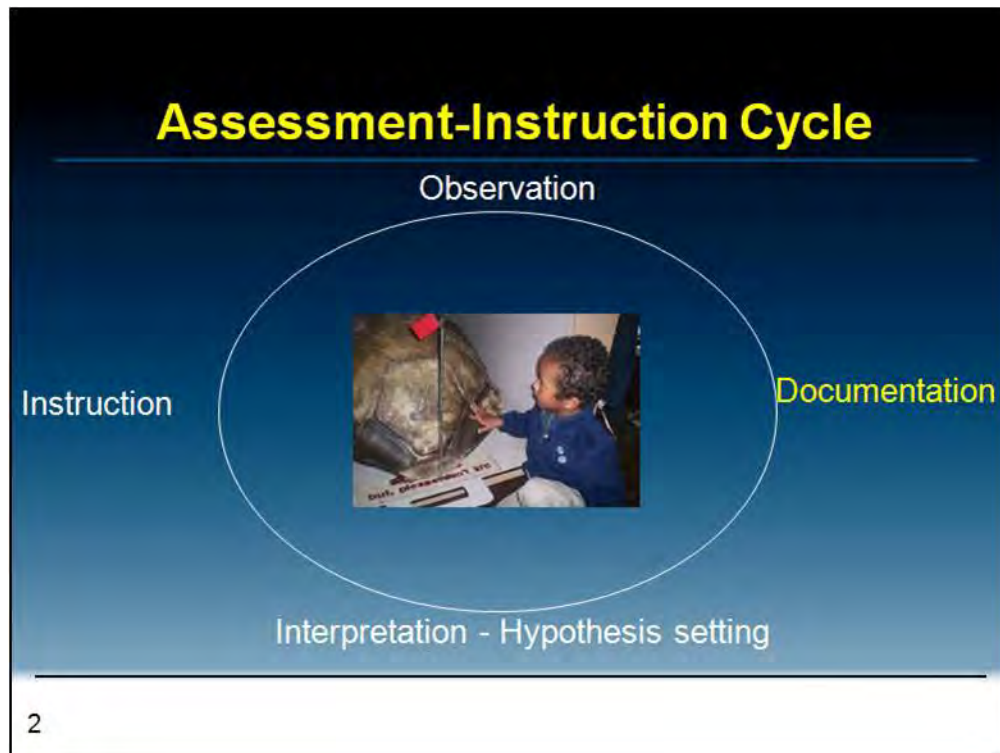


Documenting Observations



In the Assessment-Instruction Cycle, the first step is Observation and the second step is Documentation. In this presentation, we discuss various types and methods of documenting our observations of children, provide examples of documentation tools, and then consider how best to organize and use the products of our documentation for subsequent steps, such as interpreting the data and setting hypotheses, and using the information to improve children's learning.



On this slide, you see the “Assessment-Instruction Cycle.” Though our presentation today will primarily focus on the topic highlighted in yellow—“Documentation”—I’d like to begin by briefly reviewing the whole cycle.

Overall, the cycle shows us that to reach the point of effective instruction (which we see on the left-hand side of the cycle), we must begin by observing the children in the classroom and documenting their development over time. It is especially important to plan out what observations we will make and how we will document those observations so that we are sure to gather information on all of the children in the classroom in all areas of development over time. In the next stage of the cycle, we interpret the information we have gathered. When we document, we are noting the actual behaviors—what we see and hear. The interpretation is the time to generate questions and ideas about the meaning of the behaviors. In other words, it’s the time to generate hypotheses about what we think is occurring, that we can test further with more observation. Based on interpretation and hypothesis setting, we then plan what we will do next with children in terms of instruction. As we plan instruction, we also plan how we will assess children’s next phase of development. This cycle of assessment and instruction should be repeated continuously throughout the year.

Documentation is an important part of the assessment-instruction cycle. In order to support interpretations of what we think children know and can do, it is important that we document over time and in different settings. There are a variety of tools to assist us in documentation.

Selecting Documentation Tools



- Anecdotal records and forms
- Journals
- Checklists
- Level of assistance records
- Time samples
- Language samples
- Parent information
- Functional behavior assessment
- Photographs
- Videos
- Work samples

3

The first step is to select which tools might best help to document observations. In order to do this, decide what you want to know and think about the most efficient ways to collect that information. For example, a child's grasp and how he or she uses tools are both easier to document with a picture than to describe in writing. In this session, we will consider each of the tools listed on the slide.

