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## **Making Thinking and Learning Visible: Observation and Documentation**

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**Narrator:** Throughout the video you will hear how full day early learning kindergarten teams across the province are rethinking, removing, and repeating practices in relation to how they are observing and documenting evidence of children's learning, and analyzing the documentation. You will hear and see teams reflecting with children, with each other, with principals, and with other school board leaders. You will also see and hear the children reflecting on the documentation.

### Team One:

**Speaker2:** I think our techniques for observing and documenting have been a little bit of a challenge for us, in that using a camera in the classroom and just being aware and think, oh, we're got to grab the camera and get a picture of this, because this is going to help us document what's happening with the children. Or even pulling out the video camera and then just really trying to think about the questions that we want to ask so we're asking the right questions. And something we've done in the classroom to just help us with that is, to have sort of little questions hung in each centre, and then we just pull the question out and we can hold the camera and be videotaping, and ask the various questions. Just to feel comfortable on camera, or even having your own voice on camera, because that's new for us, and taking pictures of each other and making sure that it isn't just the children, that we're in the pictures, too, showing that the learning is a whole unit and it's a whole team.

### Team Two:

**Speaker1:** For documentation it might be as simple as using a digital frame and putting those photos there in the environment so children can revisit when they're ready and make connections. What a great way to make real connections to their learning.

### Team Three:

**Speaker2:** With two of us in the classroom, we have more time for individual and small group instruction. So having a group of children in a small group helps us to provide opportunities for them to grow, learn, and also develop their skills in all the different areas. And

both as a team, we try to create, plan, and implement age appropriate activities, and it's all about knowing our children. It's all about observations we make every day, all the time, and just interacting with children, and knowing them helps us to meet unique needs of your child.

Speaker1: Some of the ways we document in class are, taking pictures, video, between the two of us it's a lot of talking and dialogue between us, either in class, in the moment, or after at the end of the day. Anecdotal notes on Post-Its, paper.

Speaker2: And also taking pictures.

#### Team Four:

Speaker2: We find one of our biggest jobs in the classroom is observation, and having two team members in the classroom is invaluable in terms of the observation. We're using our observations to guide our teaching practice, to guide what materials we're going to present to the children, what learning expectations we're going to target. As well as selecting those groups that need some explicit instruction, perhaps in a particular area, or observing where we might need to go in to support the play that's happening.

Speaker1: The developmental continuum becomes very evident when you're observing within the classroom. And like Kim said, you may have an activity in mind of how to use it, but when you're observing the children, you may recognize that some will need some language support, or some will need some fine motor support, or some will need maybe some social skills support. So you can address that if you have small groups of children that are over there, and specifically, sometimes we will call over specific children because we know that there's a need within that small group and we can help support them, and then they can go back into the flow of the classroom. But they now have those skills that have really been solidified and they can use them then without our assistance. But it's an on-going thing, we see needs and strengths and things popping up all the time, so we're able to address that in a very positive and very proactive and immediate manner with the way that the program is set up.

#### Team Five:

Speaker1: We use a lot of documentation in our classroom. We find that it's really helpful first of all, as an assessment piece so that we really know where our children are, what they know, and what they need to know next. But it's also a great reflection point for the children themselves, because when they see themselves in photos, or in videos and they hear what they've said it causes them sometimes to re-think what their old theory was, and to revise it a little bit, or if they're listening to someone else, or if we're saying someone else's words back to them, they really start to combine each other's ideas, and really start to, I think, go a little bit deeper into whatever project it is that we're working on. Or sometimes just to start to think a little bit critically about what their ideas are, and what other people's ideas are, and how they can incorporate all that into their knowledge base.

Team Six:

Speaker1: Maybe an invitation which is somewhat optional, but provoking, it's like a call for them to think, and really, that's what you do every day. You call them to think.

Speaker3: And the pride in them when they're done. We know that, okay, you know what, this is good, this is working.

Speaker1: And it's interesting, we work from that pedagogy of listening, and you both believe that all children are intelligent. So the challenge for many of us has been, how to make their rich thinking visible. Because you know that many, many of us, parents included, have come to expect that their thinking can only be represented by something we plop on the fridge. And so helping adults and children realize that their thinking could be made visible in a variety of ways. So where has your journey been this year in terms of making that thinking visible?

