

**Rethinking the Scale: Inclusive Assessment of Social-Emotional Development
for Autistic Preschool Children**

Honors Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
University Honors Program
Colorado State University

By

Mia VonLunen

Department of Human Development and Families Studies, Colorado State University

Dr. Lisa Daunhauer, Human Development and Family Studies
Erica Simpson M. Ed, Human Development and Family Studies

Fall 2025

Abstract

Assessment in early childhood ensures children receive adequate challenges and scaffolding to support development. Formative, norm-based assessment measures are used to guide instruction; however, normed assessments are often not reflective of neurodivergent populations. For autistic preschoolers in particular, demonstrating social-emotional growth on a norm-referenced scale is challenging as students with developmental disorders are underrepresented in the creation of the scale. As such, the present project modifies the *Teaching Strategies GOLD*, a widely used early childhood assessment tool, to include descriptions of levels and example behaviors that are developmentally appropriate for autistic children ages three to five. Through the inclusion of verbal and non-verbal example behaviors, a wide variety of learners are represented.

Additionally, revisions focus on breaking apart levels into smaller progressions. By providing early childhood educators with an inclusive tool of assessment, neurodiverse students have access to accurate progress monitoring.

Key Words: inclusive assessment, autism spectrum disorder (ASD), formative assessment, neurodiversity, early childhood education, preschool

Rethinking the scale: Inclusive assessment of social-emotional development for autistic preschool children

Preschool children are assessed on their developmental competencies in multiple domains including: social-emotional, physical, language, cognitive, literacy, mathematics, and scientific reasoning development. Assessments of developmental competencies are needed for teachers to develop lessons that meet the needs of students. Additionally, information collected in assessments can be used to refer students to other services such as speech language therapists, physical therapists, occupational therapists, or other specialists. Using rubrics or scales of developmental milestones helps educators to objectively measure the capabilities of children. Scores on these assessments can be compared across time to measure skill progression for a student.

Many current developmental assessments do not account for nuanced or non-linear progress observed in children who have neurodevelopmental disabilities like autism (Kover & Abbeduto, 2023; Loveall et al., 2022). The tools and scales that educators choose can affect the results, highlighting the need for valid and inclusive assessments that are both developmentally and culturally appropriate. It is also critical that assessments account for individual variability whether it arises from genetics, other biological factors, environment, and growth. Choosing scales of measurement that honor individual variability ensures that educators are providing students with opportunities to demonstrate competencies.

When reviewing common assessment rubrics, examples for expected behaviors are in line with neurotypical development. Example behaviors often do not account for children with limited expressive language capabilities or difficulties in social situations. Neurodivergent children are often underscored on these assessments. Children with neurodevelopmental

disorders (NDD) are often scored near the bottom of assessment rubrics; consequently, producing floor effects. Floor effects occur when a large percentage of individuals score at or near the bottom of assessment tools (Lovell et al., 2022). As such, patterns of scoring reflect lower teacher expectations for neurodivergent children. Quality teacher-student relationships in preschool settings have been correlated with positive developmental outcomes (Sanders et al., 2015). A concern within inclusive early childhood classrooms is that children with disabilities typically experience lower quality interactions with teachers and materials than their typically developing peers (Wolery & Gast, 2000).. These biases potentially impact the quality of education neurodivergent children receive.

Inclusive assessment

Inclusive Classroom Profile (ICP) is a measure for assessing if a preschool environment meets the developmental needs of children with disabilities (Soukakou, 2012). The framework assesses equitable access to quality early childcare. One key component of equitable access includes quality of practices and support in the classroom (Dockrell & Lindsay, 2008).

Interactions between teachers and students in the classroom should provide adequate scaffolding and challenges to meet the various needs of students. Additionally, ICP outlines that students with and without diagnosed disabilities should feel a sense of membership within their classroom (Laser, 2025). An inclusive classroom is not genuinely inclusive without a sense of community for all students. It is an educator's responsibility to make students feel welcome. When supporting students in an inclusive classroom environment, ICP states that high-quality learning environments involve a student's family system.

Inclusive assessment is the concept that individuals' learning should be evaluated with limited barriers. Equitable opportunities are provided for each student to demonstrate their

knowledge and abilities. Within the classroom, inclusive assessment is a critical part of creating an inclusive environment. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) ensures that children with disabilities have access to a free appropriate public education (IDEA, 2025). Educating children with disabilities in the least restrictive environment is imperative for supporting their academic success. Inclusive assessment is how teachers can measure student outcomes regardless of ability level.

Taking a strengths-based approach to assessment highlights the capabilities of children rather than their deficits. A strength-based assessment model has been shown to promote social justice and empowerment (Fenton et al., 2015). This approach includes individuals of diverse backgrounds and honors areas they excel in; additionally, the approach proposes goals for learners. For families facing challenging situations, utilizing a strengths-based approach has been beneficial in early childhood settings (Fenton et al., 2015). By promoting shared power, a strength-based approach creates an equitable environment where students are uplifted. Designing strength-based assessments means creating a tool that highlights areas of mastery as well as areas of growth. In scoring students, educators monitor students' progress and provide qualitative feedback.

Teacher expectations

Teacher expectations for students consciously and subconsciously impact their grading, behaviors, and overall demeanor towards a student. Setting high expectations for all students encourages students to aspire to do more. Holding the belief that students are capable changes the culture of a classroom. Early childhood educators help support the social, emotional, and cognitive development of young children. Behavioral learning theory illustrates that people learn through conditioning and interactions with their environment. Sanders et al. (2015) found that,

on average, preschool teachers have lower quality interactions with autistic students. The study concluded that preschool teachers ask less cognitively demanding questions of autistic preschoolers than they do of typically developing students. This research finding potentially extends to students with limited language capabilities; teachers propose less challenges to students with limited expressive vocabulary. Educator interactions are imperative in early childhood education as the questions asked by adults have been correlated with the development of language and cognitive growth (Sanders et al., 2015). Through the utilization of alternative techniques, such as using open-ended questions, educators can facilitate more advanced language and abstract thinking.

Lowering expectations for students has detrimental effects, especially in the early childhood setting. Holding limiting beliefs about students hinders their learning potential. When students are deprived of challenges, they are not able to expand their thinking. Through the utilization of inclusive assessments, teachers can set appropriate expectations for students. Choosing an assessment scale that aligns with the capabilities of the students in the learning environment ensures that students will receive appropriate outcomes to create scaffolding and challenges to further development and learning.