[READ SLIDE]

Be Objective



- **Observe objectively, without interpreting**
- **Record facts rather than opinions**
- **Use words that describe but do not judge**
- **Record only what you see and hear**

4

As you observe, remember to be objective in what you document.

Record facts rather than opinions and avoid subjective judgments.

Stick to the observed data—what you perceive rather than your interpretations.

For example, when observing behavior:

- Don't assume that you know the child's feelings. Others, such as parents, might interpret the same situation differently. Only the children know how they feel and many of them are not able to name the emotion.
- Don't assume the child's motivation. Unless the child tells us (and even then we would look for more evidence), we cannot be sure about motivation. For example, children may play in an area because their friend is there, or because it is quieter, rather than because they are interested in particular play materials.

Anecdotal Records or Jottings

- Who
 - What
 - When
 - Where
 - How
- 1/28 M opened milk carton independently
 - 2/24 M counted 5 blocks 1:1
 - 9/28 J: More milk.
 - 4/30 J: I want more milk, please.
 - 9/30 11:15-11:20 S. used walker when coming to cafeteria. S was at the end of the line. S kept walking to the right. T reoriented the walker every few steps.

5

With anecdotal records and jottings, you write down key pieces of information about what a child has done.

On the left-hand side of the slide, we list the types of information you want to record in an anecdotal record. You always want to record *who*, *what* and *when*—in other words, which child, what he or she did and the date that he or she did it. Sometimes the time of day or length of time (other aspects of when) or information about the setting—the *where* and the *how*—will be important. In other instances, you may not need this further level of detail.

Let's take a look at the examples on the slide. Each set of bullets refers to a different child. First... **[READ THE FIRST TWO SETS OF BULLETS]**

Consider the difference between a child asking "milk" when the milk is there in front of him and he has just heard the word when the teacher asked, "Does anyone want milk?" versus a child who comes to the teacher during free play time to ask "milk?" It is more difficult for children to ask for things when they don't see them or haven't heard the label for them recently.

Note how in the second set of jottings, brief samples of language taken at snack time at different points in the year show the progression of the child's language. **[READ FINAL BULLET ON SLIDE]**

When documenting what children do, it is important to also document mistakes. Errors and mistakes help us to understand how they think about the world and different concepts. For example, do they think of the word "top" in only 3-D terms. placing their hand over the middle of the paper when asked to put something on the top of the paper? Documenting what they do allows us to reflect on what it

means. It can also suggest what we might try in the situation, and what prompts might be helpful for the child.

The anecdote about S walking to the cafeteria tells us that this child was able to walk as far as the cafeteria but needed assistance with reorienting the walker every few steps. The teacher might ask to see how far S can walk without needing assistance: What happens if she walks to the wall; will she reorient herself? Can the teacher use a verbal prompt to stop and turn the walker instead of physically assisting?

Anecdotal Forms

Name:	Observer:	Date:
		Time:
General Context:		
Social Context:		
Challenging Behavior:		
Social Reaction:		
POSSIBLE FUNCTION:		

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<http://www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel/modules/module3a/handout3.pdf>

6

This anecdotal form, and the form you will see on the next slide, are a kind of “event record.” They record an event and the circumstances surrounding it and are usually collected across a day or week.

The record on this slide is used for writing brief descriptions of a child’s challenging behavior and the context in which it occurred to help in analyzing that behavior.

Anecdotal Forms, Cont.

Home Observation Card		Side 1
Child's Name: _____	Date/Time: _____	
Activity: _____	Observer: _____	
Describe Challenging Behavior:		
What Happened Before?		
<input type="checkbox"/> Told or asked to do something	<input type="checkbox"/> Playing alone	<input type="checkbox"/> Changed or ended activity
<input type="checkbox"/> Removed an object	<input type="checkbox"/> Moved activity/location to another	<input type="checkbox"/> Object out of reach
<input type="checkbox"/> Not a preferred activity	<input type="checkbox"/> Told "No", "Don't", "Stop"	<input type="checkbox"/> Child requested something
<input type="checkbox"/> Difficult task/activity	<input type="checkbox"/> Attention given to others	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify) _____
What Happened After?		
<input type="checkbox"/> Given social attention	<input type="checkbox"/> Punished or Scolded	<input type="checkbox"/> Put in "time-out"
<input type="checkbox"/> Given an object/activity/food	<input type="checkbox"/> Request or demand withdrawn	<input type="checkbox"/> Ignored
<input type="checkbox"/> Removed from activity/area	<input type="checkbox"/> Request or demand delayed	<input type="checkbox"/> Given assistance/help
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify) _____		
Purpose of Behavior:		
To Get or Obtain:		To Get Out Of or Avoid:
<input type="checkbox"/> Activity	<input type="checkbox"/> Attention	<input type="checkbox"/> Activity
<input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input type="checkbox"/> Food	<input type="checkbox"/> Attention
<input type="checkbox"/> Person	<input type="checkbox"/> Place	<input type="checkbox"/> Transition
<input type="checkbox"/> Help	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify) _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Food
		<input type="checkbox"/> Person
		<input type="checkbox"/> Place
		<input type="checkbox"/> Demand/Request
		<input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify) _____

