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Preschool Assessment

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Northwestern College

A School Improvement Project Presented
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Education

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Abstract

Assessments in early childhood are being addressed by educational leaders, administrators and teachers to meet the needs of preschoolers and ensure that these young children are school-ready. A school improvement plan was created using research-based methods. This school improvement plan looks at the need to create a developmentally appropriate preschool assessment report based on state standards with age appropriate objectives outlining specific benchmark skills to show teachers and parents an accurate picture of how children are progressing and growing. The focus of the literature review is based on the need for preschool assessments, types of assessments that are developmentally appropriate in preschool, the importance of using the results of assessments to drive instruction, and address the domains of preschool assessments. These important components of preschool evaluations were used to create a new assessment report for Nicaragua Christian School International by modifying the current one, clarifying with examples and adding benchmarks.

Keywords - Preschool, Assessment, Benchmarks

Preschool Assessment

Preschool assessments give teachers and parents an accurate view of a child's abilities, learning, and growth through meaningful observation methods and to direct classroom instruction. According to the Iowa Department of Education (2018), children should be observed continuously by their teachers so that the classroom environment can nurture continued age-appropriate development and communication with families. Early childhood programs need to focus on holistic standards and accountability systems to ensure the whole child's needs are met and not just the math and reading objectives in core curriculums (Haslip & Gullo, 2018).

Four and five-year-old preschool students are learning and growing rapidly, and tracking their development is an important step in the educational process. Goldstein and Flake state that preschool development and learning involves "social and emotional development, executive function, physical skills, and early literacy and numeracy skills" (2016, p. 275). To have an accurate understanding of the skills a young child has mastered, the type of assessment needs to be authentic. Preschool students show their ability as they work and play, so teachers need to be observing them as they are engaged in activities in the classroom (Frey et al., 2012). Lambert et al. (2015) believe that correctly implemented assessments can be a principle report to give direction in lesson planning and parent communication for teachers. There is a crucial need for preschool assessments that are done frequently and in comfortable settings so that the results can influence instruction in all the domains of early childhood learning.

Research conducted within the last ten years reinforces the importance of the use of preschool assessments as a way of demonstrating student learning, driving classroom instruction, and meeting the preschool state learning goals and assessment domains for each child. The

literature review in this school improvement plan lists several descriptions and recommendations for different types of preschool assessments, addresses the needs for assessment to drive instruction, and defines the domains of assessments in early childhood. The National Association for Education of Young Children Position Statement of Assessment and Program Evaluation are included in this literature review because they are an organization that guides education for young children by combining research with classroom practice and policy.

The problem is that the Nicaragua Christian School International (NCAI) preschool assessment report does not give a true report of student growth because it is vague and not developmentally appropriate. The problem with the current assessment is that it has a list of skills, but does not give details to guide the assessment or direct classroom instruction. For example, items on the current assessment are listed as fine motor skills, but do not explain the details of the fine motor skills that are to be achieved. Fine motor skills can include but are not limited to cutting in a straight line, a proper pencil grip, building a block tower, threading beads on a string, or using large buttons. By replacing NCAI's current preschool assessment report with a detailed comprehensive assessment report, teachers will be able to share with parents details about their child's development and use the data to guide their instruction to meet the needs of the students in the class. The new assessment report will give teachers and parents an accurate view of the child's abilities in learning and growth through meaningful observation methods. The results can then be used to direct classroom instruction.

The purpose of this school improvement plan is to create a developmentally appropriate preschool assessment report with objectives that include several benchmark skills to show teachers and parents an accurate picture of how children are progressing and growing. The new

assessment report will allow teachers to create lessons that use specific objectives as the goal so that curriculum can be used to meet the needs of the current students. For example, if a child is not able to meet the fine motor skills listed on the assessment report, the teacher needs to provide activities in small groups or centers that will strengthen fine muscles and give children an opportunity to practice the skills. These activities may include putting pony beads on a pipe cleaner, rolling play dough into balls or snakes, or creating towers with Legos.

The scope of research in early childhood assessments has led to discussion and creation of developmentally appropriate assessments that address the child and not just cognitive development as is seen in elementary grade levels. The research began with capstone project reports, action research results, and peer-reviewed journal articles with criteria that addressed the need for preschool assessments, kinds of assessments, assessment influence on instruction, as well as the domains of assessment in early childhood learning.

All of the articles reviewed were published in the last ten years, and most were written in the United States, but include a few from Europe, Asia, and Australia. The research extended to a couple of state objectives and frameworks for early childhood education and two position statements of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), which are relevant to today's preschool classrooms, regardless of their older publishing dates. Some of the NAEYC statements are under review and being updated at this time.

Preschool assessments need to give teachers and parents an accurate view of the child's abilities, assessments of learning and growth through meaningful observation methods need to be a regular part of classroom activities. Due to research findings that the whole child needs to be addressed at this age, benchmarks and objectives need to include social growth, motor skills,

self-help, and cognitive growth. A high-quality preschool assessment report portrays an accurate picture of the whole child so that the teacher can use the assessment data to drive classroom instruction. As a result of this school improvement plan, a developmentally appropriate assessment will be created with recommendations of ways to apply the assessment so that it can be used to guide instruction at NCAI.

The literature review will convey the need for robust and developmentally appropriate assessments in preschool, but also some cautions when assessing young children. The types of assessments that are successful for young children, the importance of using the results of assessments to influence instruction, and finally the domains of preschool assessments will be addressed.

Literature Review

Early childhood education can refer to children's learning and development from infancy to age eight; however, this review is focused on three-, four-, and five-year-olds in preschool programs. These programs are "increasingly being recognized as an integral part of efforts to ensure that all children enter school ready to learn and as a way to help close the achievement gaps that exist at the time children enter kindergarten" (Ackerman & Coley, 2012, p. 2). This literature will address the multi-faceted role of assessment in preschool education, starting with its importance.

