DRDP, and GOLD send regular updates via email).

III. Concrete Instructional Strategies to Collect Authentic Observation Data

- Plan and run synchronous (live) calendar times, story times, singing, and movement breaks.
- Plan and run social skills lessons to provide opportunities for children to participate in conversation (back and forth) with peers with the support of the teacher if necessary
 - **Example:** Consider doing this in a small group, which may be more manageable. If a small group is not feasible, consider assigning a smaller number of students to engage in social skills and conversation at one time. Have a clipboard or computer nearby to take notes.
 - **Example:** Run a regular show and share (i.e. share and tell). Partner with parents ahead of time to preview what the sharing/telling is.
- Use screen sharing on your virtual platform to play educational games with students (or watch them play). This activity will likely need to be 1:1 or a small group.
 - **Example:** [UltimateSLP](#), a paid subscription service, allows a teacher to play a board game with a student (the teacher runs the game from her computer). Each “turn” requires them to do something to target the skills s/he are working on. The spinners and game boards also provide opportunity for naming numbers and counting. The drawback to these is that they are often subscription services. [PBS Kids Games](#) provides free access to educational games that can be used to elicit targeted knowledge and skills.
- Collaborate with other educational staff (and families) to collect authentic observation data and reduce duplication of data collection efforts. Partnership can include related service providers, interpreters, paraprofessionals, specialists, and others. Whenever possible, use the collected information to meet other distance learning requirements, such as attendance verification. This may also help you establish routines for distributing and collecting information.
- Run a once-a-week (or once-every-two-weeks) Lunch Bunch activity, where a teacher/staff member and a couple of students have a short lunch (15 minutes) together. An alternative to a Lunch Bunch could be a Snacktivity, where the teacher/staff member have a snack with a small group of students.
 - **Example:** As a special treat/get to know the teacher, invite two students to a Snacktivity (over time, rotate through the entire class so all students have that opportunity, especially students who might be struggling). Encourage parents to provide a snack that can be counted or sorted, like colored Goldfish or M&Ms.
- For children and families who speak a language other than English at home, consider utilizing a Language Line, interpreter, or staff member who speaks the family’s home language to communicate with families.
 - **Example:** Run a synchronous (live) virtual session with a child and family to demonstrate an activity you’d like them to try. Invite an interpreter to convey your information in the family’s home language.
- Work with the family to determine the frequency that observation data should be requested/collected from families (asking for information every day is not practical). The [Fall 2020 Early Learning Programs Attendance Verification Guide](#) suggests that family supplied work samples/documentation is a weekly collection.
- Explain how the information you are asking for is valuable:
 - It will help you get to know their child better (i.e. likes/dislikes).

- It will help inform your instruction.
- Knowing a child’s strengths and challenges will inform the activities and supports that will benefit a child.
- When a family shares an observation with you, acknowledge your appreciation and share how that information will help support the child’s learning.
- Ask a family to record a video of them playing a game with their child and send it to you.
- Provide a supply kit (or suggest home materials like magazines, books, comics, newspapers, or measuring cups) that will help the child with the activity/task:
 - Keep it simple!
 - Art supplies: scissors, eraser, markers, outdoor chalk
 - Age appropriate games: Go Fish, Connect 4, Monopoly Junior, Memory Guess Who
 - Assistive technology from the student’s Individualized Education Plan (IEP): Unifix Cubes, foam blocks, a visual schedule, visual picture cards for activities, timers
- Work with families to identify materials and games at home that can be utilized into educational activities.
- Share lesson ideas with families that target specific skills while also providing families with specific “things to look for” or “questions to ask” when observing their child.
 - **Example:** For a sorting activity, “look fors” might include: Was your child able to sort by color? By shape? Both? What kind of help, if any, did your child need to sort? Could they correctly sort all the time, some of the time, or none of the time?
- Livestream or record a video where you model a specific activity. Consider sharing with parents what might prove challenging and how to support their child through those challenges, ways to make the activity easier or more difficult, and a clear understanding of the duration of the activity.
 - **Example:** Demonstrate and explain the difference between rote counting and object counting.
- Provide asynchronous coaching/commentary – with explicit feedback [i.e. not just ‘good job’] - on videos or photos shared by families.
 - **Example:** “That video was great! XXX seemed to enjoy the game and was able to accurately count up to 5 objects. In class, I always encourage students to use their fingers and point – but also move an object to a “new pile” once it has been counted. This helps them avoid counting the same item multiple times.”
- Arrange mutually agreeable visits with families in locations that allow for adherence to MDH guidelines.

V. Stories from the Field³

Story #1 – Be Specific with Families: One thing I thought of when entering data is to be specific with families when teaching them how to respond to an activity their child is doing at home. If it's a writing activity, ask the parent to send a picture of how their child is holding a pencil/scissors so that we could provide feedback to the parent via a Zoom conference or message.