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<http://www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel/modules/module3a/handout4>

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This record, also used for collecting information about a child's challenging behavior, offers the observer a number of response options. All you need to do is check a box and perhaps add a bit of detail.

Both of these forms are available from CSEFEL (The Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations of Early Learning). They can be completed by adults at home or at school. The forms and information about how to use them are found on the CSEFEL website (www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel) in Module 3a. The forms are available in both Spanish and English.

There are also forms used to collect information for a functional behavior assessment; we'll talk more about that when we get to the "Parent Information" slide.

Journals

- **Some teachers send journals back and forth between home and preschool to:**
 - **Communicate with parents on a daily basis.**
 - **Ask parents to document what the child does at home.**
- **Journals can:**
 - **Include questions for parents about what the child does at home.**
 - **Identify whether the child is using skills in both environments.**

8

[READ SLIDE]

Some teachers use loose-leaf notebooks so that it is easy to take the notes and put them in a file about the appropriate domain. Other teachers keep the notes all together and review the child's progress periodically by reading through entries for information about different domains, or ask parents to review and summarize what they see in the last month of notes. For some parents, writing journal entries may not be feasible because of time demands or low literacy. In such cases, you may be able to collect similar information through conversations at drop-off or pick-up times, as long as you take your own notes and record the conversations into a journal.

Checklists

		Stand on one foot (number of seconds)		Hop (number of times)	
		Right	Left	Right	Left
Anna	9/28	4	1	1	0
	1/30				
	4/26				
Jose	9/28	10	4	4	2
	1/30				
	4/26				
Kai	9/28				
	1/30				
	4/26				
Linda	9/28	5	0	0	0
	1/30				
	4/26				

9

Checklists are an easy way to record information about many children or many pieces of information about one child. But checklists can include more than just checkmarks!

For example, at the beginning of the year, Mrs. Liu decided to collect information about children's gross motor skills at three points in the year. She created a checklist to document different motor skills (hopping, jumping, galloping and skipping). She decided to collect information by observing four children each day during the same week. By the end of the week, she would have observation data on all 18 children in her class. This is the section of the checklist for standing on one foot and hopping. She counted the number of seconds the child stood on a foot without touching the floor with the other foot, and the number of hops on each foot. She could easily see on Friday that she still needed to observe Kai. She left space for the January and April time points so that she could readily see how each child did across time.

Level of Assistance Records

	9/24	10/29	11/27	12/17
Ava	T3	M3	3	3
Bene	T4	MV4	M4	V4
Cara	HT4	T4	M4	V4
David	M5	M5	4 + V1	5

Codes: H=Hand-over-hand; T=Trace; M=Model; V=Verbal prompt; the number refers to how many letters

Example: HT4 = Hand-over-hand (H) assistance to trace (T) all four (4) letters of the name

10

Level of assistance records are useful for documenting increasing levels of independence in completing activities. Teachers create codes for the different kinds of support that they may offer.

Mrs. Juarez used a level of assistance record to document how independent the children were in writing their first names. "H" refers to hand-over-hand assistance from the teacher; "T" indicates the child traced the letters; "M" indicates the child used a model of the name; "V" indicates that Mrs. Juarez gave the child verbal prompts for the letters. The number indicates the number of letters. She would use combinations of these codes as appropriate.

As an example, let's walk through Cara's record in the third row. On September 24, the codes H, T, and 4 tell us that she needed hand-over-hand assistance (H) to trace (T) the four letters of her name. On October 29, Cara traced (T) the four letters of her name on her own. If we skip to the last column, we see that on December 17, Cara was able to write the four letters of her name with only verbal prompts from Mrs. Juarez. For example, after Cara wrote the letter C, Mrs. Juarez might have said "The letter 'a' comes next."

