Changing our Assessment Beliefs and Practices

Developing more authentic contexts for assessment
We began by refining the centres in our rooms so that observations could more easily be made. In order to do this we had to let go of control of the learning to the children. We started to develop more authentic contexts for assessment. For example, to get specific information about student's letter identification, we set out a variety of letter based activities and games. As the students explored the materials we joined in the games and were able to effectively record their letter identification. We also began documenting the learning in the classrooms with pictures and used some of the pictures for digital portfolios to use during fall conferences with parents. We spent time discussing how we were going to gather and use the information we were collecting. Many of our conversations revolved around the purpose and audience of the digital portfolios.

Developing learning goals and success criteria from the program expectations
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The next step in our journey involved creating success criteria to go with the learning goals. We began delving into the Kindergarten Program Document (2010) more often in order to create the goals. However, we also wanted to be more open to spontaneous observations because we know that young children do not always develop the skills and knowledge at the same time.

What does authentic assessment look like in a play-based program?
Recording sheets were also developed to help focus our observations. These sheets allowed us to take more focussed anecdotal notes.

This focus also allowed us to pinpoint what photos we needed to take as evidence of learning. We also began using video tape as well as pictures to begin to show a journey of learning. We used more open-ended observation sheets so that we could record any “spontaneous learning”. Both teachers and ECE’s used the same observation sheets. We also increased the number of conversations we were having with the children. We had more time to do this because we were no longer pulling children aside to “test” them.

Because creating the success criteria and learning goals allowed us to understand the Program Document so much better we were able to become more emergent in our planning. Both educators in the classroom knew what the goals were and what evidence we were looking for so we were better able to pick up on the children’s interests and weave them into the learning plans.

Using learning goals and success criteria with documentation panels

We then started working with documentation panels. We struggled with how to use documentation with certain overall expectations. We found that mathematics was a good place to start. We began by posting pictures of the student’s learning with the success criteria on the panels. This was very teacher driven at this time. We continued to work with the assessment sheets and documentation panels throughout the winter.

As the winter progressed we started connecting the success criteria to specific pictures on the
panels and then we began adding the children’s voices to the panels by posting quotes to go with the pictures.

Co-creating documentation panels with children
We then began using the documentation panels as a teaching tool and co-created the panels with the children. Instead of putting up the success criteria and then taking pictures to illustrate each one we began by collecting evidence of children’s learning (photos, anecdotal notes, quotes) and then named the learning as the evidence went up on the panel. It was important to build the panel over time and to refer to it every day. We made broad learning goals and success criteria so that all students could be successful. We also used the digital whiteboard to label the learning and allow students to discuss the learning immediately.

Learning through inquiry
Toward the end of the year we had a discussion about how the panels were focused on one particular content area. We wanted the learning and the panels to reflect the emergent nature of our programs and also to reflect the idea of a journey of learning. To do this we investigated the idea of learning through inquiry and began to integrate this idea into our programs. This enabled us to choose learning goals and success criteria that were cross curricular. This also allowed us to let children “show what they know” in many different ways (talking, art, building, writing, etc.)

Communicating with families
Our reading told us that documentation was not just for the teacher and the students but also for parents as well. We wanted to find ways to share the documentation with parents. To this end we developed documentation binders that went home with the children. After a documentation panel was complete it was put into a binder and sent home with all of the students over time. The parents were very positive about sharing the binders with their children. The children were very excited about explaining the learning to their parents. After each family had seen the binder it became part of the classroom collection and children could look at it again and again.
The documentation binders we sent home to parents were successful but we were concerned about the amount of time it took to get the binder to all of the families. We also wanted to be more immediate in our flow of information about the learning to parents.

We had seen a presentation from a colleague at another school who sent a newspaper home to keep families informed of the learning that was going on in the classroom. We then introduced a class newspaper which went home at the end of each inquiry. This enabled the information to get out more quickly to all families than the binders. Our next step is to co-create the newspapers with the children.