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An Assessment Plan for the Affective Standards:

Leading with Adventure-Based Learning

By Amanda McMurray  and James D. Ressler 

Adventure-based learning (ABL) constitutes a novel model that champions learner-focused immersion in hands-on experiences aimed at cultivating and facilitating the acquisition of collective effervescence and a variety of social and emotional skills (Stuhr et al., 2025). In schools, effective ABL programs include components of team building, outdoor education skills, and excursions, such as climbing and camping. The direct experiences offered through an ABL model include intentionally designed engagements that promote personal and group development (Sutherland & Legge, 2016).

The newly revised 2024 SHAPE America National Physical Education Standards (SHAPE America – Society of Health & Physical Educators, 2024) have placed greater emphasis on learning in the affective domain. Standards 3 and 4 focus on developing interpersonal relationships, offering students choices, providing appropriate challenges, and encouraging personal growth through physical activity. Based on this shift, the increased use of ABL as a pedagogical approach may be the best fit to teach and learn effectively in alignment with Standards 3 and 4. This article aims to provide effective assessment tools that address the newly revised SHAPE America National PE Standards 3 and 4 from the perspective of ABL programming and students' experiences practicing these skills.

A key component of ABL is the experiential learning cycle, a process where direct experience is followed by reflection for students to draw connections and identify patterns (Frank, 2013). This reflection, commonly referred to as the debrief, allows participants to dedicate time to share their individual perspectives, gain insights from others, and make meaningful connections between practiced skills and their applications beyond the classroom (Stuhr et al., 2016). Debriefing typically takes the form of individual or group reflection through processing strategies. This process usually involves conversation, but can also be an activity or assignment, which is known as an experiential debrief (Frank, 2013). While the existing ABL literature provides many debriefing strategies, they are often used informally through group discussions. Unlike informal assessments, which are typically discussion-based and used to check for student understanding, formal assessments are planned processes designed to elicit evidence of a student's knowledge. This evidence is then used by teachers to adjust and guide their ongoing instruction (Lund & Kirk, 2020). In ABL formats, informal assessment may not effectively capture evidence of students' full understanding of the social skills or concepts addressed during an activity. Fortunately, through existing literature pertaining to affective assessment tools, it is possible for ABL-based debriefing strategies to be adapted as formal assessments.

Effective Assessment Templates

An effective assessment plan should utilize a variety of different assessment types to capture a well-rounded view of student learning. Glennon et al. (2015) suggested four main

tools for assessing affective behaviors, including checklists, rating scales, rubrics, and journaling. Each of these serves a distinct function in collecting pertinent information to support learning and will guide how an assessment plan is organized.

Checklists identify whether a behavior is present and how well the students model a desired outcome. A high-quality checklist can resemble a rubric (Panicucci et al., 2002), but can measure not only the quality, but also the frequency of a desired behavior. In ABL, checklists can be useful in defining a student's level of skill performance (e.g., communication, cooperation, problem solving) over a period of time or series of learning experiences.

Rating scales can be used to measure performance or behavior by assigning a numerical value or descriptive label to different levels of achievement (e.g., 1 = poor, 5 = outstanding). The Likert scale is a specific type of rating scale used to assess perceptions or opinions. A Likert scale presents a statement and asks the respondent to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement (Glennon et al., 2015). The use of a rating scale holds value, as it provides more specificity than the checklist in ABL spaces by rating attitudes and behaviors, as well as personal and social contributions during an activity, among other things.

Rubrics outline a set of criteria and standards, with each level of performance described for each criterion to evaluate a student's achievement of a skill or behavior. Additionally, rubrics specify what students need to do to meet performance

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standards. In ABL, rubrics are valuable for assessing affective behaviors by offering students specific feedback on their ability to meet defined performance standards. Feedback from rubrics can guide individual or group reflection on attitudes and behaviors during movement experiences, helping students better understand how their actions impact performance levels (Lund & Kirk, 2020).