Story #2 – Extend the Activity: Encourage families to send in videos with their child talking and sharing about what they learned from a lesson or activity and provide families' with follow-up questions to ask after reading a story allows you to better understand if the child understood the story, can recall content from the story, and provides an opportunity to practice and demonstrate and verbal communication skills.

Story #3 – Collaborate with other Staff: As the teacher, I led the activity while another staff member took down the data (i.e., short observations). We made sure that we documented observations and uploaded information into the GOLD on a daily basis. We also recorded videos where we modeled everything we asked families to do in hopes that it would provide families with the confidence to lead the activity at home. While we used GOLD to document data, our district uses SeeSaw as the main communication tool. We ended up not using the GOLD application to communicate with families because it was overwhelming.

Story #4 – Model the Activity: We often modeled activities through recorded videos where students had the opportunity to respond back with what they thought the answer was or share information that related to our "Question of the day." Obtaining documentation from families was challenging, initially. Over time, however, we were able to work with families and help them practice using our apps (Zoom and SeeSaw) and they began to share more documentation. While documentation came in through Zoom and SeeSaw, I would upload those observations, photos, or videos to the GOLD.

Story #5 – Communicate in the Child's/Family's Home Language: I used Google Translate frequently when communicating with families and students who spoke another language. I'd provide the information in English and the other language. Often, families would respond in English, but my attempts to communicate in another language helped strengthen our relationship. For a longer conversation, I used another staff person who spoke the family's home language.

Story #6 – The Value of Receiving and Sending Videos: I had been closely monitoring a child's pencil grip and the parent kept sending me pictures of her writing, but not videos of her actually writing in real-time. I asked Mom to send me a video of her in the process of writing, and then I was able to provide feedback to both Mom and the child on her grip. Additionally, I sent a video back to Mom showing her what to look for/pay attention to. In this case, due to a language barrier with Mom, the video was very helpful for her to see and understand what I was looking for with a pencil grip.

³ MDE would like to express its gratitude for the following early learning professionals who contributed a "Story from the Field": Angie Tusa, Jennifer DeDomines, Kaitlin Cantolla-Edward, Jessica Meyer, Kari Fandrich, and Lauren Blake.

Story #7 – Ask Students Questions and Provide Time for a Response: One strategy is to post instructional videos with pauses that provide students with time to answer the question. I would also ask parents to video tape their child doing the activity so that I could assess where the child was developmentally on a progression of learning. For example, I recorded a video of me matching shape turtle shells to the correct shape turtle. The shells had different colors, so I would ask "What color shell matches this turtle?" A few families sent videos of their child doing the activity and I could see how well they could match.

Story #8 – Be Flexible: I used multiple strategies and kept coming back to the word flexibility. I work for a Head Start program, and our families have varying levels of access to and proficiency with technology. With some families, I was able to set up weekly video calls and focus on the different observation areas or items. I would pick an item from GOLD that still needed to be observed (I would run a report in GOLD to determine this), and focus on that item on the video call. For example, counting. If I needed to observe a child counting, I would encourage the student I was on the call with to count toys they had. One little boy and I worked on counting his cars over the video. Another strategy I used was short video clips from a cell phone for observations that I needed. I would text items to the family, and Mom would text me a video of her child working on the item. One of the videos I was able to use was tracing and saying the name of different shapes. Through the video I received, I was able to obtain observations on shapes as well as using writing or drawing tools.

Story #9 – Balance Repeat and New Activities: We knew we had to balance switching up activities so that we hit more GOLD items and domains with the need for repetition so that the child would gain confidence and provide opportunities for them to be successful. We lead activities over Zoom that allowed us to capture authentic observations.

Story #10 – Compare Work Samples Over Time: Families loved being able to see their child's drawings and emergent writing across two points in time. While comparing beginning of the year work to end of the year work is amazing, comparing work over a shorter time can also demonstrate significant growth. Even better, since I had those work samples saved on my computer, I had a lot less paper to manage and sort through. This also helped me demonstrate and speak to the growth of the child.

Story #11 – Using a Family Engagement Platform: I used SeeSaw to collect and share documentation of learning in an online portfolio format with families. This made organizing and storing student work so easy! Seesaw also lets teachers create folder so you can organize work by domains of learning. There are other versions of SeeSaw that include tagging skills and tracking skills as well.

Share Your Story from the Field!

Do you have a strategy or story to share? MDE will periodically update this document to reflect the stories and successes you share with us.

[Click Here to Submit your "Story from the Field"](#)

Appendix: Additional MDE Resources for Hybrid and Distance Learning Models

[COVID-19 Early Learning Assessment Guidance: Required KEP-Approved Assessment Items](#)

[Fall 2020 Early Learning Programs Attendance Verification Guide](#)

[Importance of Relationships in Infancy and Early Childhood during Challenging Times](#)

[Distance Learning Considerations for Infants, Toddlers and Preschool Children with Disabilities](#)

[Family Activity Guide](#)

[Quick Guide: Early Childhood Programs—Building Relationships That Support Consistent Attendance](#)

[Engaging and Communicating with Families during Distance Learning](#)