Need for Robust and Developmentally Appropriate Assessments

To verify that children are ready for kindergarten, it is apparent in the research that teachers need to be using assessments to meet students' needs. Goldstein and Flake (2016) stress that the assessment process is fundamental and that teachers and administrators should be

actively involved. Furthermore, the interpretation of assessment data to drive instruction is a skill that needs to be a part of professional development standards (Goldstein & Flake, 2016).

Goldstein & Flake (2016) stress that assessment is an art form meaning that assessments need to be done well allowing adequate time and practice.

Assessments are essential to allow a teacher to evaluate a child's knowledge base and guide instruction focused on the students unique learning and development. Diamond et al. (2013) state that the "primary purpose of early childhood education and interventions is to promote children's acquisition of knowledge and skills linked to later social competence and academic success" (p. 2). To verify that children are achieving sufficient knowledge and skills, educators need to utilize proper assessments. Educators need to actively research dependable and authentic activities to appraise student learning and understand their development (Diamond et al., 2013). These measurement reports need to be easily implemented into everyday preschool classrooms. Therefore, as teachers guide and instruct children at all levels, the importance of assessments is increasingly guiding their decisions (Dunphy, 2010).

According to the Michigan Department of Education (2013), assessments need to measure children's accomplishments. The National Association of Education for Young Children (NAEYC) (2003) asserts that assessments should align with student objectives, benchmarks, and curriculum goals. The ultimate goal of an evaluation is to understand a child's development and knowledge. Guyon (2019) believes that evaluations must be used to reflect on student learning and examine ways to nurture growth by expanding on the student's experiences ultimately, making assessments essential for teaching student learning.

Addressing assessment at the preschool level needs to be different from all other grade

levels because three-, four-, and five-year-old's are unable to sit, read a test, and complete it independently. Research conducted by Ackerman & Coley (2012) found that contrary to older students, who are assessed with paper and pencil and computer testing, preschool-aged children are not able to read independently and have a shorter attention span that is not adequate for paper and pencil or long computer testing. Age-appropriate assessment leads to authentic assessment. Frey et al. (2012) believe that the assessment should reflect real-world tasks and activities to ensure authenticity. When considering what accurate preschool assessments should look like, Frey et al. (2012) believe that schoolwork and learning for young children occur through play and interaction with peers. Therefore, the best way to assess these students is to observe them in their natural classroom learning environment as they engage in activities independently or in groups (Frey et al., 2012). Other aspects of authentic assessment include using several activities and making a "connection between assessment purpose and use" (Frey et al., 2012, p. 11).

When evaluating each child's assessment results, learning and development will look very different because all children approach learning uniquely-according to their own "interest, curiosity, initiative, persistence, attentiveness, flexibility, self-regulation, reflection, cooperation, and independence" (Li et al., 2019, p. 1272). These characteristics are a predictor of future success in learning. Therefore, when assessing each child in the classroom, observation of the individual in the whole learning environment ensures an age-appropriate, authentic and holistic assessment. Ackerman & Conley (2012) focused their research on assessment as having value to the learner, keeping in mind that each child brings in a variety of knowledge, skills, abilities, and personalities whereas, Fey et al (2012) focuses on each student finding the activity or work meaningful encouraging the student to be fully engaged so that the task is rewarding, and the

assessment is authentic.

After implementation of assessments, the assessment data can be gathered and used by the teacher to focus on the individual child's needs by giving feedback that considers the child's characteristics and bridges the connection between effort and success (White, 2020). Preschool teachers use evaluations to observe and contemplate what is happening in the classroom and understand how each child is growing in relationships with their peers (Guyon, 2019). Goldstein and Flake (2016) recommend that assessments be interpreted as a snapshot of where a child is developmentally at the time of the evaluation, rather than a measurement of abilities. Preschool assessments need to allow the teacher to consider the whole child and not just the academic knowledge exclusively assessed in older children.

While considering the need for assessments and what defines a successful and authentic process, educators need to consider what does not work for preschoolers. The Michigan Department of Education (2013) warns that “young children learn at different rates in the various domains of their development and not all children master skills and content within a domain in the same order, although there are patterns to their development” (p.12). Because young children are known to develop on substantially different time schedules with irregular changes, Ackerman & Coley (2012) note that it may be difficult to assess them and that the assessments may be inaccurate. Additionally, they stress that there is a discrepancy in life experience growth development for each preschooler (Ackerman & Coley, 2012). Research by Invernizzi et al (2010) found that assessments should not be high-stakes standardized testing for preschool children but rather assessments should be broad-based and developmentally appropriate. Jones (2018) agreed stating that young children may not understand or be fully involved in a structured

assessment activity. Knowing that preschool assessments need to be different than elementary, “the field of early childhood education has struggled to make available assessment protocols that are reliable and valid, meaningful to multiple audiences, valuable to teachers for curriculum development, and respectful of children” (Linking Curriculum and Assessment, 2016, p. 4). Research by Diamond et al (2013) shows that widely used assessments in the preschool classroom may not give a genuine portrayal of a child’s abilities or knowledge. Therefore, according to Wright & Murray (2018) evaluations should not consist of a checklist of isolated knowledge as the teacher and child sit together; instead, they should look at the child’s abilities and growth as a whole.

In summary, to give preschool teachers a true understanding of each student’s development and knowledge, age appropriate assessments need to be incorporated into the classroom frequently. To provide needed skills and ability practice that is geared to the children in the classroom, assessments need to have detailed objectives and benchmarks. Assessments can ensure the success of classroom activities to prepare children for kindergarten.