Speaker2: I think with technology now we have started using cameras more in the classroom. And even in the beginning of the year we were just taking pictures that were like, oh, this is cute, let's go take a picture of that. Or that's pretty cool, let's take a picture, but then not really doing anything with it. The end product is not always the most important part, it's often the process of how to get there, because we are hearing the language, because we're seeing the thought processes that are going on while they were doing it. And so this has been a really nice way for us to document that process to show, this is what we started with, this is how it looked in the middle, and then this is how it became at the end.

Speaker1: Or maybe not even at the end.

Speaker2: That's it, and sometimes things do fizzle out and they don't always continue on with an idea that they had, but that's okay, because they had the idea, they got started with it and you can still get some really great documentation from their learning part of it.

Speaker1: And certainly, it doesn't have to be tied constantly to digital images, because it's just those moments that you can capture anecdotally in documentation form when you're engaged with the kids. Would you agree with that?

Speaker2: There is, actually, a few things later on, too, where it's just almost like a transcript of a conversation that we had with students. So there isn't a picture to go along with it, so it's making learning visible without actually seeing the picture, but you can still see what's going on in their mind, or in their thought process. We don't always have the access to the camera right away when we need it, so it's a good way still for us to write it down, and for the kids to even hear it back is a good thing, too.

#### Team Seven:

Speaker2: I think a really important thing that we do is listen to children, and really observe what's going on, and document the things they're saying. So through that, we were hearing language around mirrors, and reflections, and light. And this had come from cameras, so we believe that children learn when their experience goes from simple to complex. So as a result, we talked about what kind of centre we could create to extend that learning. So we don't even know what this centre would be called, but the things in it are very intentionally chosen to help them extend their theories about reflections, and mirrors, and light and dark. We noticed in the way they play that it's working, at times when we see a decrease in the learning we know it's time to change the materials again, or add a different variable.

Speaker1: Or move the room around, we found that, too, we rearrange the room quite often.

Speaker2: So in this centre we brought in prisms, and film canisters, and just different things to explore light and dark, but we also make sure the ongoing learning is represented. The children, some decided to construct cameras, and some explored theories and created art. Art is always a very valued language in exploring their inquiry. Providing books that would help them extend their learning.

Reading back on their conversations I think is really important and just empowering them through listening, and offering them the freedom to represent their ideas.

Speaker1: And the freedom to explore and take that ownership of their learning, I think is just such a valuable thing for them. And because we've put out the things that we have, I think it really shows them that we value their thoughts and their thinking, too, and I think that's just so empowering to them that we feel what they say is important.

#### Team Eight:

Speaker2: We posted the question, what makes a kite fly? And the kids began predicting, making theories of how they thought a kite would fly. You can see, some of the ideas they had, the kite blows the wind, the wind goes to the second wind and the certain wind goes across and the kite goes up.

Speaker1: I love that word 'certain,' that's really interesting that he would add that.

Speaker2: Yes, it is interesting. And the kite is light, and the wind goes down and the kite goes up. So we kind of looked at a lot of these theories, and we decide to go outside and test kites and see if their ideas might change after they went outside and tested the kites up in the air and tried to fly them. And they started working in partners, and talking to each other and discussing how they would make it go up, and the kites would go up, and then they'd fall and they'd say, you weren't running fast enough, or you turned towards the kite. So we discussed it, we talked about the pictures together.

Speaker1: So they're doing some pretty good strategizing then in order to figure out how to make it fly, it sounds like.

Speaker2: They are, definitely. So today they're going to look at their theories after flying the kites and see if their ideas have changed after going outside and experiencing it first hand, whether or not they've thought differently about what might make the kite go up.

Speaker1: Look at this one; the wind catches the flight, and the wind carries the kite away from when you are distracted, the wind goes around the kite. I love that. They're really using some sophisticated words there, that's fantastic.

Classroom One:

Student: Over here, there was someone who had some clothes he had right there, and there's some more, and there's some more. And there's the hat that he showed us (inaudible). And here is the place that he showed us, too. Where is that? Do you remember? I don't. And there's that, the same place right there. Oh, and here's some dead animals hanged up right there and right there, and there's me again.