Journaling allows students to share their perspective by narrating their experience in response to an activity. It can be structured with guiding questions or left unstructured, serving as a medium for free-form thoughts (Panicucci et al., 2002). Guiding questions can be broad or deliberately worded to prompt reflection. In ABL experiences, journals provide students with an opportunity to share their perspective or demonstrate their cognitive understanding. Collecting multiple journal entries over time can be used to create a portfolio that serves as a comprehensive record of a student's perspective on their learning experiences or adventures.

ABL-Inspired Assessment Strategies

Adventure-based learning in physical education offers dynamic frameworks for assessing students' skills and behaviors aligned with the 2024 SHAPE America National PE Standards. The following assessment strategies leverage known

ABL frameworks and experiential learning concepts to deepen students' reflections on their roles, behaviors, and personal growth during physical activities. Drawing from existing affective assessment strategies and combining ABL-specific debriefing techniques, these tools provide structured opportunities for students to reflect on their experiences and interpersonal interactions.

Challenging Choices Checklist

The Challenging Choices Checklist (Figure 1) is a group-assessment tool intended to be used as a formative assessment best utilized with students in Grades 5 through 8. It is designed for students to reflect on the roles fulfilled by different group members during a specific activity (Panicucci et al., 2002). Each student completes the checklist individually, but it can also be adapted for groups. A key idea of this ABL concept is that different levels of engagement naturally occur depending on the task or problem on which a group is working. This tool guides students in reflecting on individual and group levels of physical and emotional engagement during a physical activity or experiential learning. It also challenges students to choose what role they believe each group member fulfilled during a group activity. Furthermore, this group-assessment checklist tool asks students to explain why they assigned specific roles to their peers. The assessment presents five roles, representing



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Challenge Choices Checklist: Group Assessment

Non-participant	Chose not to join the group. Did not watch the activity and did something else.
Observer	Decided to step back and watch the group. They paid attention to what was happening and maybe encouraged others but didn't join in.
Passive Participant	Paid attention and followed along with the group during the activity but stayed quiet. Didn't share many thoughts or ideas and mostly stayed in the background.
Active Participant	Worked with others in the group during the activity. Made suggestions, was eager to try new ideas, and share thoughts or ideas with the group.
Influencer	Very engaged with the group. Helped lead the group by coming up with ideas, gave their best effort, inspired others to get more involved, and were fully committed!

Directions: Write the names of everyone in your group in the first column. Check the box that best describes what each person did during the activity today. Use the table above to help you decide what each role means.

Group Member	Influencer	Active Participant	Passive Participant	Observer	Non-Participant
Your Name:					
Member 1:					
Member 2:					
Member 3:					

Challenging Your Choice: Fill in the blanks and describe below why you chose each role for each person in your group!

I chose the _____ role for myself because:

I chose the _____ role for (member 1) _____ because:

I chose the _____ role for (member 2) _____ because:

I chose the _____ role for (member 3) _____ because:

Figure 1. Challenge choices checklist: Group assessment.

varying levels of engagement within the group during the activity:

- *Nonparticipant:* Person who chose not to join the group. Did not watch the activity and did something else.

- *Observer:* Person who chose to step back and watch the group. They paid attention to what was happening and maybe encouraged others, but did not join in.
- *Passive participant:* Person who chose to pay attention and followed along with the group during the activity

but stayed quiet. Did not share many thoughts or ideas, and mostly stayed in the background.

- *Active participant*: Person who chose to work with others in the group during the activity. Made suggestions, was eager to try new ideas, and shared thoughts or ideas with the group.
- *Influencer*: Person who chose to be very engaged with the group. Helped lead the group by coming up with ideas, gave their best effort, inspired others to get more involved, and were fully committed!