Types of Assessments That Are Successful for Preschool

Research by NAEYC (2003) has shown that preschool children’s assessments are essential and need to be approached differently than older grade levels. Dunphy (2010) states that the importance and validity of assessment is clear only when the learning outcomes are made evident and recordable. Goldstein and Flake (2016) believe that students need to have numerous chances to exhibit their abilities in order to show current knowledge and growing skills. They also feel educators need to understand how to interpret and chart their observations so that the assessment is a true reflection of development (Goldstein & Flake, 2016). NAEYC

(2003) defines formative assessment as the “process teachers use to monitor and provide feedback on children’s learning and to adjust their instruction to better meet children’s needs” (p. 3). According to NAEYC (2003), the assessment process needs to include frequent, duplicated, and organized observations and documentations. Several researchers have different opinions about the kinds of essential assessments for young children, Dumphy (2010) details the methods of assessment to include observing, anecdotal notes, communicating, interviewing, documents and reflecting, compiling portfolios of drawings and other works, or creating narratives about a child’s learning. Assessment options defined by Jones (2018) include conversation records, anecdotal notes, children’s selected drawings or work samples, and other formal measures. Assessment as defined by the Michigan Department of Education is “a systematic procedure for obtaining information from observation, interviews, portfolios, projects, tests, and other sources that can be used to make judgments about characteristics of children or their programs” (2013, p. 142). For the purpose of this school improvement plan and literature review the focus on the types of preschool assessment will be observations, direct assessment, and portfolios.

Observation occurs each day as children are involved in learning activities in the classroom. Oxford (n.d., para. 1) defines observation as “the action or process of observing something or someone carefully or in order to gain information”. The Iowa Department of Education (2018) states that observation is the most common form of evaluating preschoolers’ abilities and motivation. Researchers, Ackerman & Coley (2012), Dunphy (2010), Lambert et al (2015), Li et al (2019) and Riley-Ayers (2018) all agree that observational assessments need to occur frequently while the child is exhibiting skills in natural settings, such as the classroom, playground, or home, for an accurate understanding of their knowledge and development.

Lambert et al. (2015) makes note that preschool learning and growth happens quickly and at varied rates. Dunphy (2010) found in his research that “there is a long tradition of child observation in early childhood education. Many of the pioneers in the field (e.g., Froebel, Piaget, Vygotsky, and Issacs) strongly promoted the processes of watching, listening and reflecting on children’s actions and words” (p. 41). Iowa Department of Education (2018) recommends that children should be observed continuously by their teachers so that the classroom environment can nurture continued age-appropriate development and communication with families. In conclusion, when teachers document their observations, it confirms what the child can do, what they can understand, and how they are developing-all while in a natural setting.

Another essential type of assessment is direct assessment, which may involve a child completing a checklist; a list of specific questions or finishing different types of tasks while sitting one on one with a teacher. Thatcher Kantor et al (2011) recommends that when using direct assessment for evaluation, children and teachers need to have an established relationship. Ackerman & Coley (2012) advise that there needs to be consistency each time an assessment is given and an awareness that direct assessments may not provide an accurate portrayal of ability because the setting is usually out of context. Li et al (2019) cautions that when using direct measurement activities or a checklist to evaluate children, a teacher or parent’s documentation of natural student behaviors can elucidate the results. Circumstances can warrant direct assessment, it should never be the only type of assessment used in a preschool setting.

A portfolio is another recommended type of assessment that can be used for evaluating preschool children’s learning. Portfolio is defined by the Oxford dictionary (n.d., para. 2) as “pieces of creative work collected by someone to display their skills”. Riley-Ayers (2018)

research encourages the collection of anecdotal notes and work samples to display a child's ability and knowledge base and can be used to direct instruction and personalize student learning. Ackerman and Coley (2012) refer to papers, artwork, pictures, and videos as possible parts of a portfolio. Laski (2018) refers to the importance of allowing children to choose their own works to add to the portfolio to enable the opportunity for self-assessment. Laski (2018) addresses two different ways in which portfolios can be used: to visually track student progress and to encourage student learning visually. The work samples in a portfolio allow teachers to gauge student individual growth and development, communicate with parents about a child's achievements and areas that need improvement, and encourage self-evaluation.

In summary, observations, direct assessments, and portfolios have been identified as valuable methods of evaluations. These forms of evaluation can all be used individually or in combination to show student knowledge and development (Li et al., 2019). Whichever method is implemented, research stresses that the assessment needs to give an accurate picture of the child in a natural setting and be done frequently.

The Importance of Assessment Influence on Instruction

Research suggests that teachers use the insight gained from assessments to guide their lesson planning, classroom activities, and direct instruction. Bailey (2017) describes assessment as an opportunity to accumulate student knowledge, analyze it, and then use it to guide instruction and activities to improve learning to ensure that the child is ready for school. In her action research, Bailey (2017) found that the teachers used assessment data to modify individual and group instruction, which supports the findings of Goldstein and Flake (2016), who firmly believe that for children to learn specific classroom standards, a teacher needs to utilize

appropriate developmental activities during instruction.

Research affirms that teachers need to use assessments to ensure that the instructional activities meet the individual needs of students. Shepley (2019) states that when teachers do not use the information gained from ongoing assessments to change and guide instruction, student learning is hindered. Haslip and Gullo (2018) add that teachers may overlook various teaching methods compatible with student interests because of the pressure to meet specific standards or goals without utilizing assessment data. When teachers are well informed about a child's knowledge and development, they can guide instruction towards relevant standards while still seeking to adapt to the child's interests.

Michigan Department of Education (2013) recommends that content and teaching methods guide teacher instruction. NAEYC (2009) further emphasizes that young children need to be challenged to learn and advance by building on what they currently know, challenging them with the next level, and giving them opportunities to practice these new skills. Lambert et al. (2015) adds to the importance of assessment in that teacher's instruction and child learning activities can be guided through proper assessment methods that are "well designed, implemented effectively, and interpreted and used appropriately" (p. 49). Furthermore, Lambert et al. (2015) explain that lesson planning and parent-teacher communication can also be positively influenced by the valuable information gained from assessment (Lambert et al., 2015). Frequent assessment of what preschool children know, need to know, and are currently learning can help guide classroom planning and policies. (Ackerman & Coley, 2012). Not only does assessment impact instruction methods, but it can also help preschool teachers recognize and respond to what is happening in the classroom and how students are handling and engaging with

certain activities. Additionally, it can lead to adjustments in schedules, small groups, or pairing with students who need more assistance (Guyon, 2019). Therefore, the information gained through frequent assessments should be used to create focused lessons, needed activities and appropriate grouping that will best serve the needs and developmental growth of students in the classroom.

