

Royal Drakensberg Education Trust

APTZA

Assessment and Planning Tool for children under 3 years in rural preschools ©

A guide to the Assessment and Planning Tool ZA

Introduction

This guide aims to assist staff in working together to support and develop practice for younger children (those under 3 years) in rural preschools. It was originally developed from experience working in and with rural preschools in the Northern Drakensberg. However, it is hoped that much of it will be relevant in other preschools.

As yet, the assessment pertains to children under 3 years because this was considered the area most requiring support. It is foreseen that an assessment appropriate to older children will be developed in the future, following a similar format.

Visiting staff should allow sufficient time to make observations which enable them to complete the assessment.

Step 1: Initial assessment

One or two staff with experience of ECD should visit a school with the school's prior agreement. Visiting staff should allow sufficient time to make observations which enable them to complete the assessment.

1. **What does the school have?** The resources in the school
2. **What does the school do?** What activities are routinely provided for children and documented in a weekly plan
3. **How does the school provide X?** The quality of the practice: How well are the activities currently provided. (If an activity or activities are not happening that day, please ask for a demonstration or return to view this another day so that you can assess).

Remember, **the role of visiting staff making an assessment is to gather information and observe**. If required, help and support will be offered later.

If 2 staff visit, the assessment form should be completed by each observer independently. Where staff differ in their judgments on the form, later they should discuss these differences to reach a consensus. These consensus ratings should be transferred to a new form which will become the baseline assessment.

Advice. Observers sometimes notice different things. However, the tables of characteristics pg. 10-13 should assist.

It is helpful for observers to make a few notes as well as ticking the boxes.

Step 2: Completing the form and moving towards a plan to support development

Discuss your assessment with the school and agree with them areas for development or support

- **What does the school have?** This part of the assessment considers the resources in school and whether they are sufficient or not. If the assessment suggests resources or furnishings are inadequate.
- **What does the school need?** If the assessment suggests resources or furnishings are inadequate you can make suggestions in this section. If you know of a source of support/funding this can be approached.
- **What does the school do?** This part of the assessment is concerned with what activities are provided for the children. If activities suggested on the form are not happening, please help the school to develop their daily/ weekly programme so that these activities are provided for the children on a regular basis and as often as described on the assessment for. The agreed suggestions should go in the section entitled: What does the school need to do?
- **How does the school provide X?** This part of the form looks at the quality of the learning experiences provided for the children in a few areas. If there are areas where the quality of practice is basic or good, agree with the school the areas for development. For example, your assessment may suggest that the way in which the teacher engages in play with the children is basic and that ideally staff should aim to provide play experiences for the children which are rated as good. You may decide that storytelling and book sharing is good but together with the teachers you decide the school could aim for excellent. The agreed suggestions should go in the section entitled: **How can the school develop?**

Step 3: Setting development goals

Choosing areas to develop practice should be done in discussion with the staff in the preschools and should take account of their staffing and any other constraints.

The goals should relate directly to questions on the form which follow the rating sections

1. **What does the school need?**
2. **What learning activities does the school need to provide (and how often)?**
3. **How can the school develop?**

The answers, mainly to questions 2 and 3 will provide content for setting the development goals which should be:

- **S**pecific - a clear statement of what the school will try to do
- **M**easurable-a statement about how you will measure/track progress
- **A**greed – staff in the schools are consulted about the goals and agree to work towards them
- **R**ealistic – goals set should consider the context, i.e., the environment, staffing levels and resources and should set realistic expectations of progress
- **T**imebound -a clear statement of a time by which the suggested will have taken place

See worked example on page 4

Setting development goals: a hypothetical example for storytelling/book sharing

At your first visit to a school, you make observations about the books the school has and their book sharing/ storytelling practice, by answering questions on the assessment form. **See below**

- **What does the school have?**

Books	adequate	inadequate
Picture books	●	
Board books		●
Sufficient books (at least 20 books for children under 3 years)		●

- **What does the school do?**

Teachers read stories / share books with little children daily	No
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In fact, you discover that staff are only reading stories/ sharing books with younger children occasionally.

- **How does the school provide?**

You observe the teacher reading a story from a book. You grade the practice as basic and notice the following.

Story reading

Story reading	Does not occur	basic	good	excellent	Comments
		●			<p>Book choice not suitable.</p> <p>No questions, use of props, actions or animated voice.</p> <p>Teacher doesn't help children not paying attention</p>

Before completing the report and identifying development goals, answer 3 further questions from the form.

1. **What does the school need?**

The school needs least 10 more books suitable for under 3 years including at least 5 board books.

