

Authentic Assessment

Mueller (2003), explains that authentic, on-going assessments is “a form of assessment in which children are observed while working, playing and performing real world tasks that demonstrate meaningful application of essential knowledge and skills.” Teachers collect information about children in varied ways that document what children can do in settings where they are most comfortable, during normal routines and in play in the classroom. Assessment data should be gathered from many sources, including families, over time in children’s naturally occurring learning environments (Lambert, Kim & Burts, 2011).

The Power of Assessment defines assessment as a method of systematic process (cycle) of collecting and interpreting information in order to answer questions about children’s development and learning; and inform instruction. Dodge, et.al. (2004), states the key is to observe purposefully and plan for documentation that provides rich data. Teachers who collect documentation in various ways form a representative picture of children’s abilities and progress made (i.e. children’s work samples, observation, anecdotal notes, photos, video and audio recordings, and checklists. The more documentation you collect the “stronger and more valid your decisions will be” (2004).

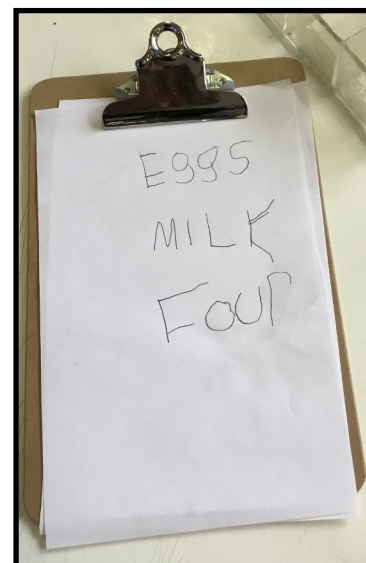
Assessment is a cycle and intentional implementation that takes time and practice. As mentors and evaluators, it is important to help early childhood educators reflect on their assessment practices. Teachers assess children throughout the day in the classroom oftentimes using research based methods; and may not even be aware of the times they are assessing. For example, a teacher may spontaneously scaffold an activity after it becomes clear that a child or group of children need more guidance in learning a specific skill. Although unplanned, the teacher has assessed the needs of the child(ren) and quickly modified guidance to provide next steps. As mentors and evaluators, we can help teachers break-down the steps in the assessment cycle process and guide them to become more intentional as they plan for collection, interpretation, and implementation of next steps.

Guiding questions to ask teachers *before* collecting data:

- What do children need to learn?
- What interests and engages children?
- What should be assessed (curriculum goals/objectives; expected developmentally appropriate outcomes; specific concerns; etc.)?
- What documents and information should be collected?
- Who should be assessed (individual/group)?
- How will the assessments be carried out?
- Will both teacher and co-teacher collect data?
- How much data/information is needed?
- In what different ways can you find out/collect the needed information?



In an eye doctor office set up in the classroom, the teacher planned a letter assessment where two children called out letters to their patient, marking what he/she knew.



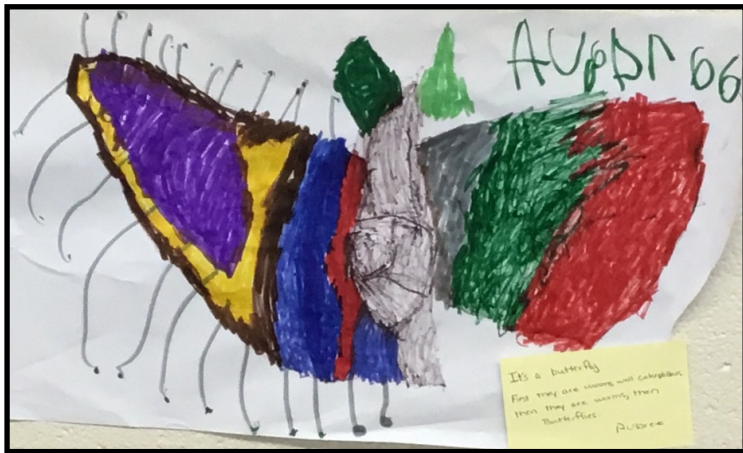
This child-made grocery list demonstrates invented spelling.

Mentor Minute (cont.)

Early childhood educators need to have a solid understanding of child development, know their children, and be informed about their curriculum in order to accurately interpret assessment data and plan for children's next steps and learning. NC Foundations for Early Learning and Development provides a rich resource and guide for teachers meeting the needs of children by aligning developmental steps the child is doing now with next steps and strategies to meet the needs of each child.

Guiding questions to ask teachers about interpreting and using the data to plan next steps:

- What can the children do and what do they know?
- What does the data/information tell you?
- What did you learn about each child from the data collected?
- How will you use the information you learned?
- How will your plans change?
- What strategies will you use?
- What are your next steps with this child or group of children?
- How might you note on your lesson plans your strategies for collecting data?
- How might you track or keep up with what happens as a result of your planning?



It's a butterfly
But they are using real caterpillars
then they are using their
butterflies

Children's drawings can tell a teacher what children know and *do not know* (i.e. Butterfly with numerous legs in drawing). What might be the teacher's next steps in planning for this child?

Children sorted rocks by size and were encouraged to count and draw the same number of rocks and write the number under each column.



Two children are paired together using a book to retell a favorite story in art.



Mentor Minute (cont.)

Information gathered outside of the school day is necessary in painting a full picture of what each child can do. Teachers should welcome and encourage input from families and the children themselves, so that both can play a crucial role in the authentic assessment process.

Guiding questions to ask teachers about involving children and families in assessment:

- In what ways can you seek input from with families?
- How can you support families in understanding and the relevance of assessment data?
- How might you promote ways for children to assess themselves or be involved in preparing for conferences with their families?

Knowing that learning that takes place at home can be an important supplement to classroom practices. As Early Childhood Educators, we know that a child's first teacher is their family.

Additional strategies for involving families in the assessment process:

- Ask families to involve their children in assessment by having them choose their favorite creations from school. Why is this their child's favorite creation (in the child's words)?
- During parent-teacher conferences, share only 2-3 main points related to the child's assessment information.
- Have children present their assessment portfolio information to their families during parent-teacher conferences (e.g., children showcase their favorite works, children explain what they learned, and children indicate what they liked best about the activity).
- Be strengths-based, positive and encouraging when discussing a child's assessment information with families, but be careful not to overshadow areas or skills that may need more focus and improvement.
- Be prepared to share at least 1-2 specific suggestions and/or activities to guide families when working at home with their children.



Drawings of a school bus over time that document children's learning. Asking families to bring in drawings created by child at home can help to reflect a fuller picture of learning.

References:

- Dichtelmiller, M. L. (2011). *The Power of Assessment: Transforming Teaching and Learning*
- Dodge, D.T. & Heroman, C & Charles, J & Majorca, J. (2004). *Beyond Outcomes: How Ongoing Assessment Supports Children's Learning and Leads to Meaningful Curriculum*
- Mueller, J. (2003). *Authentic Assessment in the Classroom and the Media Center*

Please be sure to also visit the [EESLPD Useful Resources](#) tab of our website to explore the Authentic Assessment section under Mentor/Evaluator Additional Resources

Special thanks to Heather Taylor whom served as a guest contributor to this month's Mentor Minute