Similarly, NAEYC (2003) believes that an enhanced understanding of children in the classroom is gained through assessments. Riley-Ayers (2014) echoes the importance of understanding what children know “since children’s new knowledge builds on prior knowledge” (p.6). When the information compiled via assessment is used by teachers to guide instruction and ensure that both benchmarks and the child’s specific needs are met, it provides a more comprehensive understanding of the child’s developmental standing and improves their overall learning experience. Invernizzi et al (2010) advise preschool teachers to analyze assessments, determine what their students' needs are, and adjust or focus their instruction accordingly to meet the specific presenting needs.

Assessment is individualized, flexible, and comprehensive. It informs instruction, interactions and communicates progress. Russo et al. (2019) found that teachers should utilize multiple assessments and the data analyzed to identify a child’s needs and abilities, to keep track of learning, and to plan individualized activities. Riley-Ayers (2018) emphasizes this as well by stating that assessment data gives insight into where children are developmentally, acknowledges gifts and talents, and provides direction into what should be next. Jones (2018) and Riley-Ayers (2018) both agree that the primary purpose of preschool assessment is to enhance teaching and strengthen student learning or better stated as, “Teaching is assessment and assessment is

teaching – they are not separate acts” (p. 2). Assessments are a primary part of a preschool classroom and should be done frequently.

Learning Domains to be Assessed

When preschool educators utilize assessment, there needs to be a consideration of what subjects are being evaluated. When considering what areas to address and assess for preschoolers, the research shows that the learning domains to be taught need to cover more than the cognitive subjects of the elementary grade levels. Several learning domains have been identified for three-, four-, and five-year-old’s in terms of cognitive skills and child development. NAEYC (2009) goes into more detail and identifies cognitive learning skills, social and emotional development, and physical growth as being interconnected domains of learning and development for early childhood students-all of which influence each other. Goldstein and Flake (2016) identify similar learning domains for preschool: social and emotional developmental growth, cognitive growth, motor skills, and literacy, and math knowledge. Haslip & Gullo (2018) define learning goals for preschoolers in more detail by including the following:

Optimizing language development, emotional well-being, character strengths, child nutrition, early literacy and numeracy, children’s experiences with nature and the arts, the necessity of a stimulating environment, executive functioning, developing resilience, and involving children in integrated projects related to science, engineering, and math, among other areas. (p. 262)

Jacob et al. (2019) describe two types of preschool skills: self-regulated learning and executive function. They define the self-regulated learning skills as independently directing their learning and making choices for themselves (Jacob et al., 2019). For executive function, they

refer to cognitive abilities such as using to make plans, reason, remember previous lessons, or solve problems independently (Jacob et al., 2019). These skills impact a child's relationships with friends, a child's ability to think about consequences before acting and a child's recall of past outcomes of behavior choices. Because self-regulated learning and executive function impact brain development, Jacob et al. (2019) believe it is essential to teach these skills in preschool. In Casey's (2020) literature review, she showed that these social-emotional skills and executing functions should work in tandem with cognitive skills because they are closely connected. As Dunphy (2010) simply states, the skills to be a good friend, play, and work well with peers, and build relationships are important in preschool learning. In fact, Clark (2017) emphasizes that "the abilities to share, follow directions, take turns and generally self-regulate grow in importance as children leave early childhood, play-based classrooms for settings with more teacher-directed learning" (p.13). Clark also stresses that "Curriculum should address prosocial behaviors that will enable children to be successful beyond the early childhood classroom. Social skills should be assessed and instruction targeted to meet the needs of the individual" (2017, p. 15).

The main cognitive subjects that early learning focuses on are early literacy skills and pre-math skills. Devries (2015) includes phonemic awareness, phonics, word recognition, and vocabulary as early literacy skills. Thatcher Kantor et al. (2011) note that print awareness or literacy skills are a foundation for reading and are an essential skill to have. Piasta et al. (2016) refer to alphabet knowledge as being able to name letters and identify their sounds. They also point out that using quality assessments to evaluate alphabet knowledge gives insight into needed instruction. These early literacy skills are foundational, and Internizzi et al. (2010) stress that

emergent literacy assessments are only valuable for guiding instruction. Educators need to have a clear understanding of early literacy skills that need to be taught to discern high-quality assessments to implement. Early math skills will give children the foundation needed to be ready for Kindergarten. Twelve pre-math skills identified by Purpura and Lonigan (2015) are “verbal counting, one-to-one counting, cardinality, counting subsets, set comparison, subitizing, numeral comparison, set comparison, number order, set-to-numerals, story problems, and number combinations” (p. 291). Purpura and Lonigan (2015) also stress the importance of assessment methods to determine if a child has gained required pre-math skills and guide instruction according to student needs. Literacy and math are the two main learning domains for preparing students to be successful as they start their educational process.

Research identified several different preschool classroom domains, but Casey (2020) warns that preschool teachers need to nurture the whole child and not focus more on either academic skills or social-emotional growth. “It is not necessary to choose between one developmental focus or the other” (Casey, 2020, p 28). Social skills and cognitive growth together allow children to develop and be highly prepared for school. Therefore, when creating a robust assessment report, cognitive, emotional, and physical domains should all be included.

