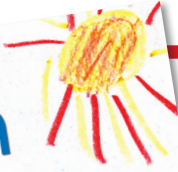


Kindergarten Readiness



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notes, and collections of children's work over time. Keep a folder for each child with work samples, records, assessments, and notes. Collectively, these informal assessments will form a portfolio of the child, capturing and demonstrating his or her skills, interests, strengths, and knowledge. In this way, assessments will be based on multiple sources collected over a long period of time, reflecting a wide range of learning experiences from more than one observer and from more than one method. The following are commonly used assessment methods in the preschool environment:

- Performance-based or *authentic* assessments
 - These seek to measure a student's ability to perform or complete a task, demonstrating real competencies and revealing what they know and are able to do. They focus on the assessment of concrete, observable behaviors on real tasks that are part of the child's regular classroom activities and experiences in the natural classroom setting (Bowman et al., 2001; Jonson, Cappelloni, & Niesyn, 2011).
- Classroom observations and anecdotal notes
 - Careful, systematic observation is a critical tool for early assessment of student behavior, knowledge, and abilities. The notes you take become an important tool for understanding the individual child's strengths and weaknesses.
 - In the beginning of the year, create a logbook to maintain a record of your observations. You may find it handy as you move about the classroom to carry a pad of sticky notes in your pocket to jot down observations, which can later be recorded in the logbook under the appropriate child's name. Be sure to check off names to ensure that you observe every student. Some teachers select a target student or students for the day. This strategy allows you to observe a single student in a wide array of contexts. By doing this, you will gain important information about your students that may otherwise go unnoticed and that you will want to share during teacher-family conferences.
 - Make a number of observations over time. One-shot observations are unreliable indicators of student stability or growth. By looking at children in many different learning situations and settings and on different occasions, you will be able to detect patterns, document growth, and identify areas that need to be addressed. Focus on the whole child—socially, emotionally, physically, and academically. Learn to document a child's skills, accomplishments, and abilities as the child participates in routine classroom activities and interacts with peers, adults, and materials.

- Know what you are looking for. Don't try to take it all in.
- Record exactly what you see or exactly what students do. Avoid temptations to infer, insinuate, judge, diagnose, or inflate assessment results based on your prior knowledge of the student and his or her abilities. Try to be objective. Separate your emotions from the assessment process.
- Having all teachers observe all children at different points in time will bring a greater collective picture of the child (Jonson et al., 2011).
- Interviews
 - Individual interviews with children will give you valuable information. Understanding your students from their perspective gives you greater insight and a more complete picture of each individual child. Questions can range from "Who are your friends at school?" and "What do you like best about school?" to "Count as far as you can go starting from 1," or "Let me hear you say the alphabet."

There are many assessments available for use in the early childhood setting. Referred to as *assessment instruments, tools, screenings, or tests*, these include different observational systems, checklists, completion of tasks, systems for collecting portfolios, and family and teacher questionnaires. Assessments vary as to what they are evaluating and measuring. They fall under different categories, such as *Observation Tools, Screening Tools, Behavior and Social/Emotional Development, Speech and Language, Readiness Assessments, and Motor/Sensory Assessments*. Some are described as providing systematic methods for observing, recording, and evaluating each child's progress; some claim to help teachers identify what children are learning, what they are beginning to master, and what they still need to work on; and some claim to identify children who may need additional assessments and support in order to perform successfully in school. The technicalities of assessments vary in a number of ways: qualification requirements of the assessor, age range of the child being assessed, time required for test completion, individual or group administration, format, standardization (norm-referenced, tested for validity, and reliability), versions in Spanish for children for whom Spanish is their primary language (see the NAEYC position statement on screening English language learners, 2009), scores and interpretation, and scoring method options. Most current editions of assessments have been revised to be more culturally, gender, and linguistically sensitive and responsive to all young children (Pearson Early Childhood Assessments, 2012).

Assessments differ in what they are attempting to measure. Some choose a specific area within a developmental domain, while other

assessments attempt to address a child's abilities across all domains of early learning and development. Therefore, the child's skills, abilities, and characteristics in all developmental domains (physical/motor, social, emotional, approaches toward learning, language and communication, emerging literacy, and cognitive development and general knowledge) should be assessed to get a complete profile of the individual child. The benefits of assessment results serve many purposes, including helping teachers individualize instruction, communicate with families more effectively, monitor developmental progress, pinpoint children's strengths and weaknesses, promote early identification and focus intervention strategies, inform curriculum and instruction planning, lay the groundwork for future achievement, and increase positive outcomes (Pearson Early Childhood Assessment, 2012).