Autism Spectrum Disorder

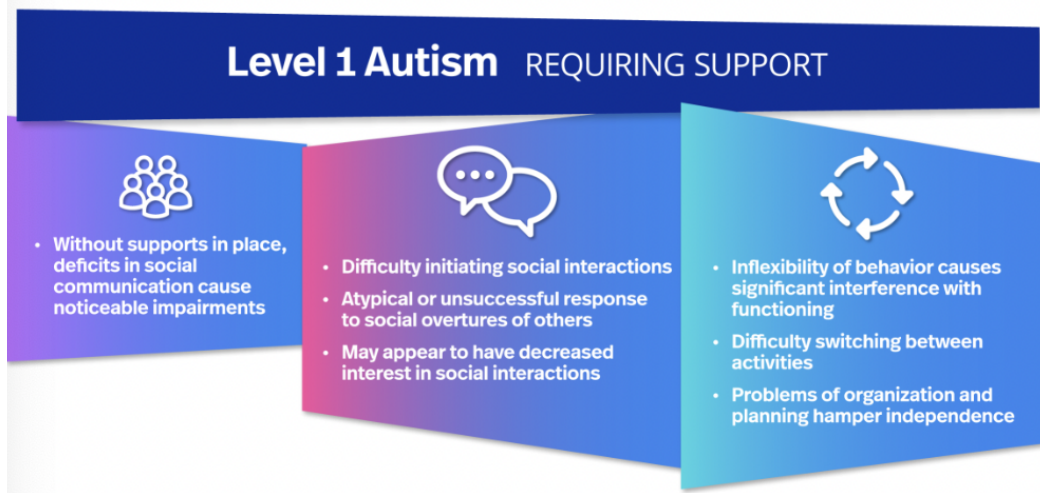
Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by persistent challenges in social communication and restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities which can include challenges in two or more of the following areas: stereotyped movements or speech, high fixation on routines or specific interests, or atypical sensory responses (American Psychological Association, 2022). The categorization of autism began with Leo Kanner's 1943 observation of eleven children who presented severe problems in

social interaction and resistance to change (Rosen et al., 2021). Kanner's findings were groundbreaking for defining autism. Around this time, Hans Asperger also observed children with social difficulties and circumscribed interests (Rosen et al., 2021). Over the years, autism research has progressed, and autism has been redefined as a developmental disorder present throughout a person's lifetime and the symptoms that vary severity across a spectrum. The DSM-V is the most recent criteria for diagnosing autism.

Symptoms of ASD must be present in early childhood. An individual will not be diagnosed with ASD unless their symptoms cause significant impairments to some aspect of daily functioning. Diagnosis involves an observation and analysis of a person's developmental history (Autism Speaks, 2025). and autism spectrum disorder includes a broad range of functioning abilities. Beyond the diagnosis criteria for autism, the DSM-V illustrates three levels of autism severity: requiring very substantial support, requiring substantial support, and requiring support (American Psychological Association, 2022). The adjustment reflects the array of symptoms people with ASD can display. As autism is highly variable, individuals with ASD present symptoms differently. Additionally, there is a high co-occurrence of autism diagnosis with other neurodevelopmental disorders (Kover & Abbeduto, 2023).

Figure 1

Level 1 Autism (Autism Speaks, 2025)



Note: Level 1 Autism, requiring support. Details common behaviors and challenges for individuals who fall within this range.

The rate of ASD in the United States has been rising. Diagnoses are more common for children because of the influx of research and media coverage of ASD. An estimated 1 in 31 children and 1 in 45 adults in the United States are diagnosed with autism (Autism Speaks, 2025). Males are more likely to be diagnosed with autism than females (Autism Speaks, 2025). Increased diagnosis is due to three main factors: changes in diagnosis criteria, improved screening tools, and increased awareness (Autism Speaks, 2025). As more children are being diagnosed with autism, more early childhood settings have moved to inclusive education models. The prevalence of autism highlights the need for early intervention in universal spaces.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends children be screened for autism between 18-24 months of age (Autism Speaks, 2025). The modified checklist for autism in toddlers, revised (M-CHAT-R) is a screening assessment used to test children ages 16-30 months for autism (Robins, 2025). A team of medical specialists can perform an autism screening. Physicians, psychologists, speech-language pathologists, and occupational therapists

screen for autism symptoms regarding physical, language, motor, and cognitive development (Autism Speaks, 2025). Preschool teachers may refer families to professionals for screening if they notice a student displaying ASD symptoms.

Figure 2

*M-Chat-R*TM (Robins, 2025)

M-CHAT-RTM

Please answer these questions about your child. Keep in mind how your child usually behaves. If you have seen your child do the behavior a few times, but he or she does not usually do it, then please answer **no**. Please circle **yes** or **no** for every question. Thank you very much.

1. If you point at something across the room, does your child look at it? (FOR EXAMPLE, if you point at a toy or an animal, does your child look at the toy or animal?)	Yes	<input checked="" type="radio"/> No
2. Have you ever wondered if your child might be deaf?	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes	No
3. Does your child play pretend or make-believe? (FOR EXAMPLE, pretend to drink from an empty cup, pretend to talk on a phone, or pretend to feed a doll or stuffed animal?)	Yes	<input checked="" type="radio"/> No
4. Does your child like climbing on things? (FOR EXAMPLE, furniture, playground equipment, or stairs)	Yes	<input checked="" type="radio"/> No
5. Does your child make <u>unusual</u> finger movements near his or her eyes? (FOR EXAMPLE, does your child wiggle his or her fingers close to his or her eyes?)	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes	No
6. Does your child point with one finger to ask for something or to get help? (FOR EXAMPLE, pointing to a snack or toy that is out of reach)	Yes	<input checked="" type="radio"/> No
7. Does your child point with one finger to show you something interesting? (FOR EXAMPLE, pointing to an airplane in the sky or a big truck in the road)	Yes	<input checked="" type="radio"/> No
8. Is your child interested in other children? (FOR EXAMPLE, does your child watch other children, smile at them, or go to them?)	Yes	<input checked="" type="radio"/> No
9. Does your child show you things by bringing them to you or holding them up for you to see – not to get help, but just to share? (FOR EXAMPLE, showing you a flower, a stuffed animal, or a toy truck)	Yes	<input checked="" type="radio"/> No
10. Does your child respond when you call his or her name? (FOR EXAMPLE, does he or she look up, talk or babble, or stop what he or she is doing when you call his or her name?)	Yes	<input checked="" type="radio"/> No
11. When you smile at your child, does he or she smile back at you?	Yes	<input checked="" type="radio"/> No
12. Does your child get upset by everyday noises? (FOR EXAMPLE, does your child scream or cry to noise such as a vacuum cleaner or loud music?)	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Yes	No
13. Does your child walk?	Yes	<input checked="" type="radio"/> No
14. Does your child look you in the eye when you are talking to him or her, playing with him or her, or dressing him or her?	Yes	<input checked="" type="radio"/> No
15. Does your child try to copy what you do? (FOR EXAMPLE, wave bye-bye, clap, or make a funny noise when you do)	Yes	<input checked="" type="radio"/> No
16. If you turn your head to look at something, does your child look around to see what you are looking at?	Yes	<input checked="" type="radio"/> No
17. Does your child try to get you to watch him or her? (FOR EXAMPLE, does your child look at you for praise, or say "look" or "watch me"?)	Yes	<input checked="" type="radio"/> No
18. Does your child understand when you tell him or her to do something? (FOR EXAMPLE, if you don't point, can your child understand "put the book on the chair" or "bring me the blanket"?)	Yes	<input checked="" type="radio"/> No
19. If something new happens, does your child look at your face to see how you feel about it? (FOR EXAMPLE, if he or she hears a strange or funny noise, or sees a new toy, will he or she look at your face?)	Yes	<input checked="" type="radio"/> No
20. Does your child like movement activities? (FOR EXAMPLE, being swung or bounced on your knee)	Yes	<input checked="" type="radio"/> No