Conclusion

High quality research-based preschool assessments are needed to ensure that students are developing appropriately and learning the skills needed to be successful in Kindergarten. Natural observations performed frequently with trusted adults give an accurate picture of student learning. Then teachers need to use the assessment results to guide lesson planning and instructions to meet the needs and interests of students. As Riley-Ayers states “assessment brings

the child back to the focus of teaching” (2014, p.6) and it “provides teachers with the reports to notice the individual differences among their children” (2014, p. 6). A robust preschool assessment will encompass the whole child by including social-emotional, developmental and cognitive domains. This literature review addressed the need for preschool assessments, the kind of assessments needed, the assessment influence on instruction, and the assessment domains in early childhood learning.

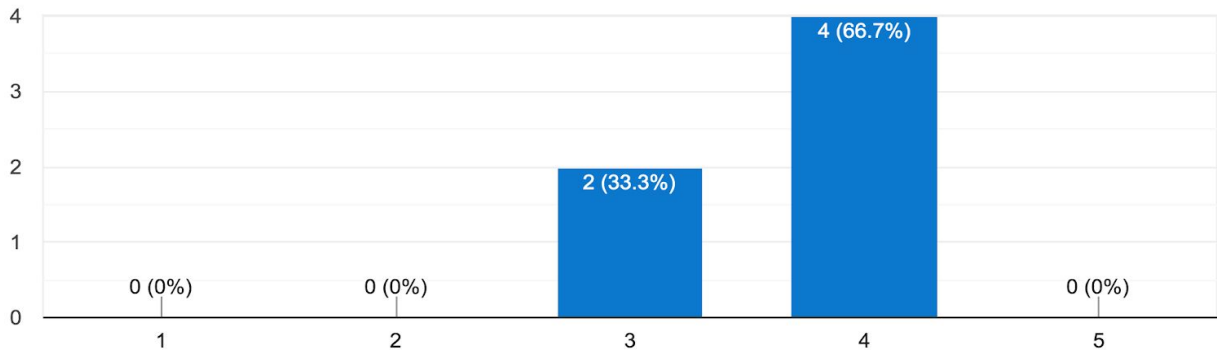
The Need for the School Improvement Plan

The problem with the current NCAI preschool assessment report is that it follows the same structure as the elementary school report card. The only variation is the addition of some developmental benchmarks and the use of “achieved,” “in progress” and “needs improvement” instead of letter grades (Appendix A). The current assessment report is vague in some areas as to what is being assessed. For example, when the benchmark refers to “recognizes selected uppercase letters,” it is unclear what letters, how many, or what exactly the child needs to work on to receive a mark of “achieved.” Another example is “demonstrates age-appropriate fine motor skills.” There are numerous fine motor skills, but there was only one space given to summarize all the skills together.

To determine the need for a new assessment, a survey was sent to the director of the school, the preschool administrator, the curriculum coordinator, and the three early childhood teachers. The first question asked them to identify their role at NCAI. The second question asked them to answer how well the current preschool assessment report assessed students, number one being poor and five being excellent. Thirty-three percent gave a three for average, and sixty-seven percent ranked it as a four.

2. How well does the current report assess the students in your opinion?

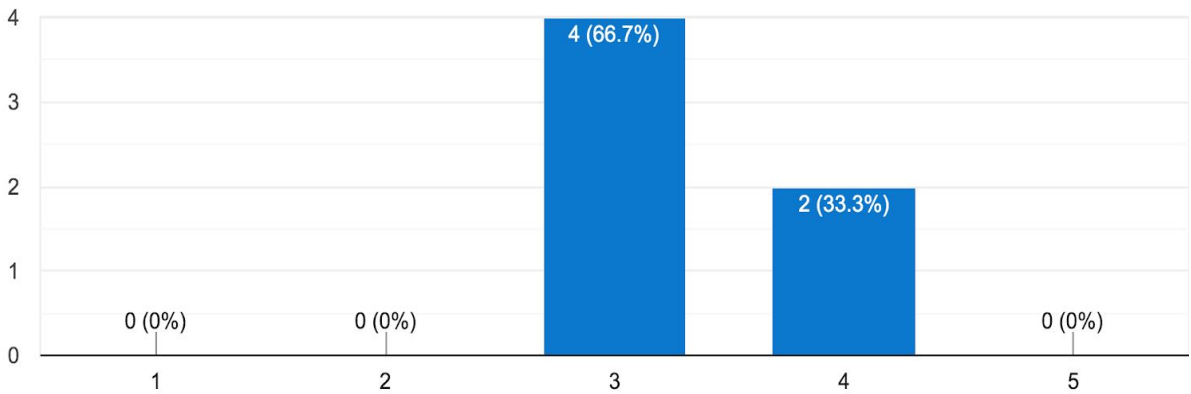
6 responses



The third question asked if they understood the benchmark being assessed, rating a number one as being vague and five as being detailed. Sixty-seven percent answered with a three for average and thirty-three percent gave it a four.

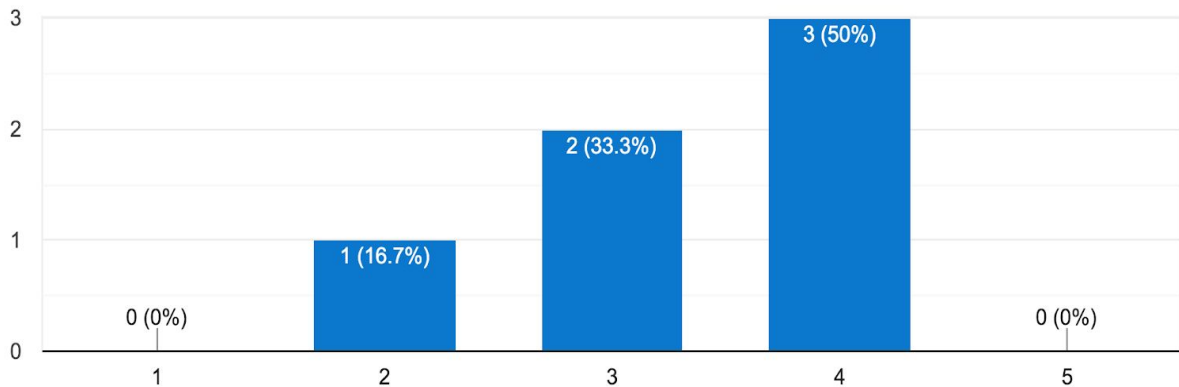
3. How clear are the benchmarks being assessed? (Do you understand exactly what you are assessing?)

