

A SURVEY TO EVALUATE THE EXTENT TO WHICH FIVE PRE-
SCHOOLS IN THE CAYO DISTRICT ARE MEETING THE
STANDARDS OUTLINED BY THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

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Submitted by

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

There are many preschools opening in the country because parents want their children to attend school as early as possible. The researcher has observed the opening of a number of preschools in her community and in Cayo District on a whole. The conditions under which some of these preschools operate made the researcher wonder if it is worth the while to send children to preschool. The Ministry of education has some guidelines or standards that a preschool should adhere to but these do not seem to be followed in some of these schools. As a result of this experience, the researcher decided to study five preschools in the Cayo District to see if they are meeting the standards set by the Preschool Unit of the Ministry of Education.

Preschool education is to prepare children to be socially adjusted to primary school and be mentally prepared for academic work. The main approach use to achieve these objectives is the play method. The children play many different games from which they learn to socialize and to think. They are helped and encouraged to practice the fine motor skills needed to use their hands and fingers with control and dexterity. Some students who don't attend preschool come to primary school not able to trace objects with crayons, write with an implement or even help themselves by lacing their shoes, sipping their sippers, holding a scissors and pouring liquid without spilling. This is difficult for the teacher to deal with. August (1997) and Martinez (1998) found that students who attended preschool perform academically better than those students who did not attend a preschool do. It is generally accepted that students who attend preschool do better than

those who do not in infant one. So parents try their best to send their children to a preschool even if the school's standards is questionable.

Preschool education is optional in Belize and is for children between the ages of three and five years. The researcher like most educators agree that preschool education should be available to all children. The infant one teachers would be very happy if this was to be realized because they would have a more prepared group of students. They would not have to deal with all the problems associated with a mixed ability class because most students will enter primary school with similar preparation.

The Problem

The Planning Unit needs to become aware of the extent to which their standards are being met so that it can appropriately influence those responsible for the school. If schools are not meeting the standards then they should be closed

down or be converted to day care centers or some other service that best fits their offerings.

It is clear from the draft policy for preschool that the goal of a preschool should not be to make money. However, individuals who provide day care services attempt to change or change their service to a preschool center because the fees are higher. In addition, given that the resources used are the same, this means more income for the entrepreneur. Some private individuals have opened schools and called them preschool because they teach the children something. However, are they doing what a preschool should do for children? Is the environment conducive for the physical, mental, and social development of children? Are the teachers trained in early childhood education and able to help children in their development? If the answer to any of these is negative, the school might not be meeting the standards of preschool in Belize.

If the standards are being met by preschools, they should be encouraged to continue the job they are doing, and if they are not, immediate measures should be taken to ensure that they do. The problem is that we cannot know if schools are meeting the standards and adjust accordingly without studying them.

The Purpose

The purpose of this study is to determine if five preschools in Cayo District are meeting the standards outlined by the Preschool Unit of the Ministry of Education. The questions that this research will answer are:

1. What standards are met by these preschools?
2. What standards are not met by these preschools?
3. What can be done to help these schools to meet the minimum required standards?

Significance of the Study

The study can be of benefit to the following in the ways specified.

1. The Preschool Unit can use this study to learn about the status of preschools in Cayo District. They will be able to appropriately response to the findings of this study to improve the status of preschool education in the Cayo and more specifically the five schools studied.
2. Preschool teachers and administrators can get to know how their schools are matching up with the standards set for the school. They will also be able to get ideas how to improve their schools.
3. Parents of children attending preschool will be able to use this study to know more about the services and the environment of the school they are sending their children.
4. The Early Childhood Education lecturer and supervisors at Belize Teachers' Training

College could use the findings and recommendations of this study as reference in preparing teachers to teach in and establishment of a preschool.

5. Other researchers doing similar studies will be able to make use of this study as a guide.

Definition of Terms

Early childhood education: program design for
infants, toddlers, pre-schoolers
and primary infant children. It
provides caring adults, materials,
guidance and safe reliable
environment for a child to develop
socially, mentally, and
physically.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Purpose of Preschool

The benefits of a preschool have been established by many research in Belize and elsewhere. Several of these studies compared the academic and social performance of students who attended preschool with those who did not. All of the studies have found that students who attended preschool did better both academically and socially in infant one than those who did not attend preschool. According to UNICEF and the National Committee for Families and Children (1997) children who attended preschool also show a much higher primary school completion rate and higher general education attainment levels. Martinez (1998) found that children who attended preschool work at a much faster pace in infant one and at times became impatient when the teacher dedicated more attention

to other children. She also said the social skills of children who attended preschool appeared to be more developed.

