

Play-Based Assessment (PBA)

The authors' PBA schedule contains:

- Background Information Sheet
- PBA Guidelines (Observation)
- PBA Prompt Sheet
- PBA Guidelines (Participatory Play)
- Assessment Summary Sheet

Background Information Sheet

Name of Child:	Date of birth:
Address:	Ethnicity:
Name of school/nursery/other:	First language:
Nature of child's difficulties:	
Additional information:	
Dates of assessment:	
Duration:	Location:
Adult present:	

Figure 6.1 Authors' PBA

PBA Guidelines, observation phase

In PBA observation is an essential part of the assessment format because it provides useful insight into a child's understanding, learning pattern and learning potential. The assessor should allocate a minimum of 90 minutes to carry out a thorough PBA. This could be spread across two sessions within a four-week period. As part of PBA the suggested observation schedule highlights five main areas of a child's development (see Figure 6.2). The scale from 1–3 refers to a continuum of ability in the areas of Physical, Language, Cognitive (Thinking and Learning), Social and Emotional Development. Each child's skills are interrelated and reflect social and cultural factors. During the period of observation this profile can be used as a prompt and record sheet for the assessor when observing the child in solitary or group play or both. In order to use this profile most effectively the assessor may focus on each area of the child's development separately to ensure adequate details are obtained.

This basic schedule is *scaled* as follows:

Undeveloped: 1

Developing: 2

Developed: 3

These scores obtained could be used to compare the child's current level of functioning rather than comparing him/her to other children of the same age. In other words PBA is a criterion- rather than a norm-referenced form of assessment. The profile obtained can be used to highlight areas of development and/or discrete skills as strengths and will indicate the need for further investigation or immediate intervention. For example a score of **1** would indicate significant difficulty, **2** would suggest potential for improvement and **3** developed skills and consistent progress in this area. **Others** refers to any additional skills/behaviour observed by the assessor. The **Comments** section may be used to:

- highlight queries regarding scores
- give reasons known for high/low scores
- provide examples
- anticipate child's learning potential in discrete areas and the scope for mediation
- note 'unscorables' such as alertness, responsiveness and interest.

The **Assessment Summary Sheet** should highlight the child's strengths and weaknesses in relation to his/her general areas of development. Strengths constitute mainly **2s** and **3s** and weaknesses mainly **1s**. Action may need to be taken in relation to the development of the child's discrete skills and his/her approaches to learning through appropriate mediation.

PBA Prompt Sheet

Areas of development	Solitary	1	2	3	Group	1	2	3
Physical	Strength				Strength			
	Mobility				Mobility			
	Balance/posture				Balance/posture			
	Whole body coordination				Whole body coordination			
	Ball skills				Ball skills			
	Spatial awareness				Spatial awareness			
	Hand-eye coordination				Hand-eye coordination			
	Manipulation				Manipulation			
	Others:				Others:			
Language	Imitation				Imitation			
	Gesture/pointing				Gesture/Pointing			
	Eye contact				Eye contact			
	Listening (appropriate response)				Listening (appropriate response)			
	Duration of on-task behaviour				Duration of on-task behaviour			
	Vocalisations				Vocalisations			
	Babbling				Babbling			
	Naming (single words)				Naming (single words)			
	Short phrases (2/3 words)				Short phrases (2/3 words)			
	Sentences				Sentences			
	Syntax				Syntax			
	Pronunciation				Pronunciation			
	Vocabulary				Vocabulary			
	Following instructions				Following instructions			
	Pre-reading skills							
					Plus:			
					Turn taking/sharing (non-verbal)			
					Turn taking/sharing (verbal)			
					Role-play			
					Communication (non-verbal)			
					Communication (verbal)			
				Seeking attention				
				Following instructions				
Others:				Others:				

Figure 6.2 (continued overleaf)

PBA Prompt Sheet

Areas of development	Solitary	Group			1	2	3
		1	2	3			
Cognitive	Sorting (colour, shape, size)						
	Matching (colour, shape, size)						
	Sequencing (colour, shape, size)						
	Number concept						
	Logical thinking						
	Memory skills						
	Ability to pretend (role-play)						
	Others:						
Social							
	Others:						
Emotional	Occupying oneself						
	Smiling						
	Laughing						
	Crying						
	Controlling him/herself						
	Responding to change						
	Others:						
Comments							

Figure 6.2

PBA Guidelines, Participatory Play phase

The second component of PBA is Participatory Play where the assessor interacts with the child in a play situation individually or as part of a group. This phase of the assessment complements the earlier observation and provides a fuller picture of the child. Behaviours that were evident from observation can be explored further through Participatory Play. The adult is directly and equally involved in the child's play. In worthwhile Participatory Play the assessor needs to consider the following points in three essential stages:

Stage I: Pre-play

Stage II: Play

Stage III: Post-play

Stage I: Pre-play (preparation for assessment)

- Be specific about the information you will be gathering (refer to PBA Prompt Sheet if necessary).
- Decide the number of sessions.
- Negotiate timing and type of activities with other adults as far as possible.
- Decide the duration and the time.
- Decide location.
- Consider the cultural/linguistic factors.
- Familiarise yourself with the child and his/her environment.
- Decide mode of communication.
- Decide the role of other adults.
- Decide on group or individual play focus.

Stage II: Play (adult–child interaction, individually or as part of a group)

- Consider proximity to child.
- Allow child to initiate as far as possible.
- Participate at the child's level.
- Guide/lead when necessary.
- Share agenda.
- Be aware of child's basic needs.
- Ensure flexibility in approach and ease of communication.
- Initiate and support pleasurable and positive interaction.

Stage III: Post-play (completion of assessment)

- Phase out gradually.
- Record and structure information gathered by completing the PBA Prompt Sheet.

- Structure information gathered (refer to available standardised checklists if age-norms are needed).
- Feed back to other adults.
- Plan next step.

Assessment Summary Sheet

Child's name:	Date of birth:
Name of school/nursery/other:	
Strengths identified through PBA:	
Areas to target/develop:	
Action:	
Immediate:	
Future:	
Assessment completed by:	
Name:	
Title:	
Date:	

Conclusion

PBA has similarities with other assessment schedules and checklists but it has distinctive characteristics. It is:

- criterion-referenced
- context-embedded
- spontaneous
- accessible
- self-reinforcing
- culture-friendly
- suitable for all ages and ranges of ability.

Other important aspects of PBA are:

- its scope for assessment over time
- a means for achieving a full picture of child
- a curriculum planning/monitoring strategy
- an approach which focuses on the child's rather than the adult's agenda
- an approach which has potential for use dynamically
- an approach with scope for mediation, as assessment and intervention are taking place side by side.

The central feature of this model of assessment is the interaction of the child and adult through the medium of play. The child takes the lead while the adult observes or participates without affecting the pace or flow of the play. While interacting with the child, the adult acts as a 'go-between' between the child and his/her learning experiences. His learning is assisted through the adult's awareness of what the child needs to learn and how the adult acts upon it. This is also known as mediation and will be further discussed in relation to the work of Vygotsky and Feuerstein in Chapters 7 and 8.

Note: A separate PBA assessment schedule (unpublished copy) can be requested from the authors as commercial publication is currently under consideration.