6 responses



The fourth question refers to how well parents can understand the assessment, one meaning poorly and five as very well understood by parents. Seventeen percent responded with a two rating, thirty-three percent gave it a three, and fifty percent responded with a four.

4. How well does the report card gives a clear assessment of the child's development to parents?
6 responses



The last statement on the survey gave the opportunity to comment on the current assessment being used as a report card and give recommendations for improvement. One response stated that there is a lack of clear descriptors and benchmarks for teachers and parents to know if a student has met a particular objective. For example, it is difficult for parents to understand what it means if a child can write the letters of its name, but is not receiving an achieved because they are not being written correctly or consistently. Another staff member responded similarly with “I think it would be helpful for the assessment and for parents if we had more specific indicators below some of the benchmarks. She recommended using phrases like “verbalizes emotions”, “uses ‘I feel’ statements” or “has difficulty expressing emotions” under the objective “expresses emotions appropriately”.

Two of the survey participants commented that the current preschool assessment report was created by a committee of teachers drawing on their own personal experience as well as other standards. The two participants offered that they would be open to suggestions and the need for improvement based on universal preschool benchmarks. One of the teachers felt that some of the skill objectives being assessed were subjective. Another teacher would like to have assessment forms to follow more in line with the skills taught and evaluated. She also expressed that it would be nice to have a system that uses portfolios to share with parents so that they can observe their child's improvement.

The compilation of the survey data, participant comments and recommendations yield to the conclusion that the current assessment report that Nicaragua Christian School International uses has served to communicate where a child needs to improve their skills, where a child is in the learning progress, and what skills have been achieved, but lacks specific details that clearly communicate and demonstrate student progress. Therefore, a new preschool assessment report would be welcomed by all staff if the new assessment report clearly details what is being assessed and gives examples of measurable developmental benchmarks.

Goals and Implementation for the School Improvement Plan

The goal of this school improvement plan is to create a developmentally appropriate research-based preschool assessment report to replace Nicaragua Christian School's current assessment report by including developmentally appropriate objectives and benchmarks skills to give teachers and parents an accurate picture of how children are progressing and growing. The new assessment report will include specific research-based assessment domains as suggested from researchers like Goldstein and Flake (2016), which include: social and emotional, cognitive

growth, motor skills and literacy, and math knowledge. The newly developed preschool assessment report will include the previously used assessment domains, which are social-emotional development, language development, literacy skills, math and logic concepts, developmental skill and conduct. Developmentally appropriate objectives will be specified under each assessment domain with specific research-based state benchmarks which demonstrates student learning and progression.

For example, if the domain is social-emotional development and the objective is for the child to control emotions appropriately, the benchmarks will be: the child understands there are different emotions, the child identifies different emotions by name and facial expression, and the child uses and controls emotions for a routine or a certain situation.

The new assessment will be completed by the end of November 2020 and be given to administration as recommendations for implementation in the 2021-2022 school year. There will not be any resources needs nor financial obligations outside of the final document nor will there be any barriers for the Nicaraguan Christian School International to use the new assessment report created as a result of this research.

Assessment of the School Improvement Plan

The purpose of this school improvement plan was to create a developmentally appropriate preschool assessment report with objectives that include several benchmark skills to show teachers and parents an accurate picture of how children are progressing and growing. This new assessment report will allow teachers to create lessons that will use these specific objectives as the goal so that curriculum can be used to meet the needs of the current students. The main purpose of preschool assessments is to enhance teaching which leads to student learning (Jones,

2018). Because this assessment report will be used in the next school year, it is not able to be assessed for success at the completion of the plan.

The goal of this school improvement plan was to replace the current preschool assessment report with a research-based preschool assessment report that would give teachers and parents a clear understanding of student performance by stating specific benchmarks under objectives. Teachers will then be able to focus activities and instructions to meet specific goals for individual students. The assessment report will be successful if the teachers can use it to understand what they are observing in the classroom, adjust lessons to meet the needs of each child, and communicate more effectively with parents.

The school improvement plan will be shared with the director of Nicaragua Christian School International, the elementary principal, the curriculum specialist, and the early childhood teachers. It will be in their hands to be implemented in part or as a whole to replace the assessment reports currently used. Teachers will be able to clarify the objectives used and determine how they want to assess students on a regular basis in their classrooms. “A primary purpose of early childhood education is to promote children’s acquisition of knowledge and skills linked to later social competence and academic success” (Diamond et al., 2013. p. 37). Teachers will see the importance of preschool in the literature as well as the type of assessment that can be utilized, how the assessments can guide instruction and what domains are important.

Conclusion

Nicaragua Christian School International currently uses a preschool assessment report that is vague and therefore confusing for teachers and parents. The current preschool assessment report lacks organized domains, age appropriate objectives and comprehensive benchmarks for

the students. Current research was reviewed with survey data and comments along with recommendations submitted from the Nicaragua Christian School International staff that led to the conclusion that a new preschool assessment report was needed, which would include age-appropriate assessment domains and specific learning objectives with detailed state benchmarks. This new preschool assessment report will allow parents to see exactly what their child is learning, how their child is progressing in accomplishing the required state benchmark skills and to be able to identify what learning still needs to be accomplished by their child. Teachers will use the new assessment report to create plans and activities that meet the specific learning needs and outcomes of the individual child. The Nicaragua Christian School International will use the new assessment report not only to replace the current report card, but as a guide for planning and implementing instruction for the preschool children.