© 2009 Diana Robins, Deborah Fein, & Marianne Barton

Note: Criteria for autism diagnosis are circled in red. Measure is valid and reliable for children ages 16-30 months

Intervention

For students who have been diagnosed with autism, access to quality intervention is necessary. Studies have found that students with ASD who received early and appropriate intervention have been shown to improve their ability to build relationships, maintain friendships, and live independently (Hoe-chi Au et al., 2020). Intervention in the early childhood setting can have lasting effects on a child's social and academic future. Early intervention capitalizes on the brain's plasticity in early childhood (Zwaigenbaum et al., 2015). As neuroplasticity is greatest during early childhood, intervention practices for ASD have shown positive developmental outcomes.

More preschools have adopted inclusive education models. With the rise of autism diagnoses, early childhood programs must adapt to fit the needs of the population they serve. Preschools have seen an increased integration of other professionals such as speech/ language pathologists, occupational therapists, and physical therapists (Fenton et al., 2015). The integration of other professionals demonstrates how schools are providing interventions to students. As more students are receiving additional support outside of the classroom, quality documentation and assessment is necessary to communicate developmental competencies with the child's support network.

Social-emotional development in preschool

Social-emotional development affects a child's overall learning and development. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has reported that children with greater social-emotional competencies have greater motivation, participation, and achievement in school (Ho & Funk, 2018). Some social emotional competencies early childhood educators assess are: working in groups, sharing materials, labeling emotions, and following directions. In preschool, children have the opportunity to learn social-emotional skills by

interacting with peers and their teachers. Teachers assess each area of development, including social-emotional competencies. These assessments are used to measure the progress of students and provide necessary support or challenges.

Neurotypical Social-emotional Development

While there is a wide range of expected social-emotional development in preschool, typically developing preschoolers are expected to form relationships, play with peers, follow directions, collaboratively solve problems, and recognize emotions (Ho & Funk, 2018). The degree to which students demonstrate competencies varies. Additionally, students' social-emotional competencies can be situational. A student may struggle to follow directions in some instances. The role of early childhood educators is to track the progress of students over time and support positive development.

Early childhood educators expect preschoolers to know how to operate in the classroom, label basic emotions, use vocabulary for social situations, and solve social problems (Elias, 2022). Preschoolers may need support in each of these areas. To achieve mastery, educators assess if students can consistently demonstrate social-emotional competencies across situations. By utilizing formative assessment tools, educators can track students' progress over time.

Social-emotional Development for Autistic Preschoolers

There is a wide range of observed social-emotional development in autistic preschoolers. As autism is a spectrum disorder and social-emotional development exists on a spectrum, there is not one expectation for what social-emotional development looks like for autistic preschoolers. However, ASD affects an individual's ability to engage in social interactions. Signs of autism in younger children can include avoidance of eye contact, persistent preference for solitude, difficulty understanding others feelings, delayed language development, repetition of words or

phrases, resistance to minor changes, restricted interest, repetitive behaviors, and in some cases loss of previously acquired speech, babbling or social skills (Autism Speaks, 2025). In the classroom, ASD can manifest in avoidance of peers or limited engagement with the class.

Research has shown that preschool teachers are often the first professionals to refer students to services (Jobs et al., 2018). Early childhood programs can help provide intervention services and scaffolding for students in need of additional support. Intervention in preschool lays a foundation for academic success. Educators must understand typical and atypical patterns of development to best support children. In a comparison between preschool teacher and parent's ability to recognize signs of autism, preschool teachers more accurately noticed symptoms (Jobs et al., 2018). Consequently, early learning settings have a responsibility to provide students with learning opportunities in the least restrictive environment.

The Present Project: Rethinking the Teaching Strategies Gold

The Teaching Strategies GOLD (TSG) is an assessment tool widely used in early childhood settings. The TSG was designed to monitor development for children from birth to third grade. The tool assesses ten areas of development: social-emotional, physical, language, cognitive, literacy, mathematical, science and technology, social studies, the arts, and English language acquisition. By assessing various areas of development, the TSG takes a whole-child approach to assessment. The TSG is a formative assessment, meaning that educators observe and score behaviors in the moment. These observations are then used to guide instruction by providing scaffolding or additional challenges. However, the TSG rating scales are based primarily on normative development. To be developmentally appropriate and informative for autistic preschoolers, the present project will focus on identifying potential modifications for the social-emotional goals within the TSG to align with patterns of development for autistic

preschoolers. By identifying inclusive modifications, this project will make a significant step towards improving the validity of the TSG for autistic preschoolers. These modifications will ultimately support educators in obtaining results that will better inform them regarding autistic children's progress and provide useful information to support selection of the most effective teaching strategies.

Assessment in Early Childhood

Assessments are used to guide teaching. Vygotsky's zone of proximal development illustrates the 'happy medium' between what an individual can do alone and what they can complete with the help of a more knowledgeable other (Shabani et al., 2010). Assessments inform teachers about where a child's 'happy medium' of challenge lies. In early childhood settings, assessments track developmental milestones. The TSG is a formative assessment document that helps to monitor the progress of students across different domains. While the TSG is not a diagnostic tool, formative assessments can provide educators with insight into what scaffolds or interventions are necessary for a student to succeed. The observations teachers make are used to inform instruction and communicate with family systems. Detailed records of classroom observations track a student's learning. As preschool curriculum is often play-based, assessments of learning rely on qualitative measures. Assessments in early childhood should honor the range in development and the different ways students demonstrate learning.