This checklist can be given to students after a group or team activity. Before the activity, the facilitator should present the five roles (i.e., nonparticipant, observer, passive participant, active participant, and influencer) that students can fulfill in a group-based activity (e.g., cooperation games, team building, sports matches, or group fitness). This helps students become aware of the engagement levels they can choose. After the activity, using the checklist to reflect on roles and participation deepens students' understanding of how their level of engagement can affect their experience and relationship with movement. The individual student's engagement with movement goes beyond the moment, and connecting the experiences to learning standards promotes transfer to life "outside the gym." The more opportunities for connections in this regard, the better the chances of ABL programming having positive effects on students' future lives. This checklist supports assessment objectives related to students' abilities to implement and provide constructive feedback to others (3.8.4); explains how communication, feedback, cooperation, and etiquette relate to leadership roles (3.8.10); and analyzes individual and group challenges through movement (4.8.5; SHAPE America, 2024).

Five Finger Form

The Five Finger Form (Figure 2) is a formative Likert-style self-assessment tool based on the concept of the Five Finger Agreement. It is best suited for middle school and early high school students. However, the language can be simplified, making the form usable for elementary-age students as well. In *Journey Towards the Caring Classroom* (Frank, 2013), the Five Finger Agreement helps establish social norms among students. Each finger symbolizes a pillar of group norms that promote safety and respect in the classroom:

- *Pinky finger*: Represents safety, as it is the smallest and most vulnerable finger.
- *Ring finger*: Symbolizes commitment and the willingness to let things go during activities.
- *Middle finger*: Stands for support and awareness of put-downs in group experiences.
- *Pointer finger*: Represents taking responsibility and not blaming others.
- *Thumb*: Reflects effort, symbolizing doing one's best in an activity.

This form serves as an evaluation tool and enables students to reflect on their role in creating a respectful space in physical education class. This adaptable tool helps students self-assess their adherence to social agreements and personal behavior standards during physical activities. Designed for regular use as a formative assessment, it prompts students to reflect on their behavior and attitudes, particularly their ability to demonstrate affective behaviors that foster a safe emotional environment for others (3.12.2; SHAPE America, 2024). Teachers can use the Five Finger Agreement self-assessment to evaluate how well students follow the social contract. It is particularly useful when students need to revisit or reflect on

FIVE FINGER FORM		Name: _____ Date: _____				
Circle the answer for each question that most applies to you.		Not true at all		Somewhat true		Very true
	Pinky: I was able to practice physical and emotional safety during our activity today.	1	2	3	4	5
Ring Finger: I was committed to the activity and my classmates today.	1	2	3	4	5	
Middle Finger: I was a supportive community member and classmate during the activity today.	1	2	3	4	5	
Pointer Finger: I took responsibility instead of pointing blame during today's activity.	1	2	3	4	5	
Thumb: I gave a genuine effort and did my best during today's activity.	1	2	3	4	5	

Figure 2. Five finger form.

their behavior in relation to the social contract during physical activities. While the tool works well in ABL and experiential learning, it can also be applied to any team-based physical activity. For instance, it can assess sportsmanship during volleyball setting drills, while completing fitness stations, or in small-sided soccer games, or even function as a postgame reflection for competitive athletes. Additionally, regular use of this tool can help identify trends or changes in students' affective behaviors, providing program leaders and educators with insights into the reflection, guidance, or practice opportunities students may need to better understand how their behaviors and actions create emotional safety for others in physical activity environments.