N.B. This is not a target for the school but could be relayed to a potential source of funding or support

2. **What learning activities does the school need to provide (and how often)?**

Staff need to read at least 3 times a week

3. **How can the school develop (their practice)?**

The teacher will choose appropriate books taking account of the children's level interest and attention span. She will encourage children's engagement through actions and props.

You can now write 2 SMART development goals for reading

1. **S**= The school will read stories/share books with children under 3 at least 3 times a week.

M= Teachers will record the name of stories they tell and the date they shared these with the children in a simple diary notebook. At a reassessment visit, REDET teachers will look at the diary with the teacher.

A= The teachers will agree to read at the required frequency and record their story telling activity.

R= They feel that with some modifications to their daily plan this is possible.

T= The diary entries will be discussed with teachers after 3-4 months mentoring.

2. **S**= Teachers will improve the quality of their story telling from basic to good.

M= At a reassessment visit, visiting staff will observe the teacher's story telling/ book sharing and rate their practice on the form.

A= Staff in the preschools, agree to develop this area of practice with the support of mentors.

R= Preschool staff feel that they will be able to develop their skills given support.

T=Reassessment of storytelling (an observation by visiting staff and **recorded on the form**) will take place after 3-4 months.

Step 4: Supporting improvement

Scope for supporting improvement will depend on resources, both material and staff, and will vary according to the context.

However, in broad terms, desired practice in the 4 areas of book sharing / story reading, structured play, fantasy play and table-top play are listed in the assessment grading tables.

It is suggested that helping teachers to include more of these characteristics will result in improved practice. This may require modelling coaching / mentoring.

Step 5: Reassessment to report on progress

After a period of support in which preschool staff will have had support to develop their practice, the school will be reassessed to observe and report on progress. At this visit, the main focus will be on observing and

noting progress towards the development goals and on listening to challenges or comments that staff raise relating to the goals.

There is no need for visiting staff to complete the whole form again, focus only on the areas identified for development. For example, if the school being helped to provide better quality play experiences for the children, say moving from basic to good, observe a play session and rate the quality of the practice on the form.

Assessment for children under 3 years in preschool

1. General school information	
Name of school	
Date of assessment	
Number of children under 2 yrs 11 months	
Number of staff	
No of classrooms	

What does the school have?		
Furnishings	<i>Adequate</i>	<i>Inadequate</i>
Small tables and chairs		
Comfortable rugs		
Soft furniture to prop up babies unable to sit unaided		
Cushions		
Toys	<i>Adequate</i>	<i>Inadequate</i>
A variety of safe, intact toys e.g. Pop up toys, large and smaller vehicles, stackers, large building blocks/ Duplo, Duplo size people and animals, soft ball simple wooden puzzles (form boards) simple shape posting box, toys to push, dolls with cups, brushes, a blanket, a bath etc (for fantasy play)		
Games	<i>Adequate</i>	<i>Inadequate</i>
Playdough, simple puzzles, matching games		
Enough toys for the number of children		
Books	<i>Adequate</i>	<i>Inadequate</i>
Picture books		
Board books		
Enough books (at least 20 suitable for under 3 years)		

2. What does the school need?

3. What does the school do?		
	Yes	no
Teachers have a specified weekly programme for children under 3 years?		
Teachers provide separate learning experiences for the under 3 years?		
Teachers provide children with opportunities for age-appropriate fantasy play? Dollies and home experiences 3 times a week		
Teachers provide children with a variety of other toys to play with 20 minutes 2-3 times a week		
Teachers read stories / share books with little children daily		
Teachers engage very small groups of (older) children in table-top activities 2- 3 times a week (simple puzzles / play dough)		
Teachers sing a variety of simple repetitive/ action songs with the children daily		

4. What does the school need to do?

5. How does the school provide...?

If you can make a short video of any areas, you observe that could be helpful

	Does not occur	basic	good	excellent	Comments
Quality of fantasy play?					
Quality of "other" toy play?					
Story reading?					
Table-top activities (play-dough, simple puzzles)					
Singing?					

6. How can the school develop? (this will be linked to smart targets in the development plan)

Scoring storytelling, fantasy play, toy play, story reading/book sharing and table play with pictures/ table top activities

As an important part of our assessment, we grade the schools on their practice in the above areas (see No 5 .. How does the school provide...?). This helps us determine a baseline level of practice against which we can measure change and improvement.

To make our decisions more objective, the main characteristics of desirable practice have been identified.