Student: And there's me.

Teacher: What happens in this part of the book, in your documentation? What do the words do?

Student: Help you remember, too.

Teacher: They help you to remember, too.

Student: And this is the miner's place, I think. I see me, I think. I can't see me.

Student: Because you're way back playing hiding right there.

Teacher: I think I remember seeing this photograph earlier.

Student: Next part.

Student: Yes, the next part.

Student: Whoa, you skipped a page.

Student: I think I know it was over there earlier, but now it's gone.

Student: And this is Mrs. Thodds(ph).

Student: Yes, holding a dead owl, it is actually alive at one time, but it's dead.

Student: But the eyes are actually real, they just took the eyes out and then they just throw in the garbage after and took it somewhere. And he put pretend eyes there.

Student: No, it's real, and it was dead. So those eyes are real.

Student: Oh, I wonder why— this is just a research book.

Student: Yes, and then we got that, and we found gems, I'm going to go get the gems to show you all the gems that we found already.

Student: These are all of the gems what we found in here.

Student: Yes, that's the activity and see there's the stone knocked down, go (*demonstrates*) with a hammer. And then you crush them and you try and find the gold. We found one earlier, and this is the one, I think. Is this the one?

Student: Yes, that's the one. And we had to find a gem for a long, long, long time.

Student: And there's how we kept track of it. We used to do that, then there was a pencil tied and you write your name with the number so you know who's going next.

Student: Or first, or next, or anything. And this is the museum.

Student: Yes, we went and visited the museum by staying in Kenora on that huge screen. And we saw that fossil, and that's a picture of us outside in the same place. That was in the winter.

Student: Oh, and that was my mine and it was a crystal, and it's...

Student: That's the same book with the same crystal. Oh, I know where that is.

Student: And that's right there, it's the same thing.

Student: That's the same thing as this. And you can— and there's some dust. Can you see that dust?

Teacher: Oh, yes.

Student: It's some yucky dust. It looks kind of funny.

Student: And there's a hole there.

Student: Yes, that's where the dust is all in. And guess what? I found it out from one of the drawings (inaudible) paper, and guess what? It was a fish bone.

Teacher: Really?

Student: Yes.

Teacher: Were you surprised?

Student: Yes. And this is the gift stuff. That's Matthew's collection, it's Star Wars.

Student: Or it looks like. And I didn't see Matthew's collection. And this is about the eggs, and this is a blue jay's egg.

Student: Yes, but we didn't even discover what that egg is.

Student: It was a blue jay egg.

Student: No, that brown one.

Student: Oh, yes, (inaudible).

Teacher: How did you figure that out?

Student: Once we read in the book and stuff, and we were keeping track.

Student: But we found out a little bit, so it was that egg.

Student: And then soon we actually found out about not touching the robin's egg, or a live egg, and it has a mommy in it, and then the mommy will never come back. That's not her smell. Oh, yes, and this is us painting the same colour egg. And know what? Once we actually saw a little bit of blood in these, like and a little bit fur in there.

Student: And we mixed all the kinds of colours together to make all kinds of different egg colours inside. And there's the hay table and there was little foam eggs that we put in there. Oh, and these are some books, there's eagle eggs, and there's all kinds of eggs.

Student: And these are the ones which Mrs. Favro(ph) and Mrs. Baum(ph) cracked...

Student: And then they cracked it and cracked it to see if there was any animal inside, but there's none.

Student: Because they weren't warm.

Team Seven:

Speaker1: In the beginning we thought we had to document everything, and over time we realized that you're really looking for those a-ha moments, and those moments of really deep learning. And I think recording the children's conversations, we've learned so much about them, and in recording the conversations, we've been able to use that as a reflective tool for ourselves, and to see what kinds of questions we're asking.

Speaker2: Another important decision is, that we take turns documenting and leading. So sometimes I'll say, do you want to lead the inquiry, I'll document, that allows her to reflect.

Speaker1: Well, it gives you a different perspective, too. I remember last year we experimented with this a little bit too, and I took over the circle and she just went, I didn't notice half that stuff before, because you're leading and you're so involved with the children that you may not notice the other little things that are going on, or the students' engagement in what you're doing. So that really gives a great perspective of the other side.