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Appendix A

NCA International Preschool Progress Report

First Quarter 2020-2021 (Grade P1)

Name: [Redacted]
 Homeroom: [Redacted]
 Date: [Redacted]



Academic Progress	Qtr 1a	Qtr 1b	Qtr 2a	Qtr 2b	Qtr 3a	Qtr 3b	Qtr 4a	Final
A. Social-Emotional Development								
1. Participates in group activities								
2. Stays until task is completed								
3. Asks for adult help when needed								
4. Controls emotions appropriately								
5. Listens attentively								
B. Language Development								
1. Understands basic directives in English								
2. Knows theme vocabulary studied in class								
3. Expresses him/herself correctly								
4. Memorizes songs, poems and rhymes								
5. Memorizes and recites monthly Bible verse								
C. Literacy Skills								
1. Recognizes name in print								
2. Recognizes selected uppercase letters								
3. Can trace letters								
4. Recites the alphabet								
D. Math and Logic Concepts								
1. Counts to 10								
2. Identifies numerals from 0 to 10								
3. Recognizes basic geometric shapes								
4. Recognizes basic colors								
5. Can identify and create patterns								
6. Can sort objects according to characteristics								
E. Developmental Skills								
1. Demonstrates gross motor coordination								
2. Demonstrates age-appropriate fine motor skills								
3. Holds the pencil correctly								
4. Beginning to use scissors correctly								
5. Traces his/her first name								
6. Places objects in the indicated positions								
F. Conduct								
1. Follows classroom rules and routines								
2. Listens to and follows directions								
3. Interacts and plays well with others								
4. Gives best effort on assignments								

NCA International Preschool Progress Report

First Quarter 2020-2021 (Grade P2)

Name:

Homeroom:


Date:



Academic Progress	Qtr 1a	Qtr 1b	Qtr 2a	Qtr 2b	Qtr 3a	Qtr 3b	Qtr 4a	Final
A. Social-Emotional Development								
1. Participates in group activities								
2. Stays until task is completed								
3. Asks for adult help when needed								
4. Controls emotions appropriately								
5. Listens attentively								
6. Demonstrates age-appropriate responsibility								
7. Completes tasks independently								
B. Language Development								
1. Uses English to communicate in class								
2. Expresses him/herself correctly								
3. Participates in class discussions								
4. Knows theme vocabulary studied in class								
5. Memorizes and recites weekly Bible verse								
6. Identifies rhyming words								
7. Memorizes songs, poems and rhymes								
C. Literacy Skills								
1. Recites the alphabet								
2. Recognizes selected uppercase letters								
3. Recognizes selected lowercase letters								
4. Identifies sounds of studied letters								
5. Understands basic concepts of print								
D. Math and Logic Concepts								
1. Counts to 20								
2. Identifies and writes numerals from 0 to 10								
3. Recognizes basic geometric shapes								
4. Recognizes basic colors								
5. Can identify and create patterns								
6. Adds 2 groups of up to five objects								
E. Developmental Skills								
1. Demonstrates gross motor coordination								
2. Demonstrates age-appropriate fine motor skills								
3. Holds the pencil correctly								
4. Uses scissors correctly								
5. Understands spatial relationships								
6. Prints selected alphabet letters correctly								
7. Recognizes and writes first name								
F. Conduct								
1. Pays attention during group time								
2. Listens to and follows directions								
3. Interacts and plays well with others								
4. Gives best effort on assignments								

Appendix B

NICARAGUA CHRISTIAN ACADEMY INTERNATIONAL				PK 1 SCHOOL YEAR 2021-2022							
				NAME:		TEACHER:		DATE:			
	OBJECTIVES	BENCHMARKS	Clarification or Examples	Start	Quarter 1	Progress Report	Quarter 2	Progress Report	Quarter 3	Final	
A. Social-Emotional Development											
	1. Controls Emotions Appropriately										
		Adjusts reactions to needs, feelings, activities	Seeks out a teacher or object for comfort, connects actions to reactions - "If I hit my friend it will make them cry"								
		Reactions are appropriate to the situation	Doesn't laugh when a friend is hurt								
		Can name types of emotions	Understands that a smiling face is happy and a frown is sad								
		Connects emotions with facial expressions	Understands that a smiling face is happy and a frown is sad								
		Can wait for their turn									
		Shows flexibility / adaptability	Doesn't get upset when schedules change								
	2. Listen to and Follows Directions										
		Understands rules and purpose of rules									
		Engages in routine activities	Responds to the clean up song, lines up when told								
		Uses materials appropriately and safely	Uses materials purposely and respectful to rules								
		Understands that breaking rules has a consequence	May lose playtime if he stands on the slide								
		Applies rules to new situations	The rules apply to specials and chapel								
	3. Pays Attention During Group Time										
		Needs minimal reminders									
		Understands rules, routines, transitions	Eyes on me, hands in lap, bubble in their mouth, raise hand if participating, listening ears, sitting criss cross								
		Listens attentively									
	4. Participates in Group Activities										
		Cooperates and can take turns	Waiting their turn, can share an object in a group setting with teachers guidance								
		Balances needs and rights of self and others	Responds appropriately when others want the same material, can ask for something they want								
		Shares materials									
		Engages and is actively involved in activity									
	5. Stays Until Task is Completed										
		Demonstrates persistence	Practices an activity until successful								
		Maintains focus	Sustains interest in working on a task								
		Seeks assistance when needed									
		Modifies strategies to complete task	Seek assistance when the next step seems unclear or too difficult.								
	6. Gives Best Effort on Assignments										
		Actively engages in problem solving	Seek assistance to solve the problem. Observes others and imitates how others solve the problem.								
		Positive approach to learning	Willingly engages in new experiences, keeps trying								
		Shows curiosity	Uses senses to explore and investigate their environment.								
	7. Completes tasks independently										
		Can work independently after directions are given	Can follow steps to complete the task with some assistance								
		Can complete tasks and assignments without help									
	8. Demonstrates Responsibility										
		Takes care of own needs appropriately (clothes, bathroom, food)	Minimal assistance								
		Washes and dries hands									
		Takes care of personal belongings	Uses cubby for toys, lunches and water bottle								
		Puts away toys or materials									
		Chooses activity									
	9. Interact and Plays Well with Others										
		Joins groups	Can join friends that are already playing								
		Makes friends	Plays with one or two preferred playmates								
		Interacts with conversation and play	Begins to involve others in their play								