This type of checklist could be used in combination with the copies of their names or could be kept as a summary sheet.

Level of Assistance Records

	9/24	10/29	11/27	12/17
Ava	2	3	3	5
Bene	2	4	3	4
Cara	1	2	3	3
David	4	4	4	5

1 Hand over hand
3 Model with verbal prompt
5 Independent

2 Trace
4 Model

11

This slide shows another way that Mrs. Juarez could have completed her level of assistance record. For the numbers 1 through 5, Mrs. Juarez defined how much assistance the child needed. “1” indicates hand-over-hand assistance—the most assistance a child might receive—while 5 indicates the child wrote his or her name independently.

Looking at Cara again, we see that she needed hand-over-hand help on September 24 (notice the “1” in the box). Skipping ahead, on both November 27 and December 17, the “3s” in the boxes tell us that Cara wrote her name while Mrs. Juarez modeled how to do it and gave a verbal prompt.

Time Samples

- To document whether Monique is playing with her peers try:
 - Time sampling: In a 45-minute free-play period, note whether Monique is playing with other children in every five-minute segment.
 - Interval sampling: At the *end* of every 5 or 10 minute interval, record whether Monique is playing with other children.
 - Record of duration: How long does Monique play with another child during free play?

12

Imagine that you are trying to track how often certain behaviors occur. For example, a teacher is interested in determining whether Monique is playing with her peers. On this slide, we see three ways a teacher can use variations on time sampling to gather this information.

Time samples are helpful for recording information about behaviors that we expect to occur frequently. Rather than recording every instance of some behavior, we note whether it occurs during a period of time.

Sometimes teachers use **interval sampling**; they don't continuously watch the child in question, but at the end of say 5- or 10-minute intervals, they look to see if the child is doing the specific behavior.

Another kind of time sample is a **record of duration**—measuring how long a child does something. How long a child spends playing with a peer; how long standing on one foot; length of time spent in different free play areas on a given day; how long a tantrum lasts.

On the screen, we see examples of each of these. [READ SLIDE]

Usually, time samples are collected for individual children, but sometimes they can be used for small groups. For example, suppose the teacher wants to record if children are on task or engaged with the activity during small group. The teacher would create a table and note every 5 minutes if each child in the small group is on task.

Time Sample of Child Engagement

Child's name: _____
 Observer's Name: _____
 Date: _____

STARE

Scale for Teachers' Assessment of Routines Engagement
 R. A. McWilliam
 Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center
 University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
 © 2000

Directions: Observe the child for 30 minutes in each of the following routines. First, rate the amount of time the child is engaged with adults, peers, and materials. Second, rate the complexity of the child's engagement. There is space to add additional or alternate routines at the end of the scale.

Arrival	Almost none of the time	Little of the time	Half of the time	Much of the time	Almost all of the time
With Adults	1	2	3	4	5
With Peers	1	2	3	4	5
With Materials	1	2	3	4	5
Complexity	Nonengaged 1	Unsophisticated 2	Average 3	Advanced 4	Sophisticated 5

*Nonengaged = inappropriate behavior, nonresponse. Unsophisticated = repetitive play, simple looking around. Average = following routine, participating. Advanced = talking, copying. Sophisticated = creative talk, pretend play, planning.

<http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~inclusion/Instruments/instruments.htm>

This is an example of a form used to collect information about children's engagement in different activities at different points in the day. The information is collected based on 5 minutes of observation during that activity. You can find the form at the website noted on the screen.

Time Samples of Behavior

Child name: David Time, Activity	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.
9:00-9:15, Group Meeting		X	X		X
11:45-12:00, Get ready for lunch	X	X		X	X
1:45-2:00, Choice Time					
3:15-3:30, Group activity	X	X	X		X

Mark with an "X" if you needed to set limits for David more than three times in the period

14

Time samples are also a good way to look at patterns of challenging behavior. Here is a record for David. His teacher felt that she was always having to set limits for his behavior, but she wasn't sure if her feeling was accurate. She chose four 15-minute periods during the day when she would record whether or not she had to set limits for him more than three times. She made sure to choose time periods when the class would be engaged in different kinds of activities.

[Note to presenter: ask participants if they notice any patterns in David's behavior.]

[Answer:] It looks as though he acts out when he and other children are sitting close together (group times) and during transitions (when the children get ready for lunch).

Can you think of things to do in response? Keep in mind that sometimes your findings might lead to more questions before you can think about what to do next.

[Note to presenter: Give teachers an opportunity to discuss possible responses to this pattern of behavior.]