What do you want to measure in each domain? Some examples of commonly measured indicators for each domain of early learning and development might include the following:

- Physical/Motor Development
 - Performs self-help skills and takes care of personal needs
 - Buttons, puts on, and takes off coat; puts on shoes; uses bathroom independently; cleans up after playing; eats and cleans up independently
 - Gross motor skills (balance and gross-motor planning)
 - Walks, runs, jumps, hops, skips, balances on one foot, throws, catches, walks backwards and sideways
 - Visual motor and visual discrimination skills
 - Traces and copies forms (circle, cross, square, triangle, diamond)
 - Fine motor skills
 - Manipulates small objects, sewing, cutting
- Emerging Literacy Development
 - Letter identification
 - Identifies upper- and lowercase letters
 - Letter-sound correspondence
 - Knows letter sounds
 - Writes letters of the alphabet
 - Writes own name
 - Draws, scribbles, or writes to express meaning
 - Understands story sense
 - Developing phonemic awareness: rhyming, sound isolation (beginning sound), segmenting (sentences and syllables)

- Cognitive Development and General Knowledge (concept knowledge)
 - Number identification
 - Identifies the numbers to 10
 - Counts to . . .
 - Writes numbers to . . .
 - Identifies body parts
 - Draws a complete person with body parts
 - Demonstrates understanding of directional, positional, and quantitative concepts
 - Identifies colors and basic geometric shapes
 - Gives personal data
 - First and last name, age, family members' names, favorite story
 - Sorts, orders, and groups objects
 - Sequences events in time
 - Makes associations
 - Copies or extends a simple pattern

The social, emotional, approaches toward learning, and language and communication domains are more difficult to assess, since they are more abstract than academic abilities. These domains are more easily measured through informal assessments, particularly through observation. Observational measures might include some form of checklist or rating scale during a certain block of time on a typical classroom day through normal preschool activities in which the child both works alone and interacts with others. These observations are best done over time, since one attempt may not give a true picture of the child's usual behavior. Be aware, however, that observations are subject to the observer's own interpretations. The *assessor* (the teacher giving the assessment) needs to be sensitive to the child's mood, feelings, and attention at the time of the assessment. The child could be very distracted by something else at the time. The assessor may even be unintentionally assisting the child in completing tasks.

For the social, emotional, approaches toward learning, and language and communication domains, observation checklist items might include assessing the extent to which a child does the following:

- Language/Communication Development
 - Answers simple questions
 - Asks questions
 - Engages in conversations with adults and other children
 - Names and identifies objects
 - Rhymes and sings
 - Listens to others speaking

- Social/Emotional Development
 - Shows compliance with rules and authority figures
 - Demonstrates focus and pays attention
 - Demonstrates self-control and impulse control
 - Follows classroom rules and two-step directions
 - Plays and cooperates with other children
 - Takes turns and shares
 - Forms and maintains friendships with peers
 - Interacts with children and adults
 - Shows persistence in completing tasks
 - Demonstrates independence in activities
 - Resolves conflict in a nonaggressive manner
 - Expresses feelings
 - Demonstrates curiosity, enthusiasm, and engagement in learning
 - Asks teachers for help when needed
 - Listens to a story for 10 minutes or more

The NAEYC suggests that assessment looks not only at what the child can do independently but what the child is learning to do and can do with teacher support or peer support. Therefore, observations should be done during situations in which children participate with others or in other situations in which scaffolding is provided (NAEYC, 2009).

CONCLUSION

Assessment in and of itself is of limited value in the absence of instructional guidance, which puts into practice the information learned through the assessment results (Bowman et al., 2001). The goal of all assessment should be to inform teachers of children's growing abilities and progress. Assessment results should be used for the purposes of

- establishing goals to guide objectives to improve skills and abilities,
- guiding instruction in planning curriculum and learning activities in order to improve teaching,
- monitoring progress,
- providing intervention,
- determining whether further assessment is warranted, and
- communicating with families.

Assessments inform teachers and families of the child's abilities, skills, and characteristics in the classroom and are used to support learning and drive instructional choices and practices. Enough time between assessments is needed to build strengths and measure children's growth and