

Documentation in Kindergarten

The Question

“What does documentation look like in Kindergarten programs, and how does it support effective assessment and evaluation practices?”

The Answer

There are five key elements to consider:

1. The purpose of documentation
2. Types of documentation
3. “Noticing and naming” children’s learning
4. Supporting the Kindergarten educator team
5. Engaging families in the documentation process



1. The purpose of documentation

Observation and documentation provide evidence of children’s thinking and learning in Kindergarten and inform the teaching and learning environment by:

- guiding intentional, purposeful interactions among educators, children, and families;
- helping educators and children “notice and name” the learning that is happening (see section 3, below);
- supporting scaffolding and differentiation of learning in response to the strengths, challenges, interests, abilities, and temperaments of learners;
- capturing evidence of children’s thinking and learning within the context of Saying, Doing, and Representing, as outlined in *The Kindergarten Program* (2016);
- providing connections to developmental continua and learning trajectories, keeping culturally appropriate and context-specific practices in mind;
- setting the context for educators and parents¹ to respond to, challenge, and extend learning;
- providing a reference point for children to return to and build on prior thinking and learning; and
- supporting the various kinds of assessment:

¹ The word *parents* is used in this document to refer to parent(s) and guardian(s). It may also be taken to include caregivers or close family members who are responsible for raising the child.

- **assessment for learning** – the process of observing and documenting evidence of a child’s thinking and learning, reflecting on this evidence, then using it to inform instruction and intentional interactions with the child and to determine what level of support the child needs;
- **assessment as learning** – the process that supports the development of a child’s capacity to participate in conversations about their learning, consider next steps, reflect on their thinking and learning, and articulate individual goals to further their own learning; and
- **assessment of learning** – summarizing a child’s key learning and growth in learning in relation to the overall expectations at a given point in time, and outlining next steps in learning.

Stand aside for a while and leave room for learning, observe carefully what children do, and then, if you have understood well, perhaps teaching will be different from before.

(Malaguzzi, 1998, p. 82)

2. Types of documentation

Kindergarten educator teams use a variety of strategies to capture evidence of children’s thinking and learning in the contexts of exploration, play and inquiry, both indoors and outdoors. Documentation may include items such as:

- **photos** of children engaged in activities as learning and inquiry progress;
- **visual representations of children’s learning**, including photographs of artefacts, projects, and explorations;
- **digital audio recordings** or **video clips** of children engaged in play-based learning or explaining their thinking; and
- **notes** of what is seen and heard while children are engaged in exploration, play, and inquiry.

Documentation may also involve creating items such as:

- **learning stories** that capture the context of the learning environment, as well as the contexts that children come from, which may play a part in enabling or inhibiting learning;
- **portfolios** that capture development over time, connect to overall expectations, and provide evidence of children’s reflections (e.g., “I am learning to...”); and
- **documentation panels**, or a series of photographs paired with captions about the knowledge, concepts, or theories that children are constructing.

Educators continually revisit documentation, moving from gathering evidence to analysing a wide range of evidence of a child’s thinking and learning over time and using the insights gained to make the child’s thinking and learning visible to the child and the child’s family. This process is known as [“pedagogical documentation”](#).

3. “Noticing and naming” children’s learning

In Kindergarten, the emphasis is on engaging children throughout the documentation process to help them understand their strengths and interests as learners and develop the ability to articulate and monitor their own learning. Effective documentation includes strategies such as:

- dedicating time throughout the day to listen to children identify their learning and express their thinking, using an asset lens (i.e., focusing on children’s strengths and abilities and responding to their needs and opportunities for deeper learning) to better support their learning;
- organizing information and identifying trends and patterns in children’s behaviour, thinking, and learning, as well as next steps;
- reflecting on documentation of children’s thinking with them to capture their questions and theories 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 children to share their learning using photographs, videos, digital artefacts, and so on);
- ensuring that families have opportunities to share their observations, opinions, and experiences to support a deeper level of learning; and
- sharing visual documentation of children’s learning as it progresses (e.g., by posting photos and including scribed language on classroom blogs and/or on panels in the classroom, placed intentionally at the children’s eye level).

Rinaldi (2006) refers to documentation as the “pedagogy of listening” and “visible listening” (pp. 65, 68). Pedagogical documentation is not a form of summative assessment and should not be reserved for the end of a given period of time. Instead, it is done on an ongoing basis, and it may involve revisiting and rethinking evidence, as part of a cyclical process that promotes children’s growth and learning.

[The Kindergarten Program](#) (2016), p. 37

4. Supporting the Kindergarten educator team

School leaders use professional learning conversations with educator teams to support embedding documentation into daily practice. They encourage educators to take time to reflect on key decision points, such as how decisions regarding learning experiences are informed by assessment information and how learning is being made visible to children.

School leaders embed reflective frameworks (i.e., remove, rethink, repeat) into discussions (e.g., **remove** worksheets as forms of assessment; **rethink** the approach to assessment, immersing it in play and inquiry scenarios; **repeat** the collection and display of relevant, meaningful pieces of documentation). They encourage educators to use the process of pedagogical documentation to reflect on the evidence they gather in order to gain insights into each child’s thinking and learning and to determine their next steps. With support from school leaders, effective educators consider documentation thoughtfully and with an open mind by:

- considering which form of documentation will best represent a child’s thinking and learning;
- gathering evidence of what is seen and heard while learning is taking place;
- reflecting on the evidence they have collected in collaboration with other educators, children, and parents soon after the experience;
- interpreting the evidence to identify how best to provide further provocation for learning, or to determine what additional evidence is needed;

- analysing evidence using their knowledge of the expectations of the Kindergarten program and of child development;
- asking questions and learning from interactions with children and their families;
- reflecting with children on the documentation to help them monitor their learning;
- planning for documentation in timely, relevant ways throughout the flow of the day; and
- reflecting on and identifying what they know about the lived experiences of the learners in their classrooms, their ways of knowing, and their beliefs.

Note: Educator teams should ensure that they are adhering to all school board policies when they use of media and digital applications to document student learning.

5. Engaging families in the documentation process

Involving parents in the review of documentation will enrich the educators' analysis and understanding of the child's learning, provide insights about the child's background and behaviour at home, and contribute profoundly to the child's learning.

The Kindergarten Program (2016), p. 44

School leaders may support Kindergarten educator teams in building parents' understanding of and participation in pedagogical documentation by:

- ensuring that time is dedicated to building trusting relationships with families and responding fully to families' questions about Kindergarten;
- viewing families and communities as co-constructors of children's learning;
- inviting parents into the classroom to share with them the evidence of their child's learning and to reflect with them on their child's learning, to share experiences, and to familiarize them with resources that will support their child's deeper learning; and
- developing an approach for sharing stories about children's learning with families – and inviting families to share any information about their child's learning that they might like to add – on the school website (e.g., designating a section of the website for posting artefacts and materials that highlight learning in the school).

References

Malaguzzi, L. (1998). History, ideas, and basic philosophy: An interview with Lella Gandini. In Edwards, C., Gandini, L., & Forman, G. (Eds.), *The hundred languages of children: The Reggio Emilia approach—Advanced reflections* (2nd ed., pp. 49–97). Greenwich, CT: Ablex.

[Ontario Ministry of Education. \(2016\). *The Kindergarten program*. Toronto: Author.](#)

[Ontario Ministry of Education. \(2016\). *Growing success: The Kindergarten addendum*. Toronto: Author.](#)

Rinaldi, C. (2006). *In dialogue with Reggio Emilia: Listening, researching and learning*. New York: Routledge.