Teaching Strategies GOLD

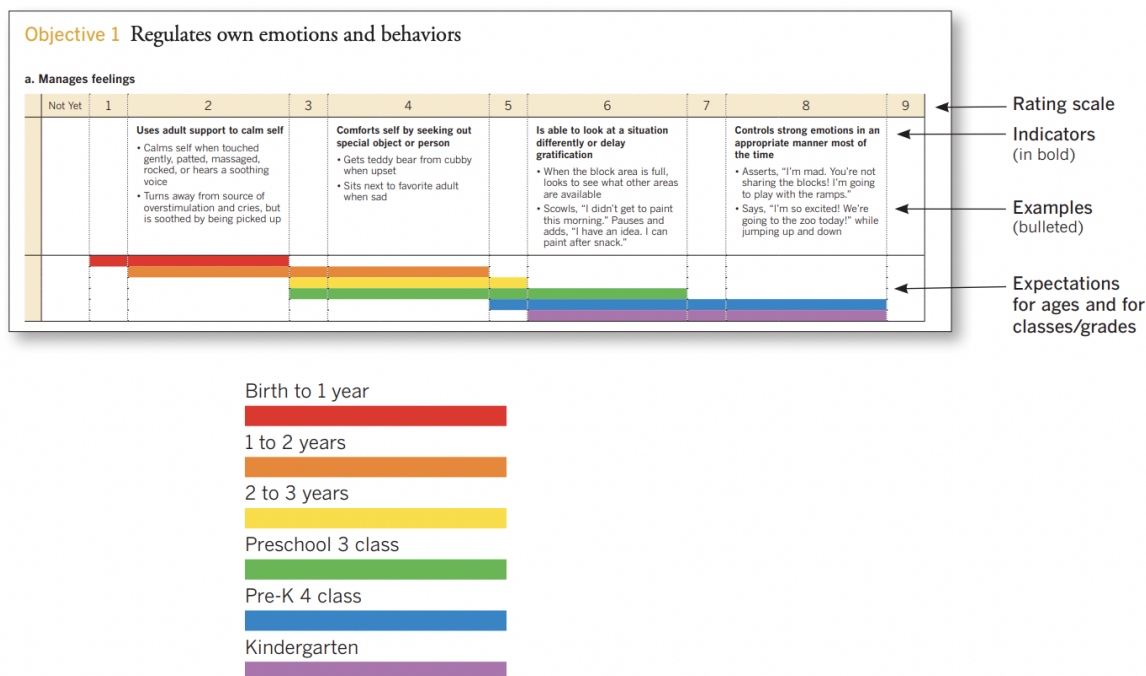
The TSG was created in 2012 and revised in 2020. The tool is a formative assessment for early childhood educators to monitor developmental competencies across multiple areas. The TSG breaks down development into ten different domains, each with additional objectives and dimensions. Dimensions are scaled on levels varying from zero (not yet) to eight (mastery). Each

level includes example behaviors to assist educators in scoring. When teachers score observations of developmental competencies using the TSG, they record the example behavior and assign a level to the behavior as fit with the level description. Odd levels signal that the student needs support in reaching the next level. In the TSG, level zero is always defined as “not yet”. The “not yet” descriptor means that the student cannot complete the first level, even with support. Raw scores from observations are converted for assessment by summing all ratings in a domain (Lambert, 2020). The scaled scores are then compared to the national norm scores to assess developmental competency in domain areas.

Educators use the TSG to track students' progress over time. The TSG can be used for students from birth to third grade; however, there is no age requirement for levels. The decision to create a developmental assessment free of chronological age accounts for diversity in reaching developmental milestones. The TSG honors that development happens at different rates. The scale also utilizes a color-coding system to encode expected behaviors for birth to kindergarten. While the color coding provides a chronological guide for expected behaviors, students of any age may be scored at any level.

Figure 3

Objective 1, Dimension a. from the Teaching Strategies GOLD (TSG) (Teaching Strategies GOLD Assessment System: Technical Summary, 2011)



Note: Graphic describes how to read the TSG.

The TSG has been found to be a valid and reliable measure of developmental competencies for neurotypical students, birth to third grade (Teaching Strategies GOLD Assessment System: Technical Summary, 2011). The TSG demonstrated significant interrater reliability when tested amongst 557 early childhood educators. Correlations between scoring of observations were very high, signifying agreement amongst teachers on how to score students. The validity and reliability of assessments is significant as assessments provide insight into development. Educators use data collected in assessments to guide learning activities. Using tools that provide educators with accurate and insightful data informs meaningful teaching practices (Teaching Strategies GOLD Assessment System: Technical Summary, 2011).

Neurotypical bias

The TSG is used to track patterns of typical development. While the tool has been approved for English language learners, children with disabilities, and children who demonstrate

competencies beyond typical development (Teaching Strategies GOLD Assessment System: Technical Summary, 2011), the levels and example behaviors reflect a neurotypical bias. As autistic students do not follow typical patterns of social development, the tool is less valid for measuring progress. Additionally, for autistic students who struggle with expressive language, demonstrating competency in social-emotional domains within the TSG would not be possible.

When the TSG was assessed in terms of validity and reliability, the measures used tracked the development of primarily typically developing students. When tested in 2020, 7.24% of the population sampled was on an Individual Family Services Plan (IFSP) or an Individual Education Plan (IEP) (Lambert, 2020). The National Center for Education Statistics (2024) estimates 15% of public school students between the ages of three and twenty-one receive special education services. As the sampled population is not reflective of the national average, the normed scores do not accurately reflect the capabilities of neurodiverse populations. Loveall et al. (2022) explains that most common assessment tools are not designed for individuals with NDD; often, neurodivergent people are scored at or near the bottom of assessment tools. Consequently, the clustering of people with NDD creates floor effects. Effective assessments should capture a wide range of skill levels, including skills at the lower performing end (Lovell et al., 2022).

Although the tool allows for variety and individualized scoring, the levels and example behaviors reflect typical patterns of development for students without ASD. While the measure was tested on a portion of the population receiving services, the diagnoses of the tested population were not specified. Additionally, the demographic composition of the individuals with IFSP and IEP plans was not stated (Lambert, 2020). As such, the measure has not been tested on autistic students specifically, and the racial diversity of the neurodiverse population

was not listed. Early childhood education settings must address the multidimensional nature of support needed for autistic individuals (Kover & Abbeduto, 2023). The needs of students vary greatly because of their various identities and backgrounds. Sampling a small percentage (7.24%) of students receiving services does not ensure validity and reliability of the TSG for autistic students.

Inclusive assessment is a way to include students of all abilities in progress monitoring. When assessment scales are not appropriate for students, they do not receive accurate feedback about their progression. Students with ASD may have difficulty progressing in assessment measures as scales are typically not normed beyond three to four standard deviations below the mean (Loveall et al., 2022). Assessment tools reflect the expectations and behaviors of the dominant culture (Kover & Abbeduto, 2023). Autistic students may receive evaluations that characterize them as being less developmentally competent on the TSG than they are, because the tool was created to reflect developmental patterns of neurotypical children. Progress monitoring helps to identify and provide students with appropriate challenges that extend their learning. For students whose abilities are not reflected in assessment measures, they are unlikely to be offered optimal learning opportunities which can lead to further barriers to future progress (Kover & Abbeduto, 2023). However, inclusive assessment methods ensure autistic children also benefit from formative assessment process. Modifications to norm-based assessment measures such as the TSG, are necessary as the sample studied is not representative of the average early childhood classroom.

Rethinking The TSG

The TSG was designed to monitor typical development. In regards to the TSG's psychometrics, the validity of the measure has not been exclusively tested for autistic students.

The aim of this project is to modify components of the social-emotional competencies listed in the TSG to meet the needs of autistic students. The objectives and domains remain the same as developmentalists, and educators have found the measures to be reliable (Teaching Strategies GOLD Assessment System: Technical Summary, 2011). Levels and example behaviors have been changed to create developmentally appropriate expectations for autistic students.