The Weather Report

This quantitative rubric is based on the debrief strategy “What’s the Weather?” and is most suitable to use with students in Grades 3 through 6. The Weather Report (Figure 3) is a rating-based method typically used for the “What” phase in the “What, So What, Now What” debrief structure. This debrief structure utilizes sequence debriefing, which involves asking questions in a particular order to help use the concepts from the experiential learning cycle to a greater advantage (i.e., experiencing, reflecting, generalizing, applying). The process starts by reflecting on “what” occurred during an experience, which can be done using a variety of strategies (e.g., words or drawings, ratings, symbols, and small activities). Once this step is complete, the debrief process moves toward identifying patterns and generalizing insights shared within the group during the “what” stage. The final debrief step, the “now what” stage, involves applying the perspectives and knowledge gained in the “so what” stage to helping students understand how the lessons learned from a particular experience can be transferred to other settings (Frank, 2013). When utilized in the “What, So What, Now What” debrief structure, the “What’s the Weather?” strategy for the “what” stage typically involves the facilitator asking, “What was the weather?” Students will identify a weather state (e.g., sunny and clear, rainy with clouds, or a heavy snowstorm) that best aligns with their perspective of an experience (Frank, 2013). Students can then share as a group, discuss in pairs, or reflect individually (e.g., through journaling) on what influenced their weather forecast choice. Once patterns are identified and perspectives are contextualized, they can brainstorm ways to apply what they learned to future experiences.

Figure 3 shows an example of this debriefing structure reflected in an assessment tool used by facilitators and students to evaluate the behavior of compassion. The rubric defines specific behaviors that demonstrate compassion and assigns numerical values to different levels of mastery for each behavior. The total points or “weather report” a student receives, determined by the facilitator, is divided into scoring ranges associated with various weather forecasts. These weather forecasts are represented in symbols that indicate the level of mastery a student has achieved regarding a specific affective behavior, such as compassion. In the example

provided, a sunny forecast represents the highest level of mastery, while stormy weather indicates a student who is still developing their ability to be compassionate. After the facilitator assigns a weather report, the assessment tool provides students with the opportunity to reflect on why they received that report. The reflection section at the bottom allows students to internalize their actions and what they need to do to continue to meet performance standards for that particular skill or change their behavior to meet performance standards in future experiences. The facilitator can decide if they want to award additional points for the students reflecting on the weather report they received or give students who earned a low score on the weather report an opportunity to earn points back for reflecting on how their actions resulted in the report they were given.

This versatile rubric can serve as both a formative and summative assessment tool, measuring students' consideration for others, positive contributions to the group or team (3.8.2), and ability to encourage and support others through their interactions (3.12.3; SHAPE America, 2024). This tool provides a structured method to assess affective behaviors while integrating ABL concepts used in informal reflections during group activities. Additionally, this assessment tool can be adapted to evaluate different affective skills and behaviors; for example, during a cooperation games unit, a facilitator could use this rubric template to establish performance criteria for the affective skill of empathy to assess students' progress throughout planned experiences in the unit.

“Sunday Afternoon Drive” Diary

This summative assessment tool is influenced by the concept of the “Sunday Afternoon Drive” model and designed to demonstrate learning outcomes related to National PE Standard 4. The “Sunday Afternoon Drive” is a discussion-based debriefing tactic that takes a flexible, student-centered approach to reflection (Sutherland et al., 2011). When using this debriefing strategy, the facilitator begins with an idea of the learning goals or the “destination” but allows discussion to follow the group's natural flow rather than sticking to a strict plan. Using guiding questions or activities (“the roadmap”), the facilitator gradually shifts from leading the discussion to supporting student-led conversations that drive the group toward meaningful outcomes or insights on what happened during a specific experience. The model includes six strategies: (1) “Choice of vehicle” refers to selecting the size of the discussion groups; (2) “Start the car” involves asking initial questions or using activities to kick off the debrief; (3) “Follow the road” means identifying key statements that could lead to deeper discussion; (4) “GPS recalculating” helps redirect conversations if they go off track; (5) “Nearing the final destination” guides participants in making sense of their experiences; and (6) the “Final destination” helps participants apply their new knowledge to real-life situations (Stuhr & Sutherland, 2013, p. 34).

Building on the reflective and discussion-based nature of the “Sunday Afternoon Drive” model, the Sunday

Afternoon Drive Diary as a summative assessment tool takes the form of a journal, integrating the concept of physical activity stories (Johnson, 2016) to provide students with a structured yet flexible framework for exploring and narrating their personal experiences with physical activity.

