



Ongoing Assessment: Capturing the Progress of Children's Learning

Sally Atkins-Burnett



Assessments are Valuable

In a national study, Head Start programs reported assessment information helped them to:

- Make changes for individual children or whole classes.**
- Implement curriculum changes to better meet children's needs.**
- Identify specific domains in need of enrichment.**
- Design trainings for staff and teachers.**
- Identify resources needed in the classrooms.**
- Update parents and policy councils.**
- Identify children who need referrals.**



Purposes of Ongoing Assessment

- **Progress toward goals**
- **Generate questions and hypotheses**
- **Inform parents about their children's progress**
- **Provide information for specialists**
- **Inform instruction**
- **Support children's development beyond the classroom**



The Assessment-Instruction Cycle: Planning Ahead

Observation



Documentation

Interpretation - Hypothesis setting

Instruction



Planning for Observation (1)

- **Plan time to observe.**
- **Consider what you want to find out about the child or children.**
- **Observations may be short and frequent throughout a day or focused on a particular activity.**
- **Decide whether to observe without direct engagement or to engage the child to test a hypothesis.**



Planning for Observation (2)

- **Plan what to look for and how to document what you observe.**
 - **Be ready:**
 - **Have handy a pencil and small sticky notes, a notepad, or other means of recording.**
 - **Write observations down right away.**
 - **Pick times when:**
 - **Other teachers are around.**
 - **Activities do not require your full attention.**
 - **Ask for help—other teachers can also observe and document.**
-



Planning for Observation (3)

- **Plan to look for the same behavior in many contexts to determine if knowledge, skills, and behaviors generalize across contexts. For example...**
 - **Indoors versus outdoors**
 - **What people are around?**
 - **What materials do the children have available?**
 - **Is the teacher guiding the activity or are the children playing freely?**
- **Be on the lookout for surprising behavior.**
 - **Did the situation influence the child's response?**
 - **Example: Nathan usually counts correctly to four, but got distracted because other children were being loud.**



The Assessment-Instruction Cycle: Documentation

Observation



Documentation

Interpretation - Hypothesis setting

Instruction



Types of Documentation

- **Checklists**
- **Anecdotal records or jottings**
- **Event samples**
- **Time samples**
- **Samples of work, photographs, video, audiotapes**



Guidelines for Making Documentation More Efficient

- **Target a different developmental area each week.**
- **Provide adequate opportunities to see a range of development.**
- **Plan which children to observe each day.**
- **Plan the easiest way to document what you want to know.**



The Assessment-Instruction Cycle: Interpretation

Observation



Documentation

Interpretation - Hypothesis setting

Instruction



Strategies for Interpretation

- **Look for patterns.**
- **Identify areas where more information is needed.**
- **Look for critical incidents (surprises).**
- **Analyze errors.**



Different Assessments: Pieces of the Same Puzzle

- **Use information from all of your assessments to better understand children's growth and needs. For example:**
 - **Work sampling**
 - **Direct assessments**
 - **Ongoing, daily observations**



Early Development is Interdependent

- **Skills often incorporate multiple areas of development.**
- **Skills build on each other and reach across areas and contexts.**
- **Remember to examine areas of development that support challenging tasks.**



Considerations for Special Populations

- **A child's individual circumstances may play out in what you see.**
- **Consider children's background when observing and interpreting. For example:**
 - **Cultural background may lead different children to respond to the same activity in different ways.**



Considerations for Special Populations, Cont.

- **Challenges in one area may affect our ability to accurately assess other areas.**
 - **Dual language learners: Perhaps a child does not follow directions, because he or she does not understand the directions... NOT due to poor behavior.**
 - **Developmental delays: Perhaps a child knows her numbers up to 10 but has trouble vocalizing them.**



Organizing for Assessment: Plan What, When, and How

- **What do you need to assess?**
 - Think of the Child Outcomes Framework and your assessment tool.
 - Identify the areas about which you need more information.
 - **When might you assess? Many possible approaches:**
 - Target a different developmental area each week for focused observations.
 - Pick which children will be observed on which days.
 - **How can you best carry out assessment?**
 - Observe children in groups or individually.
 - Engage children in discussion with questions.
 - Ask other adults for information.
-



The Assessment-Instruction Cycle: Examples

Observation



Documentation

Interpretation - Hypothesis setting

Instruction



Documenting Observations

- **Observe without interpreting.**
- **Record facts rather than opinions.**
- **Use words that describe but do not judge.**
- **Record only what you see and hear.**
 - **Don't assume the child's feelings.**
 - **Don't assume the child's motivation.**