In preschool, social-emotional development is measured by a student's ability to make friends, communicate emotions, follow rules and expectations, and engage in the class. These competencies are commonly challenges for autistic children. Modifying the TSG to include appropriate expectations for autistic students ensures that their progress is accurately measured. By modifying social-emotional competencies to include verbal and non-verbal behaviors, students of all language abilities can be reflected in scoring. Additionally, leveling smaller advancements in social-emotional development helps educators score students more accurately. Incremental advancements in levels improves the accuracy of scoring. Student's progress can be more closely monitored with slight increases in expectations per level.

Table 1

Establishes and sustains positive relationships (TSG Objective 2)

Domain B: Responds to emotional cues

Objective	2: Establishes and sustains positive peer relationships		
Dimension	b: Responds to emotional cues		
Level	Original	Modified	Rationale

0	Not yet	Does not appear affected by the behavior of others	Including a statement about what behavior looks like before level one helps educators know what behaviors to look for. Students who are not affected by the emotional cues of others are not ready to meet domain b: responds to emotional cues.
1			
2	Reacts to others' emotional expressions	Gestures to show engagement for primary emotions	Reacting to the emotional expressions of others can look and sound differently. For autistic children, including example behaviors like pointing when a child cries, helps to include non-verbal signs that a child is displaying social-emotional awareness.
3			
4	Demonstrates concern about the feelings of others	Provides practical support beginning with supporting another when sad	Showing concern for the feelings of others is often thought about as making statements like, "are you okay?". For children who are not yet able to express concern for peers, providing practical support has been shown to be a way to demonstrate care.
5			

6	Identifies basic emotional reactions of others and their causes accurately	Recognize emotions of others through body language, tone of voice, and facial expressions by matching simple pictures of emotional expressions	Recognizing the emotions of others is a challenging social-emotional task. Providing autistic students with scaffolding such as flashcards, social stories, or direct guidance can help them correctly identify emotions and work towards independence over time. Emotion identification intervention in early childhood has been shown to have positive social-emotional developmental outcomes.
7			
8	Recognizes that others' feelings about a situation might be different from his or her own	Recognizes co-occurring emotions of others through verbal expression or matching multiple expression cards to how their peer is feeling	Statements about the causality of emotions require students to first understand and identify emotions. Recognizing that other's feelings are different than their own is a developmental competency at a higher level; rather, in the modification, the level focuses on seeing overlap in multiple emotions. in emotions. This skill reveals that students have a higher level grasp of emotional complexity

Table 2

Establishes and sustains positive relationships (TSG Objective 2)

Domain C: Interacts with peers

Objective	2: Establishes and sustains positive peer relationships		
Dimension	c: Interacts with peers		

Level	Original	Modified	Rationale
0	Not yet	Does not engage with peers (even when assisted)	Providing educators for a model of what behavior looks like before level two assists with scoring. Children who do not engage with peers are still included in the rubric; however, they are not yet meeting the expectations for level one.
1			
2	Plays near other children; uses similar materials or actions	Engages in parallel play	Students who engage in parallel play work near others and may choose to use similar or different materials. For autistic students, some materials may be overstimulating as many children with ASD also have sensory symptoms.
3			

4	Uses successful strategies for entering groups	Demonstrates shared-interest in activity with peers	Moving from parallel play to entering groups is a significant jump in competencies. Showing a shared interest in an activity with peers is a way for children to demonstrate their ability to form connections without needing the social skills to engage with a group.
5			
6	Initiates, joins in, and sustains positive interactions with a small group of two to three children	Provides peer with practical help	Highlighting verbal and non-verbal forms of communication and connection is a way to accurately assess developmental competencies for autistic children. If a child does not have the language skills to interact with peers verbally, it does not mean that they are not developing socially. Providing peers with practical support, such as offering a classmate a toy, is a way for children to show empathy and understanding without needing words.
7			

8	Interacts cooperatively in groups of four or five children	Interacts with 1 or more peers through verbal and/or non-verbal communication	Interacting with a group of children may be challenging for a child who struggles with social awareness. As such, level eight is the highest score on the scale. The modification to include non-verbal communication helps to honor the social-emotional skills of non-verbal or verbally delayed students.
---	--	---	--

Table 3

Establishes and sustains positive relationships (TSG Objective 2)

Domain D: Makes friends

Objective	2: Establishes and sustains positive peer relationships		
Dimension	d: Makes friends		
Level	Original	Modified	Rationale
0	Not yet	Does not engage with peers (even when assisted)	Level zero was created to provide inclusive assessment for students who are not yet ready to meet the objective criteria. Students who do not engage with peers, even when assisted, are still scored on the scale to document their progress.
1			

2	Seeks a preferred playmate; shows pleasure when seeing a friend	Engages with social stories	Autistic children often struggle to form friendships. Social stories are narratives that describe a social situation and outline how characters would feel and behave in that situation. Autistic students who show engagement in social stories are building social and emotional skills to help them initiate interactions to form friendships.
3			
4	Plays with one or two preferred playmates	Uses picture exchange systems (PECS) or communication boards to communicate emotions in social situation	A picture exchange system or communication board helps students to convey their emotions through alternative methods. Students who demonstrate mastery in using PECS or communication boards in social settings are building emotion identification skills needed for friendships.
5			
6	Establishes a special friendship with one other child, but the friendship might only last a short while	Engages in parallel play with a peer	Engaging in parallel play with a peer means that students are able to share space with one another. Students may use different materials, but respect the materials of one another. Establishing friendships can be challenging for autistic children. Providing scaffolding gives autistic students the tools to build friendships.
7			

8	Maintains friendships for several months or more	Plays with a peer or peers during structured routine play activities	Engaging with peers in structured play activities means that students are able to share materials. Additionally, students are able to follow any rules of the activity. This level was modified because maintaining friendships is an advanced skill beyond the adjusted scale. Assessing students' emotional regulation and social integration skills before assessing their ability to maintain friendships ensures inclusive assessment and better progress monitoring.
----------	--	--	--

Table 4

Participates cooperatively and constructively in group situations (TSG Objective 3)

Domain A: Balances needs and rights of self and others

Objective	3: Participates corporately and constructively in group situations		
Dimension	a: Balances needs and rights of self and others		
Level	Original	Modified	Rationale
0	Not yet	Does not recognize spatial and/ or emotional needs of others	Educators can assess students who are not yet meeting the objective by scoring them at a level zero. Including assessment criteria for level zero provides an example of behavior.
1			

2	Responds appropriately to others' expressions of wants	Responds to needs of others through verbal/non-verbal expressions	Responding to the needs of others can include verbal or nonverbal expressions. Example behaviors in the TSG favor verbal responses to peers; however, these example behaviors may not be seen in autistic children with limited language capabilities. Students are able to demonstrate responsiveness beyond verbal capacities.
3			
4	Takes turns	Meets desires of peers with assistance	After students are able to respond to the needs of others, meeting the desire of peers with assistance is the next level. Students may need assistance in recognizing the desire of peers, so educators can provide them with guidance. Taking turns is an aspect of meeting the desires of peers, but autistic students in particular may need more support in recognizing the needs of others.
5			