In the tables we list the characteristics in each area. Tick of what you observe and then count up at the end to identify the corresponding rating. Transfer the ratings to the table on page 8

- 2-4 characteristics present = Basic
- 5-6 characteristics present = Good
- 7 + characteristics present = Excellent

Story telling / book sharing	Tick if present
<i>1. The teacher has chosen an appropriate book for the age and attention of the children. Take into consideration whether the book is big enough for all the children to see, whether it is colourful and of an appropriate length and whether it has nice clear pictures</i>	
<i>2. The teacher turns the book to face the children so that all the children can see the pictures</i>	
<i>3. The teacher reads with an engaging voice. She sounds animated and where appropriate makes noises for things in the story.</i>	
<i>4. The teacher uses gestures to engage the children or illustrate things in the story</i>	
<i>5. The teachers uses props to engage the children or aid understanding</i>	
<i>6. The teacher points to pictures as she reads to help the children understand</i>	
<i>7. The teacher links things or events in the story to the children’s real-life experiences. for example, in a story about a chicken she could ask “Do you have chickens near your house?”</i>	
<i>8. The teacher asks 3-4 simple questions relevant to the story as it progresses. For example, “Who is this? / What’s this? /Where is the piggy? What is the mummy doing?”</i>	
<i>9. The teacher monitors the children’s level of engagement and takes step to help children who have difficulty in paying attention</i>	
<i>10. The teacher records the name of the story and the date in her story reading log</i>	
Total score	

Fantasy play (depending on age of child can be with doll sized toys <u>or</u> vehicles and smaller people and animals etc)	Tick if present
<i>1. The teacher makes it possible to engage with a small group, 4-5 children</i>	
<i>2. The teacher participates in the play playing on the floor beside the children</i>	
<i>3. The teacher chooses play materials appropriate to the age and developmental stage of the children. For example, for the very smallest children simple home play using dollies and teddies is more appropriate than Duplo sized toys</i>	
<i>3. The teacher demonstrates fantasy play relevant to the child's experience for example feeding/ washing/ putting teddies to bed and encourages children to copy.</i>	
<i>4. The teacher demonstrates <u>sequences</u> of fantasy play. For examples feeds the dolly, then washes the dishes, then washes the dolly, then cleans her teeth and puts her to bed.</i>	
<i>5. The teacher makes sure all the children are involved (for example they all have a teddy/ doll/ vehicle)</i>	
<i>6. The teacher talks about the play, describing what is happening and commenting</i>	
<i>7. After some demonstration, the teacher allows the children to play by themselves although still watching and becoming involved when required</i>	
<i>8. The teacher asks some age-appropriate questions about the play. For example. What is dolly doing? Who is tired? What will we put in the truck?</i>	
<i>9. The teacher facilitates/monitors the play for 10-15 minutes</i>	
Total score	

Tabletop play with picture games or simple puzzles	Tick if present
<i>1. The teacher selects children old enough to participate (children closer to 3 years)</i>	
<i>2. The teacher forms a group of 3-4 children seated at a table</i>	
<i>3. The teacher is seated or kneeling (on a cushion) at the children's level</i>	
<i>4. The teacher chooses a game that is relevant to the age and interest of the children.</i>	
<i>5. The teacher names items in the game</i>	
<i>6. The teacher uses language to <u>describe</u> pictures (for example for a picture of banana she could say, it's yellow and you eat it)</i>	
<i>7. The teacher tries to ensure the children take turns if appropriate to the game</i>	
<i>8. The teacher can use the games in different ways. For example, with a lotto game she can play in the usual way or if children have a short attention span, just use one board and give each child a few pictures which they lay out in front of them. Then the teacher could say, "Who has the ball?" and the children check their cards and respond.</i>	
<i>9. The teacher takes steps to keep the group together and all the children engaged.</i>	
<i>10. The teacher ensures the materials are put away with all the pieces together etc.</i>	
Total score	

Other toy play with assorted toys. This includes pop up toys, bricks and blocks, stackers, spinning tops, posting boxes etc	Tick if present
<i>1. The teacher forms a group of 4-6 children on a mat on the floor</i>	
<i>2. The teacher offers a variety of toys sufficient for the group to have one each</i>	
<i>3. The teacher is seated or kneeling (on a cushion) at the children's level</i>	
<i>4. The teacher demonstrates how the toys work/ how to play with the toys</i>	
<i>5. The teacher talks about the toys, their colour, size and what is happening with them.</i>	
<i>6. The teacher joins in with the play and makes suggestions about what children can do with the toys or suggestions how to achieve something</i>	
<i>7. The teacher ensures that children get a chance to play with more than one of the toys</i>	
<i>8. The teacher encourages cooperation between the children where appropriate</i>	
<i>9. The teacher takes steps to keep the group together and all the children engaged.</i>	
<i>10. The teacher praises children for their efforts and success.</i>	
Total score	