Preschool is the starting point of a child's formal educational development. It caters to children needs and interests. At preschool a child develops psychomotor movements and social and mental skills. (August 1997) According to Skinner "If tasks and activities are presented in a systematic and positive manner, if students are helped when and where they have difficulty, if they are given enough time to achieve mastery, then most children will be able to achieve a high level of learning. Activities and tasks should be ordered by difficulty. For example, picture sequencing, letter recognition, letter tracing and copying, letter sound, and identification of letter within words. (Martinez, 1998). They learn about adult expectations, how well they can accomplished tasks, that they are lovable, learn to express themselves

through language and they learn to trust adults. During the age of three and five, children are very vulnerable so teachers and parents must not abuse the opportunity they have to influence children. The parents are considered the first teachers of a child and the home the first school. A line should not be drawn between the school and the home as far as education is concerned because there is no boundary.

When children do not go to preschool before they attend primary school, the infant one teacher has to deal with a class with mixed abilities. This creates many problems for the teacher who has to spend a lot of time with the slower students (Martinez, 1998; Hildebrand, 1991). The faster students tend to get despondent and misbehave. Is this fair to the students who have attended preschool? Small schools cannot afford to have two groups of students with two teachers and sometimes there is only one classroom and it is too small for

the teacher to divide it into two groups because there is not enough space. The approach taken by some teachers, who encounter this situation, is to bring the students who are behind to par with the more advance students, then move on as a class. This is unacceptable to parents and educators because it almost negates the advantages of attending a preschool.

Preschool education caters for children between age three and five years and run for half a day. The separation from the mother that arises as a child reaches the age to go to school is very painful and difficult for the child. The time which is spent away from parents at preschool helps children to adjust to the time away from their mother when they attend primary school. The use of a babysitter and a day care can also help a child to adjust especially since the period away from the parents can be for increasingly longer periods.

Preschool Education in Belize

Preschool education is very popular in Belize and is rapidly growing. It started in the 1940s and has evolved a great deal. In 1995/96 school year there were 88 preschools and 3,306 children who were taught by 181 teachers. Seven of the schools were government-operated, 41 government-aided and the remaining 40 privately operated. In 1996, the government-operated preschools were turned over to community groups to run because of austerity measures by the government. All school in 1998 is privately run with a grant from government, which covers materials. A draft policy is currently being considered and should become law in 1999. A Preschool Unit in the Ministry of Education coordinates all preschool-related activities.

When the policy becomes law, all preschools will need a license to operate and the Preschool Unit will assess schools to see if they meet the

established standards before they are issued a license to operate. Continuous monitoring of schools will continue to be done by the Unit. The Unit conducts training for teachers and parents. The Unit has a staff of two full-time officers and one temporary clerk.

When the Preschool Officer visits a school she observe the physical facilities including the bathroom, ventilation, building condition, spacing per student and playground. The children should be able to comfortably use the bathroom facilities thus the toilet should be low enough for them. There has to be enough windows and doors or other sources of ventilation so the children do not get too hot. The Officer observes the general building condition to make sure that it does not endanger anyone and it is conducive to learning.

The Officer observes interaction between teacher and children, children and children, teacher and teacher, and visiting adult and

children to determine the type and level of socialization that takes place. The deliveries of lessons are observed which is essential since some teachers have no training in early childhood. The only requirement of a preschool teacher is that he/she has a first class teacher certificate. The teaching plans and the records of the school are also examined.

Preschool Learning Environment

The preschool environment must be conducive to learning and this is part of the standards set by the Preschool Unit. Hildebrand (1991) emphasized that young children learn about their world through perceiving stimuli from their five senses and reacting to the stimuli motorically with hands, feet, tongue, and body. They engage in perceptual motor behavior because of things they see, hear, touch, taste, and smell. The school must present the optimal stimuli to the students. However, some

schools in Belize do not have adequate numbers and types of book (Ministry of Education 1992).