6	Initiates the sharing of materials in the classroom and outdoors	Recognize wants of peers	<p>Recognizing the wants of peers without support means that students are able to understand that others have needs. The level objective was modified to include other example behaviors beyond sharing. Students may struggle with sharing materials, but still demonstrate the objective of balancing the rights and needs of others. Example behaviors illustrate how children can demonstrate mastery with less of an emphasis on sharing physical materials.</p>
7			
8	Cooperates and shares ideas and materials in socially acceptable ways	Responding to the desire of peers through cooperative play or communication	<p>To modify this objective, the term "socially acceptable" was removed. Defining what is socially acceptable varies in different environments. Children can demonstrate balancing rights of themselves and others by responding to the desires of peers. Students can meet the desire of peers through cooperative play or communication. For autistic students who struggle with verbal communication, cooperative play provides an opportunity for students to show engagement without an emphasis on verbal abilities.</p>

Table 5*Participates cooperatively and constructively in group situations (TSG Objective 3)***Domain B: Solves social problems**

Objective	3: Participates corporately and constructively in group situations		
Dimension	b: Solves social problems		
Level	Original	Modified	Rationale
0	Not yet	Student avoids group situations.	Students who avoid group situations are not yet able to meet the objective criteria of solving social problems. Providing a description of what level zero entails gives educators a model for expected behavior.
1			
2	Expresses feelings during a conflict	Student joins others for small group work.	Level two was modified to track smaller steps of social-emotional development. Students who are able to join others for small group work demonstrate a readiness to solve social problems. Expecting students to express their feelings during a conflict means that students have the words to describe their feelings. Emotion identification skills are considered higher level skills in the modified scale.

3			
4	Seeks adult help to resolve social problems	Student joins in large group activities.	After students are able to work in small groups, the next level is participating in group activities. Group activities typically require greater awareness of social expectations and rules. This skill helps prepare students to solve social problems as they are aware of the expected behavior.
5			
6	Suggests solutions to social problems	Student responds to peers during play. Student seeks support from an adult is there is a conflict in play.	Responding to peers during play means helping to meet the needs of others. Students at this level will seek support from an adult if there is a conflict during their play time. Suggesting solutions to social problems is a level beyond the modified scale. Students must first have the ability to play corporately and understand social expectations before they are expected to know how to solve social problems.
7			

8	Resolves social problems through negotiation and compromise	Shares materials and space with peers by taking turns.	Resolving social problems requires great social awareness. This level was modified to score students' ability to recognize the needs of others. Sharing materials and space with students is an example of social problem solving. Solving more complex social problems is a behavior beyond the modified scale levels.
---	---	--	---

Implementation of scoring

Future implementation

The modified TSG document can potentially be useful for students with other types of intellectual and developmental abilities. Partnering with an inclusive preschool would provide an opportunity to implement the modified TSG. To implement the tool, first the document would be explained to the teaching team in the classroom. The discussion would cover the format of the document, how to read the scale, example behaviors for each level, and how to write observations and levels. The assessments would be recorded as objective observations.

Figure 4

Assessment Observation Form

Child: _____	Date: _____
Teacher: _____	Setting: _____
ELL: Yes/No	IEP or IFSP: Yes/No
Group Configuration: _____	Materials/Routine: _____
Observation: _____	

TSG Area:	
Social-Emotional, Physical, Language, Cognitive, Literacy, ELA, Mathematics	
Objective/Dimension:	
Level:	
Picture taken/Artifact collected: yes/no	

Note: Assessment observation form with TSG leveling.

To begin the implementation process, teachers would start by observing students during part of their daily routine. For example, teachers could start leveling observations during free-play time in the morning. Teachers would continue to observe students during the same routine and collect observations to track progress over time. When writing observations, teachers record the observed behavior as a concrete and detailed statement. After recording the behavior, teachers refer to the modified TSG for leveling.

Implications in the classroom

Utilizing a modified TSG in the classroom gives all students a space to demonstrate proficiency in social-emotional competencies. By using an inclusive scale that closely monitors progress

with incremental jumps in social-emotional development, student's abilities are better reflected in scoring. As assessments drive instruction, accurate assessments ensure students receive an appropriate level of challenge. Teacher expectations are often lower for autistic students (Sanders et al., 2015). Acknowledging the strengths and progress of students helps to set appropriate expectations.

Effect of differentiated assessment

Differentiating social-emotional progress and outcomes for autistic children by utilizing inclusive assessments ensures that students can receive appropriate educational support to progress in their learning goals. Vygotsky's zone of proximal development emphasizes there is a "just right" level of challenge. Having a valid assessment measure helps educators figure out a student's zone of proximal development. Differentiating social-emotional assessment and goals for autistic students gives them more opportunities to succeed and receive accurate scoring. Furthermore, simplifying the complexities of development into scores diminishes the nuances of competencies. In addition to assessments, educators must collect additional evidence such as photos, videos, or quotes from the children. Adding personalization and detail creates a well-rounded understanding of student strengths and challenges.

Further research

To ensure validity and reliability of the modified TSG, the scale should be reviewed and tested by educators and developmentalists through an iterative process. This process should include eliciting the stakeholder input from parents of autistic children, educators, content experts, and other professionals. The tool would then be revised and piloted in an early childhood learning setting. Findings and feedback from the pilot study would guide next steps.

Education is a collaborative and ongoing process. The modifications suggested for the TSG in the present project are the start of a move towards inclusive assessment and more inclusive education. With the input of stakeholders, the modifications for the TSG can be piloted in a real-world context. Further edits and clarifications are expected. One possible area of specification is to provide differentiated levels based on the level of assistance provided. Further research is needed to finalize modifications to the TSG; however, creating a more equitable scale of assessment ensures accurate scoring for diverse learners.

Conclusion

The model for early childhood education is changing. The new normal is inclusive environments. As preschool settings are moving towards including students of all developmental abilities, using appropriate assessment tools is necessary. Early childhood educators must honor the range of development and create a classroom that encourages learning for all. Measures of developmental competency often do not account for neurodivergent behaviors. Recognizing that students can demonstrate competency in a variety of ways celebrates the strengths of all students.

Early childhood is a time of foundational learning. Providing students with essential support early on lays the foundation for academic and social success. Detailed observations in preschool create a record of development. This record can be used to provide children with appropriate support in the classroom. Additionally, observations help communicate with stakeholders; parents, occupational therapists, speech language pathologists, physical therapists, and other professionals can learn from observations educators take. Utilizing a scoring system to organize observations monitors the progress of students objectively. Quantifying observations also allows educators to keep a detailed, easy to read record of student behaviors.

Taking a critical lens to assessment measures ensures that the tools educators use are reliable and appropriate for the population they serve. As more children are diagnosed with ASD, the utilization of inclusive measures are essential to the success of early learning. Taking a strength-based approach to assessment highlights the capabilities of children and encourages extensions rather than punishing falling short of expectations. Through the implementation of the modified TSG, early childhood educators can more accurately assess students with autism. These assessments will in turn be used to guide instruction, communicate with other professionals, and inform parents.