Observation: Children Playing

Go to video: “Progress Monitoring_Measuring Together.wmv”



Reflecting on the Observation

- **Share what you learned.**
- **Critical events versus focused observations**
- **Efficiency in accurate documentation**

Sample Checklist

	Jana	Marta	George	Manuel
Date	12/4	12/4		
Place units end to end	+			
Counted units 1:1	5	7		
Which car went farther?	+			
Which number is greater?	+			
Why?	"not same rope"			
Identified one rope as longer	+			



Vocabulary Checklist for Airport

	Dials	Control Tower	Accelerate	Decelerate	Cargo	<i>Other Words</i>
Abby						
Cam						
Greg		+	+			
Josita						
Paul	P					

P = pointed to a picture/representation

+ = used word in correct context in a sentence

- = used word incorrectly in a sentence; or incorrect response to question

Q = responded correctly to a question with the word in it



Using Documentation to Inform Developmental Assessments





Documenting Science Knowledge





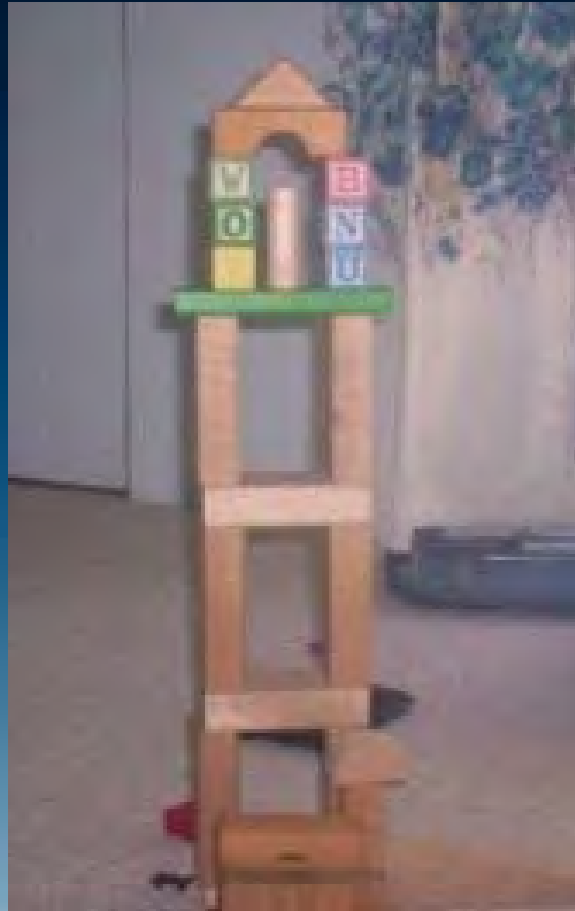
Documenting Mathematical Thinking



- On the back: T: How many fingers?; A: 5



Photos as Work Samples





Documenting Motor Development



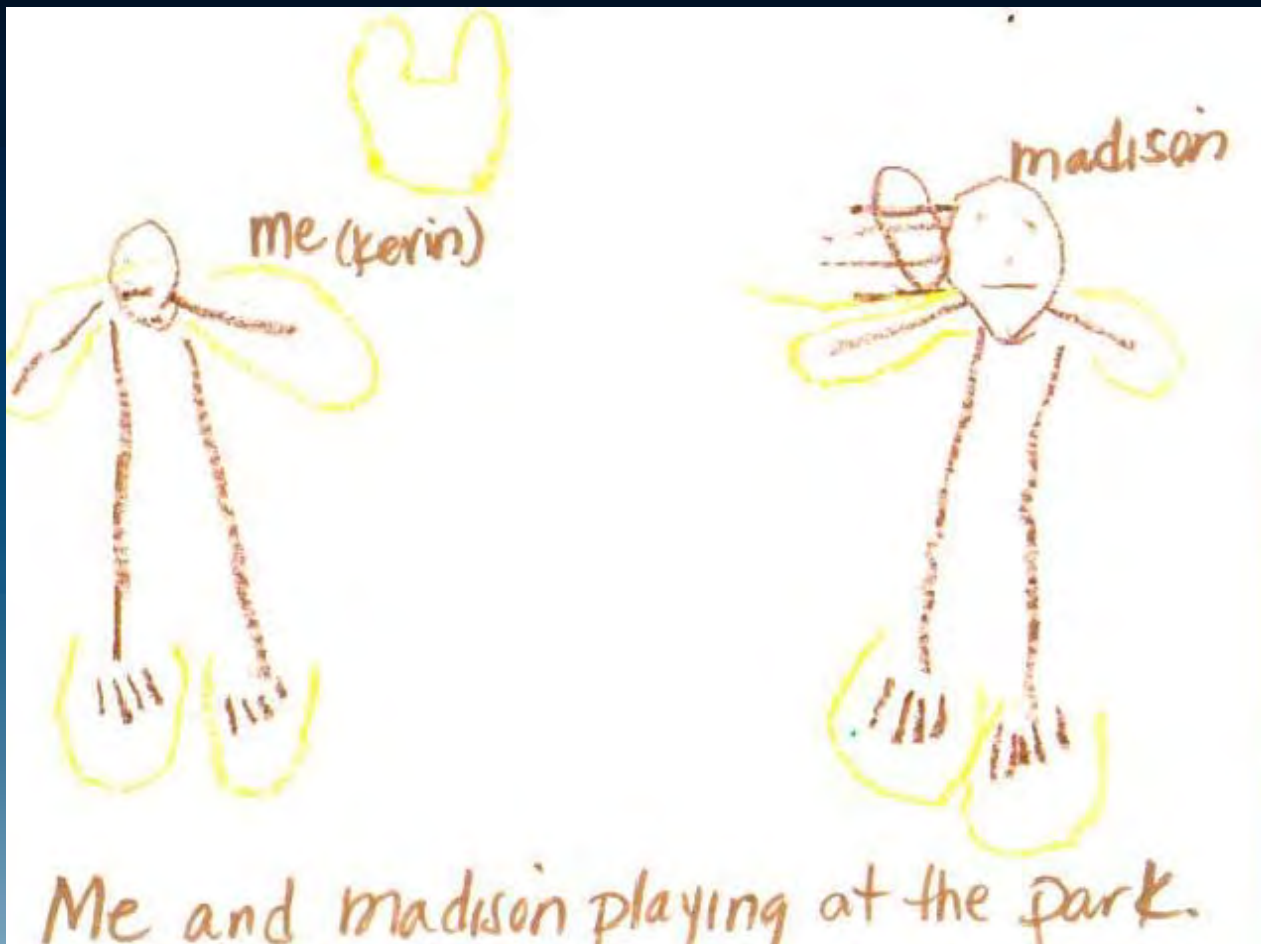


Establishing a Baseline: September





Documenting Growth: April





The Assessment-Instruction Cycle: Improving Instruction

Observation



Documentation

Interpretation - Hypothesis setting

Instruction



Use What You Learned

- **Look to see if the child demonstrates the skill or knowledge under other circumstances:**
 - **Four blocks**
 - **Four steps**
 - **Four squirts of water for the plant**



Use What You Learned

- **Plan other ways to help a child to learn a skill if the child is having difficulty.**
- **Use the information you collected to help explain the difficulties that the child is having when asking parents, other teachers, or specialists for advice.**