Speaker2: The documentation, because we know the students so well, we can follow their comments over time and see what gains they're making, but the documentation also tells us what they're not understanding, and I think that's very important. Or if they're not participating, it's made very visible and then we can talk about why, and how to enable the learning to take place. So it really makes everything visible to us, and I think that's really important.

Speaker1: And I think it makes it visible to them, too, because when you read back, and we've had that, well, my name's not written there, I didn't say anything, and then they can kind of go, oh. And I think that's a good reflection tool for them.

Speaker2: It's also very helpful, we start our day each day with a meeting, and especially if there has been a weekend, we'll use the documentation to create the context again, so we'll read what happened and then we can start right back where we left off.

### Team Nine:

Speaker1: I know you're really interested in documentation, Delara(ph), and I noticed that this was up for the parents in the window. What led to that? How did this end up on the window?

Speaker2: Actually, my co-worker suggested that it's a great piece of work that could be shared with parents. So she decided, actually offered to put it up in the window so the parents, when they come to pick up their children, they can actually see the work that's happening in the classroom.

Speaker1: So what did you do here exactly?

Speaker2: We were investigating light, and the children were encouraged to find different things that we can see light through, like jewels, and some CDs that they're not using anymore. So one of the children, actually Aaron right here, he brought different types of jewels, different colours. And they were basically for them to explore what they can do with flashlights and jewels. They noticed that they could see shadows, they start relating that the flashlights are all different colours, so Aaron actually said, the blue flashlight is blue on the shadow, and the orange one is orange colour, so they related the colour of the flashlight to the colour of the shadow.

Speaker1: So I notice that you have, repeatedly, a quote or something the child's said, and then something in brackets. What are those two pieces?

Speaker2: The brackets I just highlighted to show parents that behind this exploration, they're actually constructing learning that's happening, they're relating things to the things that they're exploring in there. So I linked it to the curriculum, actually, to show the learning that's happening in here. It's about the process of their thinking, so instead of actually giving them the knowledge of, this is what you can do with it, this is what happens, you're actually observing what they're constructing, their understanding, and relating to the curriculum. So the materials are there for them to explore, but for them to actually think about, what can we do with this? Let's use it, let's see what happens. The most important thing that I think about when I start, I look at a variety of pictures. There can be 20 and 30 pictures taken, but what I concentrate is, which ones are the most important ones? Which ones are going to tell the story what's happening there? So maybe out of 20 pictures I'm going to pick maybe four, or three that actually tell the story, just like we tell the children, pictures in the book are telling a story. I just observe them, but at the same time, I was trying to think about, when is the right time to jump in and ask the open-ended questions. There were times when they were looking for things around the classroom to help them with their bridge, using plastic containers representing water underneath the bridge. So it was just a matter of observing and deciding when is the right time to jump in and ask that question to help them to think further.

Speaker1: I notice that you make an observation, and exactly just straight observation, and repeatedly you do relate it back to what they're learning, and as a parent, that's something that I would really be interested in seeing and knowing about. How do you share this with parents beyond– this was posted in the classroom. I'm not sure where this is going, is this a documentation book?

Speaker2: Yes, it is. It was actually up on the wall for a little while and we had an open house where parents were coming in and noticing what's happening around the classroom and the biggest question they had, what is play based curriculum? And this is a great way of starting a conversation with the parents and showing them, this is what's happening in our classroom, it's not just about worksheets and giving them the knowledge, but it's about them actually thinking about the process of their thinking, what's happening, and this is how the learning is more effective for them, because they're more interested in doing what they're doing.

Parental Reflection:

Parent: Well, even just a casual walk through the school you can see what the kids are doing for a big chunk of time. At the age that they're at, they're not always good at sharing directly with their parents, or with other people, and if you can see what they're doing, it's very encouraging. I think the other students at the school enjoy it as well, because they get to see all of the cool, neat things that the children that are smaller than them are doing. It's really neat to be able to see what they get to do, and it's very entertaining to read it, and to see how the kids feed and play off of each other, and how one person's idea sparks somebody else's, sparks somebody else's. It's just overall a very neat concept.

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