Physical activity stories are a firsthand account of a student's relationship with physical activity, describing their perceptions of it both in and outside of physical education class. The Sunday Afternoon Drive Diary aims to evaluate students' development of personal skills, identification of

Weather Report









		Skill: Compassion		Student Name:		
		Sunshine (2 pts)	Clouds (1 pts)	Rain (.5 pt)	Storms (0 pt)	
F A C I L I T A T O R	Physical Help	Goes out of way to always give physical help to others when they need it.	Frequently gives physical help to others when they need it.	Only gives physical help to others when no one else will.	Does not offer to help others or request that someone else helps.	
	Encouragement	Consistently gives encouraging words all peers.	Often gives encouraging words to peers or consistently encourages friends.	Rarely gives encouraging words or only encourages friends.	Does not offer encouraging words to others.	
	Physical Safety	Thinks and cares about the emotional safety of all peers.	Cares about the emotional safety of peers most of the time.	Sometimes does not seem to care about the emotional safety of others.	Does not seem to care about the emotional safety of others and/or creates unsafe emotional environments.	
	Accepting	Readily accepts choices made by others.	Accepts choices made by others.	Hesitantly accepts choices made by others and sometimes blames people for choices made.	Does not accept choices made by others and/or blames people for their choices.	
	Open	Asks for others' suggestions and is open to hearing others' input.	Is open to suggestions made by others.	Sometimes will not take care in hearing others' suggestions or judges other people's input.	Does not care to hear others' ideas and/or judges those who input their suggestions.	
	Weather Report	    ____ /10 points	Sunny  9-10 total pts	Some Clouds  8 total pts	Rainy  7 total pts	Stormy  Less than 7 total pts
	Grade Scale: A = 9-10 points B = 8-8.5 points C = 7-7.5 points D = 6-6.5 points F = less than 6 points	Student demonstrates outstanding levels of compassion and brings positive energy to class climate.	Student demonstrates satisfactory levels of compassion for others and maintains positive energy in class climate.	Student demonstrates approaching levels of compassion for others and sometimes lowers positive energy in class climate.	Student demonstrates a developing level of compassion for others and takes away from positive energy shared in class climate or hurts others' feelings.	
S T U D E N T	Why do you think you got this weather report? (Answer in 3-4 sentences)					
	What can you do in the future to keep showing compassion for others? (Answer in 3-4 sentences)					

Figure 3. Weather report.

Sunday Afternoon Drive Diary	
Step 1: Define Your Destination (to be written by teacher or topic sentence to be written by students of the main goal or title of the story)	
<u>Example Destination</u> : Growing confidence through adventures	
Step 2: Identify Your Vehicle	
<u>General story</u> : discusses adventure experiences overall	“Participating in adventure provides me with the confidence to try new things.”
<u>Specific story</u> : explains a specific adventure experience	“Hiking with my peers gives me confidence to make more friends to do other physical activities with.”
<u>Combination story</u> : references multiple forms of adventure	“The challenge of high ropes courses helps me feel more confident to face challenges in life that make me nervous.”
Step 3: Pick Your Route and Start Your Car (you must pick at least 2 “stops”)	
Health	Section of the story describing meaning associated with health, well-being and quality of life.
Enjoyment	Section of the story describing meaning associated with fun, enjoyment, pleasure, joy, or satisfaction.
Challenge	Section of the story describing meaning associated with challenges of physical activity participation.
Self-Expression	Section of the story describing meaning associated with individual expression and identity formation.
Social Interaction	Section of the story describing meaning associated with social experiences, community, friends, family, and interpersonal relationships.
Step 4: Enjoy Your Drive! (tell your story)	
GPS Recommendations	Identify your vehicle (story) and route stops (2 areas of meaning) <u>2-3 sentences</u>
<i>This is what you must include in your Sunday Afternoon Drive Diary → → → →</i>	What happened? What is the story? Tell it! <u>8-10 sentences</u>
	Explain how you are getting to your destination. How has this experience impacted you and your relationship with physical activity or adventure? <u>3-4 sentences</u>