References

- About IDEA. (2025). *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*. <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/about-idea/>
- American Psychiatric Association. (2022). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed., text rev.). <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.books.9780890425787>
- ASD severity levels (2025) *Autism Speaks*. <https://www.autismspeaks.org/levels-of-autism>
- Dockrell, J. E., & Lindsay, G. (2008). Inclusive versus specialist provision for children with developmental language disorders. *Understanding Developmental Language Disorders*. (pp. 131-147). <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2008-10246-009>
- Elias, M. J. (2022). Social and emotional skill progression in preschool. *Edutopia*. <https://www.edutopia.org/article/social-and-emotional-skill-progression-in-preschool/>
- Fenton, A., Walsh K., Wong S. *et al.* Using Strengths-Based Approaches in Early Years Practice and Research. *IJEC* 47, 27–52 (2015). <https://doi-org.ezproxy2.library.colostate.edu/10.1007/s13158-014-0115-8>
- Hoe-chi Au A., Shum K. K., Cheng Y., Tse H. M., Wong R. M., Li J., Au T. K. (2020). Autism spectrum disorder screening in preschools. *Autism*. 25(5). doi: 10.1177/1362361320967529
- Ho, J. Funk S. (2018). Promoting young children’s social and emotional health. *National Association for the Education of Young Children*. <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/yc/mar2018/promoting-social-and-emotional-health>

- Jobs, E.N., Bölte S., Falck-Ytter T. (2019). Spotting signs of autism in 3-year-olds: Comparing information from parents and preschool staff. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*. 49(3). doi: 10.1007/s10803-018-3821-5
- Kover, S. T., and Abbeduto L. (2023). Toward equity in research on intellectual and developmental disabilities. *American Journal of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*. 128(5). doi: 10.1352/1944-7558-128.5.350
- Lambert, R. G. (2020). *Teaching Strategies GOLD* assessment system: Technical summary (second edition). *Teaching Strategies*. https://teachingstrategies.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/2020-Tech-Manual_GOLD.pdf
- Laser, A. (2025). The power of inclusion: What to expect when your preschooler attends an inclusive preschool program. *National Association for the Education of Young Children*. <https://www.naeyc.org/our-work/families/inclusion-preschool-program>
- Loveall S. J., Channell M. M., Mattie L. J., Barkhimer A. E. (2022). Inclusion of individuals with neurodevelopmental disorders in norm-referenced language assessments. *Frontiers in Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.929433>
- Robins, D. L. (2025). The modified checklist for autism in toddlers, revised with follow-up. *MCHAT*. <https://www.mchatscreen.com/>
- Rosen, N. E., Lord C., Volkmar F. R. (2021). The diagnosis of autism: From Kanner to DSM-III to DSM-5 and beyond. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*. 51(12). doi: 10.1007/s10803-021-04904-1
- Sanders, E. J., Irvin D. W., Belardi K., McCune L., Boyd B. A., Odom S. L. (2015). The questions verbal children with autism spectrum disorder encounter in the inclusive preschool classroom. *Autism*. 20(1). doi: 10.1177/1362361315569744

- Shabani, K., Khatib M., Ebadi S. (2010). Vygotsky's zone of proximal development: Instructional implications and teachers' professional development. *English Language Teaching*. 3(4). <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1081990.pdf>
- Signs of autism. (2025) *Autism Speaks*. <https://www.autismspeaks.org/signs-autism>
- Soukakou, E. P. (2012). Measuring quality inclusive preschool classrooms: Development and validation of the Inclusive Classroom Profile (ICP). *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*. 27(3). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecresq.2011.12.003>
- Students with disabilities. (2024). *National Center for Education Statistics*. <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cgg/students-with-disabilities>
- Teaching Strategies GOLD* assessment system: Technical summary. (2011) *Teaching Strategies*. <https://teachingstrategies.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/GOLD-Tech-Summary-8-18-2011.pdf>
- What is autism?. (2025). *Autism Speaks*. <https://www.autismspeaks.org/what-autism>
- Wolery, M., & Gast D. L. (2000). Classroom research for young children with disabilities: Assumptions that guided the conduct of research. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*. 20(1). DOI:10.1177/027112140002000109
- Zwaigenbaum L., Bauman M.L., Choueiri R., Kasari C., Carter A., Granpeesheh D., Mailloux Z., Roley S. S., Wagner S., Fein D., Pierce K., Buie T., Davis P. A., Newschaffer C., Robins D., Wetherby A., Stone W. L., Yirmiya N., Estes A., Hansen R.L., McPartland J. C., Natowicz M. R. (2015). Early intervention for children with autism spectrum disorder under 3 years of age: Recommendations for practice and research. *Pediatrics*. Suppl 1(Suppl 1). <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2014-3667E>

Appendices

Table 2.b. from the Teaching Strategies GOLD (2011)

Area: Social-Emotional ①
 Objective: 2 - Establishes and sustains positive relationships ①
 Dimension: b. Responds to emotional cues ①

Level	Not Yet	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7	Level 8	Level 9
Indicators	Not Yet ①		Reacts to others' emotional expressions		Demonstrates concern about the feelings of others		Identifies basic emotional reactions of others and their causes accurately		Recognizes that others' feelings about a situation might be different from his or her own	
Examples (+)										
Colored Bands (-)	Orange	Orange	Yellow	Green	Blue	Blue	Purple			
Examples (-)			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cries when hears an adult use an angry tone of voice • Smiles and turns head to look at person laughing • Moves to adult while watching another child have a tantrum 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brings a crying child's blanket to him • Hugs a child who fell down • Gets an adult to assist a child who needs help 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Says, "She's happy because her brother is here." "He's sad because his toy broke." • Matches a picture of a happy face with a child getting a present or a sad face with a picture of a child dropping the banana she was eating 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Says, "I like riding fast on the trike, but Tim doesn't." • Shows Meir a picture of a dinosaur but doesn't show it to Lucy because he remembers that she's afraid of dinosaurs 	

Modified Table 2.b.

Social-Emotional Competencies for Autistic Preschoolers							
Objective 2:	Establish and sustain positive relations						
Dimension b:	Responds to emotional cues						
	Not yet	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6
Task	Does not appear effected by the behavior of others	gestures to show engagement	provides practical support	Recognize emotions of others through body language, tone of voice, and facial expressions by matching simple pictures of emotional expressions	Recognizes co-occurring emotions of others through verbal expression or matching multiple expression cards to how their peer is feeling		
Behaviors		Points at crying child.	Brings blanket to child.	matches facial expressions to emotions.	Shows card 'angry' and 'sad' when another child is crying after their blocks fall over.		
		seeks physical closeness when upset.	Shows artwork to teacher.	Gesture to emotion cards.	Says "they are feeling happy and excited".		

