

# Principals Want to Know

A tip sheet for principals that focuses on practical issues faced in schools.

Drawn from existing resources, these tips are designed to support instructional leadership practice.

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## Documentation in Full-Day Kindergarten (FDK)

### The Question:

**What does documentation look like in FDK programs and how does it support exemplary assessment and evaluation practices?**

### The Answer:

**There are five key elements to consider:**

1. Defining the purpose of documentation;
2. Key documentation strategies;
3. Using documentation in FDK programs;
4. Supporting the FDK educator team; and
5. Engaging families in the documentation process.

### 1. DEFINING THE PURPOSE OF DOCUMENTATION

Observation and documentation provide evidence of student learning in FDK programs and inform the teaching and learning environment by:

- guiding intentional, purposeful interactions among FDK educator teams and children;
- helping educators and children set learning goals through observing responses to learning experiences;
- supporting scaffolding and differentiation in response to strengths, challenges, interests, abilities and temperaments of learners;
- providing tools to articulate learning and make learning explicit;
- capturing evidence of children's learning within the context of Saying, Doing, Representing as outlined in the program document;
- providing connections to developmental continua;
- setting the context for educators and parents to respond to, challenge and extend learning;
- providing a reference point for children to return to and build on prior learning; and
- informing **assessment for learning** (descriptive feedback); **assessment of learning** (evidence of student achievement); and **assessment as learning** (development of child's capacity to monitor progress, determine next steps, reflect on thinking and learning, and set individual goals).



*Stand aside for awhile and leave room for learning, observe carefully what children do and if you have understood perhaps teaching will be more different from before.*  
Fraser, 2006, p.141

### 2. KEY DOCUMENTATION STRATEGIES

A variety of strategies are used in FDK programs to capture observations of learning (both indoors and outdoors), including:

- **photos** of children engaged in activities as learning and inquiry progress;
- **representation of children's learning** including photographs of artefacts, projects and explorations;
- **learning stories** capturing the context of the learning environment that may be enabling or constraining learning;
- **videotape clips** and/or **audio recordings** of a child or children engaged in play-based learning or explaining their thinking to an educator;
- **records of reading behaviours** and **authentic writing samples** within the context of purposeful play and inquiry;
- **portfolios** that capture development, connect to overall expectations and provide evidence of child reflection (e.g., I am learning to...); and
- **documentation panels** or a series of photographs paired with captions about the knowledge/concepts children are constructing.

### 3. USING DOCUMENTATION IN FDK PROGRAMS

In FDK programs, the emphasis is on involving children in the assessment process to help them understand their strengths and interests as learners and to develop the ability to articulate and monitor their learning. Effective documentation includes:

- dedicating time throughout the day to have thoughtful conversations with a child or children about their learning to support assessment as learning;
- revisiting thinking with children to capture their own questions and problems and to construct possible next steps together;
- providing opportunities for children to develop their understanding of what they are learning and to share what it looks like through self and peer assessments (e.g., invitations for students to share their learning using photographs, videos, artefacts, etc.)
- ensuring families have opportunities to share their observations and experiences to support a deeper level of learning; and
- providing visual documentation of children's learning as it progresses (e.g., posting photos and including scribed language on panels in the classroom, placed intentionally at the children's level).

*Observation, as well as the documentation of observations, is the most important method for gaining assessment information about a young child.*

The Full-Day Early Learning – Kindergarten Program (Draft 2010-2011)

### 4. SUPPORTING THE FDK EDUCATOR TEAM

School leaders use professional learning conversations with educator teams to support the practice of embedding documentation into daily practice. They encourage educators to reflect on key curricular decision points such as how decisions regarding learning experiences are informed by assessment information and how learning is being made visible to students? School leaders embed the 3 R framework into discussions (e.g. **Remove** worksheets as forms of assessments; **Rethink** the type of assessment; immersing it in play scenarios rather than out of context. **Repeat** the collection and display of relevant, meaningful documentation). They encourage team members to use documentation when learning is taking place and to review it in collaboration with other educators, children and parents soon after the experience by:

- considering which form of documentation will best represent the child's thinking;
- understanding what to document through knowledge of child development and overall program expectations;

- studying the documentation and identifying what to do next to provide further provocation for learning;
  - asking questions and learning from interactions with children and their families; and
  - interacting with children about the documentation to help them to monitor their learning.
  - ensuring media tools are readily available to document effectively (e.g., digital camera, voice recorder, video camera, a budget for printing photos, etc.); and
  - helping educator teams plan for documentation in timely, relevant ways throughout the flow of the day.
- FDK Educator teams should ensure that they are in accordance with district school board policy when using media to document student learning.

### 5. ENGAGING FAMILIES IN THE PROCESS OF DOCUMENTATION

*Family involvement in schools is associated with academic success across all socio-economic groups.*

ELECT 2007, p.10

School leaders can support FDK educator teams in building parent understanding of and participation in documentation by:

- ensuring time is dedicated to building relationships with families and being open to questions about FDK;
- inviting parents/guardians into the program to observe collected documentation, reflect on their child's learning, invite conversation, share experiences and identify resources that will support deeper learning;
- creating a blog to share learning stories with families and invite sharing of additional information about their child's learning on the school website; and
- posting document photos highlighting learning in the school.

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