Step 5: Rate Yourself on How Well You Followed the GPS Recommendations			
GPS Recommendations	Outstanding (1)	Satisfactory (.5)	Needs Work (0)
I identified the vehicle (story) and route stops (2 areas of meaning).			
I wrote a detailed story with correct grammar.			
My story explains how this experience has impacted me and my relationship with physical activity or adventure.			

Figure 4. Sunday Afternoon Drive Diary.
Adapted from Johnson (2016)

personal benefits of movement, and understanding of how movement is personally meaningful. This assessment tool, best used with students in Grades 8 through 12, is designed to give students a roadmap for creating a personal narrative about a physical activity experience. Facilitators or students select a destination (i.e., the topic or main goal of the story) and use the steps in the assessment tool, based on key components of the “Sunday Afternoon Drive” model, to complete their narrative. Once the destination is chosen, students will identify the vehicle (i.e., story type) for their narrative. Additionally, students will choose at least two route stops (i.e., areas of meaning) to connect to their personal story (e.g., health and self-expression). These areas of meaning will help students link their personal experiences to the impact on their relationship with physical activity or adventure. Students receive GPS recommendations (i.e., performance criteria) to help them successfully tell their story. After writing their narrative, they will self-assess their work to see how close they are to their final destination (i.e., how well they met the performance criteria). While this assessment tool can be used to evaluate students’ reflections on personal experiences in activity-based learning (e.g., team-building games, rock climbing units, or field trips), selecting a “final destination” allows the tool to align with affective curriculum goals across different physical education settings. The goal is to recall and reflect on the impact of physical activity experiences.

For example, a facilitator could decide to use the Sunday Afternoon Drive Diary after a floor hockey unit to assess sportsmanship. The teacher might provide a specific destination (i.e., topic) or let students choose their own topic related to sportsmanship. Students can identify their vehicle (i.e., general, specific, or combined story) and select the route stops (i.e., areas of meaning) they will use to connect their story (e.g., health, enjoyment, challenge, self-expression, and social interaction). They will then follow the GPS recommendations (i.e., performance criteria) to narrate their experience with sportsmanship and reflect on its impact on their relationship with physical activity, mentioning at least two affected areas of meaning. Last, they will self-assess how close to the final destination they got by rating themselves on reaching the performance criteria for the assignment.

It is recommended to assign this assessment in steps or as part of a portfolio to minimize disruptions to students’ physical activity time. For example, if the facilitator wants to assess sporting behavior in a floor hockey unit, they could introduce the Sunday Afternoon Drive Diary project at the beginning of the unit, specifying that the final destination (i.e., the main focus) will be positive sporting behaviors. Midway through the unit, students describe their story in a few sentences (step 1). For the next assignment, students would select two areas of meaning to highlight in their story (step 2). The third assignment would involve creating an outline of their story (step 3). Finally, students would submit



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the full story along with a self-assessment of how well they met the performance criteria (steps 4 and 5).

Conclusion

Adventure-based learning in physical education presents a promising framework for assessing students in the affective domain. It has a natural alignment with the 2024 SHAPE America National PE Standards 3 and 4, and can offer some useful perspectives on teaching, learning, and assessing all student experiences. These assessment tools not only align with the National Standards but also focus on students reflecting on how physical activity experiences impact their holistic development—a vital skill to ensure those in the next generation are physically literate movers who find meaning in physical activity experiences. While assessing using an ABL approach can be intricate, the strategies outlined in this article seek to streamline the evaluation of students’ personal and social growth, ultimately enhancing their physical education experiences and promoting a lasting interest and enjoyment in lifelong physical activity.

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