Use What You Learned

- **Plan additional opportunities to practice skills and provide praise or positive comment.**
- **Plan ways to help children take the next steps.**



Share the Information

- **Children – Let children see their own progress when you have saved work samples; make positive comments on what they are learning.**
- **Parents – Share your perspective on the child's development with the parents and listen to what they have to tell you.**
- **If the child has a disability, use the child's work, your checklists, and your notes to help the specialist to see the child's strengths and challenges.**



Parents Are Partners

- **In observation and documentation**
 - **Julia might be quiet at school but very talkative at home; parents can provide other sources of evidence.**
- **For interpretation of surprising behaviors**
 - **Jacob might not listen well during story time, because he gets up at 4:00 a.m. to go to work with his mom before school.**



Communicate With Parents

- **Ask for specific information (books they read together, types of directions children follow at home, etc.).**
 - **Ask for contributions for portfolios (art projects, photos, etc.).**
 - **Create a safe place for parents to leave notes about their children.**
 - **Share assessment results formally or informally and with sensitivity.**
 - **What do parents think the child knows?**
 - **How can parents support growth?**
-



Review of Purposes of Ongoing Assessment

- **Progress toward goals**
- **Generate questions and hypotheses**
- **Inform parents about their children's progress**
- **Provide information for specialists**
- **Inform instruction**
- **Support children's development beyond the classroom**