

Choosing Which Instrument to Use: the VB-MAPP or Essential for Living

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The VB-MAPP and Essential for Living are complementary instruments based on the same concepts, principles, and procedures (including B. F. Skinner's analysis of verbal behavior), but each with a different purpose: the former to guide the instruction of young children as instructors try to help them 'catch up' with typically-developing peers with respect to language and social skills, and the latter to provide children and adults with speaking, listening, and other skills that are essential for effective daily living.

Many young children from 2-6 years of age with developmental disabilities, including autism, appear to experience delays primarily in language and social skills. With these children, we strongly recommend that The VB-MAPP be used to determine their current language and social skills and to guide the development of a program of instruction and behavior management. Some of these children will acquire nearly typical language and social skills and will be placed for academic instruction in inclusion settings with typically-developing peers. Many others will experience improved language and social skills, resulting in more effective interaction with adults and peers, but will be placed in special education programs with only limited academic instruction and inclusion primarily in social situations.

Many other children two years of age and older experience significant global developmental delays or specific syndromes which often result in limited language skills, abstract concepts, and discrimination skills. These children may also experience severe hearing, visual, or orthopedic impairments, or complex medical conditions. With these children, we suggest that Essential for Living be used from the beginning to:

- (1) determine the extent to which they communicate with understandable spoken words,
- (2) select an alternative method of speaking, if understandable spoken words are limited,
- (3) determine the extent of their speaking and listening repertoires,
- (4) determine the extent of their basic motor movements, matching and imitation skills, daily living skills, functional academic skills, and tolerating skills,
- (5) determine the extent to which they exhibit problem behavior,
- (6) guide the development of a program of instruction and behavior management,
- (7) select and implement teaching procedures designed specifically for identified skill deficits, and
- (8) track learner progress with respect to functional skills and problem behavior.

Some of these children will acquire many skills, while others will simply acquire a core set of skills, that are immediately functional for them, that will help them benefit from instruction in special education programs and from inclusion in social situations, and that will remain functional over the span of their lives.

For children from 7-8 years of age, who are continuing to make steady progress on The VB-MAPP, we recommend continuing with this assessment and curriculum.

For children from 7-8 years of age who are making very little progress on the VB-MAPP, we strongly recommend securing the assistance of a teacher or behavior analyst with considerable training and experience teaching language and social skills using B. F. Skinner's analysis of verbal behavior. If your child is not experiencing generalization across settings or people, is not acquiring 'novel' responses or answers to questions (intraverbals) without scripts, or is having difficulty making discriminations or understanding abstract concepts, and progress does not begin to occur, despite adjustments in teaching procedures, consider:

- (1) changing from a developmental to a functional curriculum and beginning to use Essential for Living, or
- (2) using both instruments for a period of time while that decision is being made.

For most children 9-10 years of age and older, who have difficulty answering questions or participating in conversations and who are not beginning to acquire academic skills at a first or second grade level, we strongly suggest Essential for Living.

For many children, Essential for Living can function as a companion to The VB-MAPP, helping instructors and care providers...

- (1) determine the extent to which children exhibit understandable spoken words and select teaching procedures designed to improve this repertoire,
- (2) select an alternative method of speaking, for children whose repertoire of understandable spoken words is limited,
- (3) assess and teach functional skills along with the developmental ones they are currently teaching, and
- (4) determine the extent to which children exhibit problem behavior and learn to manage these behaviors in the context of teaching the Essential Eight.

For adults with moderate-to-severe disabilities, developmental or acquired, especially, but not limited to those with limited language skills or no method of speaking, we strongly suggest Essential for Living.