Language Samples

After reading a book about all kinds of mothers, Mrs. Green asked the children to tell her something about their mommy. Before class, she had asked her assistant teacher to write down what each child said. This provided brief language samples for several different children.

15

Language samples simply record exactly what a child says or a conversation that you have with children or hear between children.

Language samples can be from conversations with adults or with other children. Adults are often more supportive conversational partners. However, some children are shy when talking with adults and will show more elaborate language when talking with peers. Thus, it is good to collect both kinds of language samples. You could collect language samples by writing them down as you listen to children (most people develop some shorthand to do this easily) or you can tell children that what they are saying helps you to learn how children think, and you want to remember what they say. You can ask an assistant teacher or another adult in the room to take notes. You can also record the conversation. Tape recording is best when you keep separate tapes for each child and record them at different times during the year. With digital recordings, you can more easily save recordings from different children without having to switch out tapes.

Let's take a look at a specific example.

[READ SLIDE]

Language Sample Example (1)

- Mrs. Green: What does your mommy like to do, George?
- George: Cook and order pizza
- Mrs. Green: What kind of pizza?
- George: Big pizza.
- Mrs. Green: Maria, what does your mommy like to do?
- Maria: A mi mamá, le gusta hacer enchiladas.
- Mrs. Green: Mmm. A mi me gusta las enchiladas. I like to eat enchiladas.

16

Here is what Mrs. Green recorded.

[READ SLIDE]

Note how even though she is still a dual language learner, Maria's response indicates that she followed up on George's discussion about cooking and food.

Language Sample Example (2)

- Mrs. Green: Gena, what does your mommy like to do?
- Gena: My mommy likes to wash clothes and clean the house.
- Mrs. Green: Do you help her?
- Gena: Yes, I dust the tables and put socks together.
- Mrs. Green: Jake, what does your mommy like to do?
- Jake: Sleep.
- Mrs. Green: What does she like to do when she is awake?
- Jake: Work.

17

Here are Mrs. Green's conversations with two more children.

[READ SLIDE]

You can see the difference in sentence length and detail that Gena gives when compared with Jake.

Gathering Information from Parents

- Parent interviews
- Parent surveys
- Parent rating scales
- Sharing documentation tools for use in the home

18

First, we should think carefully about what we would like to know from parents. Gathering assessment data from parents is an intervention as well as a way to obtain information. Focusing parents' attention on different aspects of development communicates the importance of these areas.

Information can be collected from parents by interviewing them about what their child does at home. For example, you could ask parents what letters their child named at home, whether they turn the pages in the book one page at a time, whether they answer "what", "where," and "why" questions about the stories they read or tell, and much more.

You can also ask parents to fill out short surveys or rating scales about their children, such as behavior ratings.

You can even ask parents to use some of the same documentation tools at home that you use at school. Again, remember that some parents may have time demands or lower literacy that may make it easier to share information via conversation and later recording by you.

Functional Behavior Assessment

- **Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) helps in understanding challenging behaviors.**
- **FBA is best conducted with a team of individuals, including the parents.**
- **Forms for collecting information and examples of a complete FBA are available on the web:
<http://www.vanderbilt.edu/csefel/modules/module3a/handout6.pdf>**

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A functional behavior assessment tries to get at the root of a problem behavior by looking at what specific things about the child or the environment might cause the child to engage in challenging behaviors. The Center for Social-Emotional Foundations for Early Learning website provides forms for collecting and organizing information for FBA as well as an example of a completed functional behavior assessment.

Using Photographs



20

Photographs and videos are a quick and easy way to describe a situation. Photographs can be from home or school. Disposable cameras can be sent home to capture activities that the parents want to share. Sequences of several photos may provide the “story” of an action or an interaction.

Using Videos

- **Best for looking at process—how a child does something**
- **For example, how a child:**
 - Balances when walking
 - Catches a ball
 - Cuts with scissors

Videos are useful for documenting the process of how a child accomplishes tasks, especially physical tasks, and sometimes for documenting interpersonal behaviors or language samples.

Interpreting Together With Families



22

Sharing photos or videos from school with families can help you in talking about children's approaches to learning and engagement.

Talk with parents about the context in which an activity took place, what happened before, what happened after, and how long the child was engaged.

Work Samples: Fall and Winter



23

Work samples can capture information about what children are learning or changes in their skill levels that might be hard to put into words. Work samples can be especially helpful if you put a short note on the back that describes the situation or the kind of help the child needed.

