What does authentic assessment look like in a play-based program?

Documentation in Early Childhood Classrooms

What is Documentation?
In its simplest form documentation is the process of collecting evidence that serves as a record. As an educator collects student work, observations, conversations, etc. they are collecting evidence of student learning.

Documentation in Early Childhood Education Classes

Documentation is the process of gathering evidence and artifacts of what happens in the classroom. Documentation is not only the process of gathering evidence and artifacts, but also a physical collection of evidence and artifacts, the reflection of that collection, or part of it, in a way that makes children’s learning visible to the children, to teachers, to other adults including families and visitors.

Carlina Rinaldi (1994)

Documentation
- includes the samples of a child’s or children’s work at several different stages of completion: it is a map of a learning journey;
- makes learning visible; shows the children’s thinking;
- allows educators to collaboratively analyze student learning in order to develop future learning opportunities;
- includes the students in the analysis of the learning, names the learning;
  - children and teacher revisit the learning/experience through the documentation and reflect on the experience
- allows student learning to be displayed in the classroom and shared with others;
  - draws parents and visitors into the story of what is going on in the classroom

Documentation has an audience
- Educators: Where are the students now and what do I need to plan to move them forward?
- Parents: How is my child doing? What is my child learning?
- Children: What am I/we learning? How am I/we learning? Look what I/we can do!

Types of documentation
- Descriptions
- Written observations
- Transcriptions of conversations
- Photographs/videos
• Samples of children’s work
• Children’s comments as recorded by an educator/recorder
• Educator or parent comments about the learning in a classroom

Sharing of the Learning
• Panels or Bulletin board or other type of display inside or just outside the classroom.
• Posters
• Class created books
• Video tapes
• Binders
• Newspapers

Observation
Documentation begins with observation, the primary way of collecting information in the kindergarten classroom.

We define observation as watching to learn. Observing provides the information you need to build relationships with individual children and enable them to be successful learners. We learn about children by carefully watching them, listening to them and studying their work. Watching and listening to children helps us understand what they are feeling, learning and thinking.

-- The Power of Observation

Being Objective
• With practice educators become objective in their observations.
• Educators learn not to make assumptions that might bias the recorded information --for example, don’t make assumptions about how a child is feeling.
• Avoid using words that might label a child.
• Children must be involved in activities which allow them to show their understanding and demonstrate their skills.
• Be aware of when are you assessing -- Beginning of the day, end of the day? Is there a special event that might bias what you record today?
• Save the reflection until later, just record what you see and hear.

Choosing What to Observe
• Some observations are incidental and some are planned.
• What do you need to find out about specific children or group of children at this time?
• What do I need to know in order to plan further learning opportunities?
• What would I need to see children demonstrating to indicate they are moving towards an expectation?
Reflecting upon observations

- Educators reflect upon observations in order to determine where the child is in his or her learning and determine next steps.
- Reflection may also indicate a need for change in the classroom environment or to teaching practice.
- Children are observed interacting with new materials, skills, processes and information in play-based centres and activities that are meaningful for them.

Recording observations

- Matrices
- Diagrams
- Sketches
- Tallies
- Photographs/video
- Checklists