A lot of pressure is place on the school environment to meet children needs because of the changes in our society. Koepke (1998, p. 14) said, "Teachers say students are becoming apathetic, impatient, self-centered, overwhelmed, and harder to motivate." He also said that "Although opinions and theories vary, one common word pops up in all the explanations for why kids are acting the way they do: stress. It is harder these days for teachers to be teachers; but that is because it is harder these days for kids to be kids. The world is changing more rapidly and more dramatically than ever before; and it is becoming a more stressful place for young people. "

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODS

This study is to determine if preschools in San Ignacio and Santa Elena are meeting the standards of the Ministry of Education. A sample of five of the seven schools from these two towns was used. The two schools that used are located in Santa Elena and were used because they were very similar to the other two from that town that were being used. Information was collected using a questionnaire and an observation. The data were analyzed using percentage, tables and discussion.

Sample

Five preschools were studied in this research. Three schools were from San Ignacio Town, namely: Kidde Kinder, San Ignacio Pre-School, and Cinderella Pre-School and the other two schools were from Santa Elena Town. They were Jireh Pre-School and Santa Elena Community Pre-School. These

schools were all privately run schools in which the students paid a monthly tuition ranging between \$20 and \$40 with three schools charging \$30.00. Two teachers ran each of the schools with student enrollment between 40 and 60.

There were seven preschools in Santa Elena and San Ignacio. The two schools that were not a part of the sample were from Santa Elena Town. They were not used because they were very similar to the other two in Santa Elena so the two schools from Santa Elena were representative of the four preschools in that municipality.

Instrument

A questionnaire was used to collect data for this study. The researcher developed the questionnaire with assistance from her supervisor at Belize Teachers Training College. It had two parts; part one will ask questions which deal with the service offer and the facilities of the school

and the second part elicited information about the teachers. After the questionnaire was developed it was field-tested to make it valid and reliable. See Appendix for a copy of the questionnaire.

In addition to the questionnaire, an observation was made by the researcher to verify some of the information gotten from the questionnaire and additional information. The observation was in the form of a list that the observer can fill in.

Data Collection

The researcher will visit the schools during which time she will deliver the questionnaire to the teachers and make the necessary observations. The visit to the schools will be made on Fridays when the teachers are more willing to give up some of their time. The researcher will make an appointment with the school before her visit. A

CHAPTER IV

DATA PRESENTATION & ANALYSIS

All five teachers surveyed said that they had enough space for the number of students in their school. According to these teachers, they also had enough materials to achieve the objectives of their school. They reported that their bathroom facilities were accommodating for their students.

The teachers said they know the requirements of a preschool as stipulated by the Preschool Unit. This means that since the teachers said that they have the required space, materials, and bathroom facilities, that their school must be meeting the minimum requirements for a preschool as stipulated by the Preschool Unit. However, as with most things, there is room for improvement. One teacher each said that the facilities in their school could be improved to meet the needs of their students by securing their campus, getting more playground and

more equipment. Playground is not a problem because four of the five teachers indicated that they have adequate playground. One teacher said the playground of her school was not adequate. This teacher however, had a playground with seesaw, slide, and swing. The researcher believes that this teacher considered the three things in the playground inadequate.

Table One shows that the all five schools had a swing in their playground, four had a slide, two had a seesaw, two had a playhouse, two had tires, and one had a baseball bats.

Table 1: Items schools had in their playgrounds.

Item	Frequency	Percentage
Swing	5	100%
Slide	4	80%
See-saw	2	40%
Playhouse	2	40%
Tires	2	40%
Bats	1	20%

The ways in which the playgrounds for four of the five schools can be improved are by providing

more playing facilities for the children. One of the teachers specifically said that more swings, jumble gym and playhouse can be installed to improve her playground. One of the teachers said "We have a wonderful playground".

Two teachers said they get water from the top, two said they used purified water, and one said they use refrigerated water but did not state the source. One school that used purified water had a water cooler.

Three of the schools operated from eight thirty to eleven thirty and two had sessions in the afternoon until three o'clock and three thirty. The two schools that had classes in the afternoon did so because they had several students that were older than four but younger than five years and their parents were typically working. So the school was used by the parents as a means of baby sitting until they come from work.

All five teachers reported that they use the Rediness Guide provided by the Pre-school Unit and that their schools were supervised by the Pre-school Unit. Three teachers stated that their schools were supervised twice a year by the Unit and two were supervised at least once a month.

Two of the five schools were governed by the community through a board, two were ran by private individuals and one teacher did not respond to this question. As was mentioned in the literature review, the trend is for private individuals to open preschools. The tradition however is that preschools are organized and managed by the community.