Martin drew these pictures in the fall and winter. Notice how much more detail he put in the winter picture.

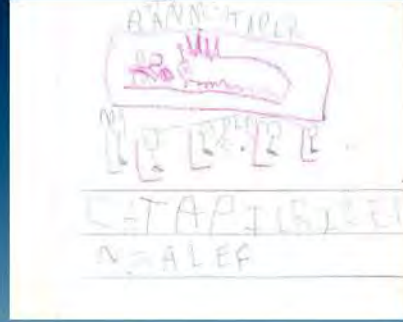
Work Sample: Spring



24

In the spring, Martin's drawing is even more detailed. Notice the feet and the neck with a collar. The ears were too faint to pick up well in the copy, but they are there too. Look at the increased control he has in connecting the legs to the trunk of the lamb.

Winter and Spring Writing Samples



25

Look at how easily and clearly this communicates the child's increased literacy skill.

Note how easy it is to see that this child moved from letter-like shapes with some letters to using the letters heard in the word. There is a lot of detail in the drawing in both pictures but in the later one he begins to add labels to the drawing.

Organizing for Assessment: Systems for Storing Documentation

- **Notebooks or binders:**
 - One for each child with separate sections for all the child outcome domains
 - Group records
- **Files:**
 - Create a place to store your notes so they don't get lost.
 - Plan to file by child and domain at least once a week.

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With so many types of data, and many children whose work you want to document over time, you may be overwhelmed unless you establish a clear system for storing your documentation. By using notebooks or binders with pockets, files arranged by child and child outcome domain, or other systems, you can ensure that the information is handy when you need to communicate with a parent or a specialist or make your own interpretations about growth and development.

Portfolios

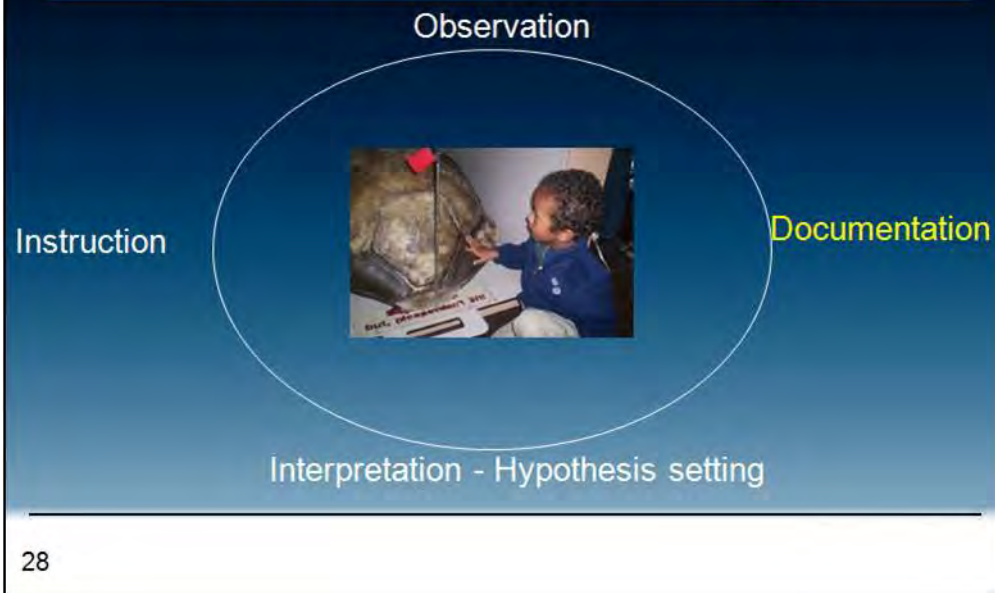
- Create an open filing system
- Store children's work over time to review frequently
- Select things that show how the child is developing
- Identify key items you want for all portfolios



One popular system for preserving documentation is a portfolio, an open filing system for preserving different types of work samples produced by children over time. To start, identify key items that you want to collect for all portfolios (self-portraits, name, block structure photograph, etc.).

For example, add different pictures children create of people at different points during the year.

Assessment-Instruction Cycle



Documentation is just one part of the assessment-instruction cycle. In order to support interpretations of what we think children know and can do, it is important that we document over time and in different settings. From a single documentation, we might generate questions about what a child needs in order to be successful or whether the child can do something in a different setting. We then plan our next steps in instruction and determine when as well as how we will observe this area of development again.

The cycle of assessment and instruction should be repeated continuously throughout the year.