Table 2.c. from the Teaching Strategies GOLD (2011)

Area: Social-Emotional 1
 Objective: 2 - Establishes and sustains positive relationships 1
 Dimension: c. Interacts with peers 1

Level	Not Yet 1	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7	Level 8	Level 9	
Indicators	Not Yet 1		Plays near other children; uses similar materials or actions		Uses successful strategies for entering groups		Initiates, joins in, and sustains positive interactions with a small group of two to three children		Interacts cooperatively in groups of four or five children		
Examples (+)											
Colored Bands (-)											
Examples (-)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sits next to child playing an instrument Imitates other children building with blocks Looks at other child's painting and chooses the same color 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Watches what other children are doing for a few minutes and then contributes an idea Asks, "Can I run with you?" 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sees group pretending to ride a bus and says, "Let's go to the zoo on the bus." Enters easily into ongoing group play and plays cooperatively 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Works on tasks with others toward a common goal Plays and works together for extended periods of time 			

Modified Table 2.c.

Objective 2:	Establishes and sustains positive peer relationships									
Dimension c:	Interacts with peers									
	Not yet		Level 1		Level 2		Level 3		Level 4	
Task	Does not engage with peers (even when assisted)		Engages in parallel play		Demonstrates shared-interest in activity with peers		Provides peer with practical help		Interacts with peers through verbal and/or non-verbal communication	
Behaviors	Avoids group settings.		sits near other children		Works on same activity as other children.		Assists peers by getting materials/ support		Communicates interest in shared-activity	
	Prefers solitary play.		Looks at other children's play		Gestures and/ or speaks about activity at hand		Contributes to shared activity		Active engagement in cooperative play	

Table 2.d. from the Teaching Strategies GOLD (2011)

Area: Social-Emotional ①
 Objective: 2 - Establishes and sustains positive relationships ①
 Dimension: d. Makes friends ①

Level	Not Yet ①	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7	Level 8	Level 9
Indicators	Not Yet ①		Seeks a preferred playmate; shows pleasure when seeing a friend		Plays with one or two preferred playmates		Establishes a special friendship with one other child, but the friendship might only last a short while		Maintains friendships for several months or more	
Examples (+)										
Colored Bands (-)	Orange	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Green	Blue	Blue	Purple	Purple	Purple
Examples (-)			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leaves library area to greet another child upon his arrival Seeks preferred child to sit next to at group time 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Builds block tower with another child during choice time and then looks at books with same child later in the day Joins same two friends for several days to play a running game outside 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Talks about having friends and what friends do together Seeks out particular friend for selected activities on a regular basis 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Finds her friend's favorite purple marker and gives it to her Works through a conflict and remains friends after a disagreement 	

Modified Table 2.d.

Objective 2:	Establishes and sustains positive peer relationships						
Dimension d:	Makes friends						
	Not yet	Level 1		Level 2		Level 3	Level 4
Task	Does not engage with peers (even when assisted)	Engages with social stories		Uses picture exchange systems (PECS) or communication boards to communicate emotions in social situation		Engages in parallel play with a peer	Plays with peers during structured routine play activities
Behaviors	Prefers to be alone in the classroom.	Listens to social stories.		Uses PECS to describe appropriate emotion		Sits/ plays near a peer in the same or different activity	Engages in the shared activity (ex. placing puzzle pieces)
	Avoids engaging with other students.	Provides input on social stories.		Understands communication boards		Respects the space of a peer.	Gestures/ uses verbal communication related to shared activity

Table 3.a. from the Teaching Strategies GOLD (2011)

Area: Social-Emotional ①
 Objective: 3 - Participates cooperatively and constructively in group situations ①
 Dimension: a. Balances needs and rights of self and others ①

Level	Not Yet ①	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7	Level 8	Level 9
Indicators	Not Yet ①		Responds appropriately to others' expressions of wants		Takes turns		Initiates the sharing of materials in the classroom and outdoors		Cooperates and shares ideas and materials in socially acceptable ways	
Examples (+)										
ored Bands (-)										
Examples (-)			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gives another child a ball when asked Makes room on the sofa for a child who wants to look at the book with him 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Waits behind another child at the water fountain Says, "It's your turn now; the timer is up." 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gives another child the gold marker to use but asks to use it again when the other is done Invites another child to pull the wagon with her 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leaves enough space for someone else to work at the table Pays attention to group discussions, values the ideas of others, and contributes own ideas in a respectful manner 	

Modified Table 3.a.

Objective 3:	Participates cooperatively and constructively in group situations						
Dimension a:	Balances needs and rights of self and others						
	Not yet	Level 1		Level 2		Level 3	Level 4
Task	Does not recognize spatial and/ or emotional needs of others	Responds to needs of others through verbal/ non-verbal expressions		Meets desires of peers with assistance		Recognize wants of peers	Responding to the desire of peers through cooperative play or communication
Behaviors	Does not sit next to or play near peers.	Looks distraught when another child is crying.		Passes ball to a peer when asked (by teacher or peer)		Gives peer a marker when they gesture towards the markers.	Takes turns on swing set when they see another child waiting.
	Limited engagement with other students.	Turning to look at a speaker.		Takes turns when reminded			Allows a speaker to talk without interruption.
		Moves away from an upset peer.					

Table 3.b. from the Teaching Strategies GOLD (2011)

Area: Social-Emotional 1
 Objective: 3 - Participates cooperatively and constructively in group situations 1
 Dimension: b. Solves social problems 1

Level	Not Yet	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7	Level 8	Level 9
Indicators	Not Yet 1		Expresses feelings during a conflict		Seeks adult help to resolve social problems		Suggests solutions to social problems		Resolves social problems through negotiation and compromise	
Examples (+)										
Colored Bands (-)	Orange	Orange	Orange	Yellow	Yellow	Green	Green	Blue	Blue	Purple
Examples (-)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Screams when another child touches his crackers Gets quiet and looks down when another child pushes her 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Goes to adult, crying, when someone takes the princess dress she wanted to wear Calls for the teacher when another child grabs the play dough at the same time he does 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Says, "You ride around the track one time; then I'll take a turn." Says, "Let's make a sign to keep people from kicking our sand castle like we did in the block area." Asks teacher to make a waiting list to use the new toy 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Says, "If I let you use the ruler, will you let me use the hole punch?" Responds, "Hey, I know! You two can be the drivers to deliver the pizza." 		

Modified Table 3.b.

Objective 3:	Participates cooperatively and constructively in group situations						
Dimension b:	Solves social problems						
	Not yet	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6
Task	Student avoids group situations.	Student joins others for small group work.	Student joins in large group activities.	Student responds to one or more peers during play. Student seeks support from an adult when there is a conflict.	Shares materials and space with peers by taking turns.		
Behaviors	Student creates physical distance between themselves and peers.	Engages in parallel play.	Sits with the class during circle time.	Passing materials when asked.	Waits in line behind peers.		
	Does not join the group for circle time.	Allows for others to play with materials at a center.	Sings/ dances along to songs.	Making room for another child to sit down when instructed through verbal communication or body language.	Follows classroom expectations for sharing materials (i.e. setting a timer, singing a song, counting)		
			Tracks teacher during whole group instruction with eyes/body.	Showing classmate a picture from a book when asked.			

