



How to Know if Students are Learning – Assessments

An excerpt from the Transitional Kindergarten Planning Guide (pages 27-28), developed by the California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CSESA).

Preparing for assessment in a transitional kindergarten program demands a well-defined plan and should be supported by clearly defined principles, guidelines, and procedures for assessing students. The purpose of assessment is to monitor student progress of students and then to organize an effective instructional program that meets their needs. TK teachers must make informed instructional decisions regarding the teaching and learning of the students in a TK program.

In *Principles and Recommendations for Early Childhood Assessments* (Shepard, Kagan, & Wurtz, 1998), assessing young children is based on specific principles regarding assessments. They should be developmentally appropriate, tailored for a specific purpose, and they must be reliable, valid, and fair. Assessments should be age appropriate in both content and methodology, and they should be linguistically appropriate.

The National Association of Early Childhood (NAEYC, 2008) states that assessments should benefit the student and accomplish three purposes:

- plan instruction and communicate with parents;
- identify young children with specific needs; and
- evaluate programs.

Adherence to these principles provides a focus on the teaching and learning of TK students.

Assessment in today's age of accountability is a critical component in teaching and learning. Using appropriate assessments effectively enables the TK teacher to provide an instructional program that is aligned to the developmental needs of every student. The assessments must include all content areas and should utilize a variety of methods, procedures and tools in order to be in the best interest of all students. If implemented properly, the teacher will consistently have a clear picture of each learner and an identification of his/her needs.

A variety of assessments used by kindergarten teachers can be used with students in a TK classroom. Assessments should be used to monitor development and learning and guide program and lesson planning and decision-making. They can also be used to identify students who need additional support, or other students who are ready to move onto another group or even to the

second year of kindergarten. Assessment information should help teachers to communicate with other teachers and family members.

It is important to determine how and when assessments will be administered and how the results will be documented. Having a well-defined assessment plan provides direction for teachers in a TK program. The following considerations should be given to the assessment of students in a TK classroom:

- Formative assessments should be used regularly for instructional planning.
- Assessment should support the student's development along all areas of learning.
- Assessments should use a variety of measurement tools and approaches including analysis of student work, teacher observation, and records of individual progress.
- Assessments should allow students to show what they know so language and cultural biases must be avoided.
- Assessment results should identify the strengths, needs, and progress of individual students and facilitate flexible groupings.
- Assessment results should identify students who need more individual attention or assistance, as well as those who may need more challenging work.
- Assessments should prepare students for meeting the *California Common Core State Standards* for kindergarten.

The following is a list of assessment strategies to consider:

Informal or authentic assessments that are performance based provide the teacher with information to use in tailoring the instructional program to meet individual needs.

Observations and teacher-made or published checklists can provide the TK teacher with information regarding the students' abilities. They can be used informally as the teacher observes the student's behavior.

Setting up the environment so that it supports observations of students should be implemented.

Anecdotal records, in which the teacher makes brief notes about students as they learn, can provide important information about learning. These records can be used to assess behavior and social skills as well as development in content areas (CDE, 2000).

Student work/portfolios are collections of actual student work that can provide meaningful information about the progress of the student as well as planning information for the teacher. This type of assessment focuses on the student's strengths and demonstrates the skills and knowledge that have been learned. Portfolios allow teachers to examine the student's progress over time.

Diagnostic assessments identify a range of strengths and weaknesses and provide feedback that can be used for instructional planning. They also provide teachers with information about student's prior knowledge and misconceptions before beginning a learning activity. They also

provide a baseline for understanding how much learning has taken place after the learning activity is completed.

Retell/narratives determine the comprehension abilities of the student. Through retelling activities, the teacher can assess whether the student comprehends the story and is able to organize his/her thoughts by responding to questions.

Writing samples at various stages are an appropriate assessment for young learners. By examining their responses teachers can identify progress in skill areas such as spelling and comprehension.

Instructional conversations with young learners are an authentic way to assess language, comprehension, self-perception and motivation. This can be done in a formal or informal manner.

Home surveys and/or checklists are ways to collect important information about a student's learning progress. It also provides a way for families to be involved in the student's learning experience by collecting this information at home.

District benchmarks are an effective way to determine whether students are learning the expected and/or required content.

Download a full copy of CCSESA's Transitional Kindergarten Planning Guide at:
http://www.ccsesa.org/index/attachments/TKGuide_11311_Print.pdf