NICARAGUA CHRISTIAN ACADEMY INTERNATIONAL				PK 2 YEAR 2021-2022	SCHOOL NAME:					
				TEACHER:						
				DATE:						
OBJECTIVES	BENCHMARKS	Clarification or Examples	Start	Quarter 1	Progress Report	Quarter 2	Progress Report	Quarter 3	Final	
A. Social-Emotional Development										
1. Controls Emotions Appropriately										
	Regulates responses to needs, feelings, events	Separation from parents, delayed gratification, learning to wait.								
	Reactions are appropriate to the situation	Differentiates behavior expectations for the place or activity (circle time vs. playground)								
	Can name types of emotions	Identifies range of feelings								
	Associates emotions with facial expressions	Understands and responds to the emotional reactions of others								
	Can wait for their turn									
	Shows flexibility / adaptability	Transitions, adjusts to new settings and schedule changes								
2. Listen to and Follows Directions										
	Understands rules and purpose of rules									
	Engages in routine activities									
	Uses materials appropriately and safely									
	Understands that breaking rules has a consequence									
	Applies rules to new situations	Applies classroom rules to specials classes, chapel, etc.								
3. Pays Attention During Group Time										
	Needs minimal reminders									
	Understands rules, routines, transitions	Understands when to have a quiet voice and when to have a bubble voice, watching eyes, raises hands								
	Listens attentively	Tracking teacher with little distraction								
4. Participates in Group Activities										
	Cooperates and can take turns	Shows patience and a willingness to take turns, raises hands								
	Balances needs and rights of self and others	Suggests solutions to social problems								
	Shares materials	Initiates sharing of materials and ideas								
	Engages and is actively involved in activity									
5. Stays Until Task is Completed										
	Demonstrates persistence	Plans and pursues a variety of appropriately challenging activities								
	Maintains focus	Can ignore distractions and interruptions								
	Seeks assistance when needed									
	Modifies strategies to complete task	Considers different approach								
6. Gives Best Effort on Assignments										
	Actively engages in problem solving	Solves problems without trying every possibility or considers several possibilities								
	Positive approach to learning	Doesn't give up or unwilling to try								
	Shows curiosity	Eagerness to learn about a variety of topics and ideas								
7. Completes tasks independently										
	Can work independently after directions are given	Continues working after adults walk away								
	Can complete tasks and assignments without help	Shows confidence in ability								
8. Demonstrates Responsibility										
	Takes care of own needs appropriately (clothes, bathroom, food)									
	Washes and dries hands									
	Takes care of personal belongings									
	Puts away toys or materials									
	Chooses activity									
9. Interact and Plays Well with Others										
	Joins groups	Initiates, joins in and sustains positive interactions with a small group of two or three children								

	Responds appropriately to specific vocabulary and simple statements, questions, and stories									
	Follows 2+ step directions that related to familiar objects and experiences	"Get a drink of water, go to the bathroom, tuck in your shirt, wash your hands, line up."								
	Uses English to express thoughts and need									
2. Expresses him/herself Correctly										
	Uses facial expressions, body language, gestures, and sign language to engage in reciprocal conversation	Is able to have a discussion and remain focused and involved								
	Uses language to express thoughts and needs									
	Uses 4-6 word sentences									
	Tells about another time and place	Is able to talk about what happened over the weekend								
	Tells stories using detail and logical order									
	Speaks Clearly									
	Uses conventional grammar									
3. Participates in Class Discussions										
	Moderates voice volume according to place and time	Uses inside and outside voices								
	Waits their turn to speak	Avoids interrupting others, learning to be respectful								
	Listens to classmates	Shows progress in listening attentively, learning to be respectful								
	Stays on subject									
4. Uses Expanding Vocabulary										
	Incorporates new, less familiar or technical words in everyday conversation									
	Uses more complex words in conversation									
	Correctly names picture when asked, "What is this?" or can identify a picture with a word, "Where is the white dog?"									
	Builds on ideas with language									
5. Memorizes and Recites Weekly Bible Verse										
	Can say the verse independently or with 1 or 2 prompts									
6. Sings Songs and Rhymes										
	Participates in play activities with sounds									
	Learns songs for special performances: Fiestas Patrias, Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter									
	Uses fingers plays and hand motions when appropriate									
	Participates in chapel actions and songs									
D. Literacy Skills										
1. Recites the Alphabet										
	Can say the alphabet without singing it									
2. Recognizes Selected Uppercase Letters										
	Check letters as they are being taught, If they know less than 50% of the letters learned up to the final week of the reporting period it is "Needs Improvement". If they know between 50% and 90% of the letters learned it is "In Progress". If they know 90% or more of the letters learned it is "Achieved".	Should be able to pick out the correct letter from a group as well as name the letter when shown a picture.								
3. Recognizes Selected Lowercase Letters										
	Same requirements as uppercase letters									
4. Identifies Sounds of Studied Letters										
	Same requirements as uppercase letters									
5. Understands Basic Concepts of Print										
	Indicates where to start reading and the direction to follow	Moves finger left to right, top to bottom								
	Knows some features of a book	Title, author, illustrator, cover, spine								
	Orients book correctly, turns pages from the front of the book to the back, recognizes familiar books by their covers									
6. Notices and Discriminates Rhyming Words										
	Fills in missing rhyming word	Ned went to bed because he had hurt his ____.								