Only one of the teachers had a teacher certification, which was a first class teacher's certificate. This teacher however did not have any preschool, early childhood education, or training related to preschool. The other four teachers, two of who were high school graduates and two started

high school but did not finish, all had training in pre-school education. Most of their training was done through the Preschool Unit. See Table 2. One of the these four teachers also had certification in early childhood education and in material making.

Table 2: Qualifications of teachers.

Item	Frequency	Percentage
First Class	1	20%
Teacher	2	40%
High School	2	40%
Graduate		
High School		
Dropout		

The teacher who reported to have preschool training said she did not need further training but all the others said they do need further training. The areas that teachers said they need further training in are early childhood education, child psychology, and disabilities. Early childhood was mentioned by three of the teachers. They said that

they should be trained at whatever level they can begin.

The teachers surveyed have been working in a preschool for an average of 10.4 years. The teacher with the least experience teaching in a preschool had four years. Three of the teachers had more than ten years teaching in a preschool. See Table 3. All the teachers had the same years of teaching in a preschool as that teaching in general, except for the teacher who had ten years teaching in a preschool and twelve years teaching in general.

Table 3: Years of teaching in a preschool.

Years	Frequency	Percentage
4	1	20%
6	1	20%
10	1	20%
12	1	20%
20	1	20%
Total 52		

The following two comments were offered by the teachers and are worthy of presentation in their entirety.

This comment was made by a teacher from a private school and who was a high school graduate. "I wish that infant teachers would be much more aware of what should be done in the pre-school, which would cause less pressure on pre-school teachers, because some do things with children that cause them to really forget what they really should be doing in the pre-school. In addition, that Government would put much more emphasis on pre-schools. In that way it will help them realize that the earlier a child can start learning there would be less problems with children leaning in the primary schools". This other comment was made by the teacher who had a first class teacher certificate. "I would like all pre-school teachers to have higher qualification, but based only on preschool, like for example primary teachers attending Belize Teachers' College."

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The researcher concludes that the pre-schools in San Ignacio and Santa Elena have the physical facilities that meet the minimum requirements as stipulated by the Preschool Unit. The schools could be improved with more items in the playground for children to play with. The researcher recognizes a need for more challenging and specializes activities in the playgrounds that would promote motor, coordination and physical development of children.

The researcher concludes that the teachers need to be more qualified. They had many years of teaching experience but did not have a high level of formal training. None of the teachers has attended Belize Teachers' College but eighty

percent had some training in preschool education. They all reported that they need further training.

The researcher also concludes that the current facilities are adequate for the number of children but if the enrollment of the schools were to increase, more space would be needed along with more materials and equipment.

Recommendations

The researcher recommends that the Preschool Unit sets a minimum qualification for teachers to teach in a preschool. The Ministry of Education must also insist that the principal be at a trained teacher. This will help the not so good and qualified teachers going to teach in preschool.

The researcher also recommends that the Preschool Unit monitors preschool regularly. This is important since students that leave preschool do not need to take any test the standards could be compromised. It is rare when teachers in primary

school or parents question the quality of preschool education because in most cases they do not know what is expected. So to complement this effort the Preschool Unit can education the parents and the community what to expect of preschoolers.

Another recommendation is that the preschool teachers in the twin towns come together on a regular basis to discuss their work in an effort to improve preschool education.

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APPENDIX A
QUESTIONNAIRE

SURVEY OF PRESCHOOLS

Please answer all the questions to the best of your ability.

1. Do you have enough space for the number of students in your school?
Yes No
2. Do you have enough materials to achieve the objectives of your school?
Yes No
3. Are your bathroom facilities accommodating for students?
Yes No
4. Do you know the requirements of a preschool as stipulated by the Preschool Unit?
Yes No
5. How can the facilities at your school be improved to meet the needs of the students?

6. Is the playground adequate? Yes No

7. What is in your playground?

8. How can your playground be improved?

9. From where do children get drinking water?

10. What is the time of classes?

11. What curriculum do you use?

12. Does the Preschool Unit supervise your preschool?

13. If yes, how often?

14. How is your school governed?

15. What are your qualifications?

16. What are your preschool qualifications?

17. Do you need further training?

18. If yes, what area?

19. At what level?

20. How long have you being teaching in a preschool?

21. How long have you being teaching in general?

22. Please feel free to make any additional
comment.

Thanks for your assistance.