



Transcript for the [video](#):

Documenting Children's Learning

Narrator: Most early childhood professionals regularly document what children do and say during the day. But why is it important to document? How can you use it to support children's development, your teaching, and your relationships with families? Let's hear from Judy Harris Helm and several teachers as they describe some of the ways documentation can support best practices in early childhood settings.

Documenting Children's Learning (0:40)

Judy Harris Helm, President, Best Practices, Inc.: I think documentation is really important for early childhood teachers. It opens a window into what children are actually doing, thinking, and learning. It's a way of listening to the child. I think documentation moves you on the other side, from what I'm doing as a teacher, to what is happening with this child?

Child: One-ah, two-ah, two-ah, four-ah.

Assessing Children's Learning (1:14)

Narrator: One purpose of documentation is to assess children's learning and developmental progress.

Amie Theriault, Toddler Teacher, Child and Family Development Resource Center: To just see where the children are as individuals, developmentally. Are they where you'd like them to be? Do they need more support in a specific area? Are they progressing? Have they moved up over the months?

Judy Harris Helm: The teacher gathers evidence of children's learning in the process of children doing it—how they play, what they draw, what they paint, the questions they ask.

Girl: Blue and red make purple.

Karen DelMastro, Preschool Teacher, Windham Early Childhood Center: I take notes; I can see what they've done; I can see where they are; and then I can plan where they need to go.

Jennifer Wolff, Preschool Teacher, Cook Hill Integrated Preschool: I take pictures of the children's work, how are they writing their name towards the beginning of the year, and

monthly, just updating those pictures and seeing the progression. And then after, I can look back at those pictures, write some notes down. Even little charts with tally marks have also been very helpful—just something that’s quick and easy that I can do to the side.

Jenny: What letter is that?

Boy 1: R.

Boy 2: Q.

Jenny: Letter Q.

Jennifer Wolff: During circle time you may want to record how many times a child is talking and involved in the activity itself.

Amie Theriault: We create electronic portfolios for each of the children. So when we’re assessing, you know, whether it’s a video that we’re inputting, or a still photo, or a work sample, or even an anecdotal record, you know, it all fits into a particular standard. It’s really nice because you can have all staff inputting data into them. My teaching partner may have more time one-on-one with a child than I have, or vice versa.

Carrie: What’s that one?

Boy: A car.

Amie Theriault: So we can really look at the child as a whole, you know; we’re including all of the domains; we’re including all of the standards.

Revisiting Children’s Learning (2:57)

Narrator: Documentation can also provide an opportunity for teachers to revisit with children what they have learned.

Amie: Right here. Do you remember what you did up here? What were you using there?

Boy: Blow dryer.

Amie: A blow dryer.

Amie Theriault: Put up those documentation panels; put up their work samples. We can go back and say, “Do you remember what we did here?”

Boy: Sucks up water.

Amie Theriault: Connect what they’ve learned with what you’re going to learn, you know. Build on their knowledge.

Judy Harris Helm: When an early childhood teacher uses documentation in the process of teaching, that teacher’s often able to interact with the child at a deeper level, and can write down some of the things that he is saying.

Leisha: How did you make it? Can you tell me?

Judy Harris Helm: Then later on, she can look at that to probe what the child understands, and can then extend that child's thinking.

Karen DelMastro: One of the ways that I really like to document is after I've seen them do something, I like to have them draw what they've done. So if they're at the water table, and they're experimenting, when they're finished, I ask them to sit down, and "Show me on paper what you've done, and tell me about it." I take photos of them while they're playing at the water table. And then when they sit down to do a picture, they look at the camera. So they tell me about it, and then I use their words and write down what they've done. And I display it, and that's very powerful—they go back afterwards, and they talk about it.

Karen: That's when we raced the cars. When we tried to make tracks for the cars.

Communicating With Families (4:25)

Narrator: One very important use of documentation is communicating with families about how their children are progressing and what they are learning.

Karen DelMastro: I do take pictures, and I put them in my newsletter and send it home so that the parents know what their child is doing and what we're working on.

Jennifer Wolff: I have a blog that I have with my parents, so daily I update the blog, and they have photos, and they have an idea of what their children did that day. That's been particularly helpful for the parents, because they already know the title of the book that they've read. They can ask questions about it.

Amie Theriault: Electronic portfolios are great for sharing at conference times. You can go through each standard with them. And you can show them concrete examples, you know. The way that I do it is I hyperlink each photo, so they're able to click on things, and just, it will bring them right to a video of their child; it'll bring them right to a work sample, and they just light up, because they can see how much they've grown.

Ensuring Informed and Reflective Teaching (5:23)

Narrator: Documentation gives teachers information they need to reflect on how well their teaching is meeting children's needs.

Judy Harris Helm: There are lots of things going on in the classroom. So the teacher just simply doesn't have time to step back and see what they're doing in terms of interacting with the children, in terms of how they organize their classroom. If they document what's

happening, the teacher can then look back later on and see, what were the children doing here? Was it inviting to children, or wasn't it? It's a way for the teacher to reflect, to evaluate, "What am I doing? How well am I doing? What should I be doing differently?"

Jennifer Wolff: Using the blog helps me to reflect on my practices and to see how children respond to new activities. And I can look back at my blog and see how, you know, they were able to get an interest in that and progress.

Amie Theriault: Sometimes when you're looking through all the portfolios, you know, you might notice that, "Wow, this child really has nothing in this standard. I wonder, you know, why that is?" And you check other portfolios and you realize, "Ooh this is really a pattern, you know, maybe that's something that I haven't touched upon." And so then you base your planning off of what you've noticed.

Jennifer Wolff: Looking back at those photographs and the notes over time really helps you figure out if there's an area of development where you may need to intervene with a certain child and assist them in a different way. Not every child's going to learn the same way, so perhaps the placement of a certain child needs to be changed at circle time, or perhaps they need modified seating in order to help them better attend.

Amie Theriault: I can take videos throughout the day. You miss things when you're in the moment. You can watch and say, "Ooh," you know, "I wish I had done this a little bit differently with this child, because I see now, as I'm watching it from an outside perspective, they possibly weren't getting what I wanted them to get out of it. Is there something different that I can do next time?"

Judy Harris Helm: The other piece of documentation for teacher growth is sharing with other people. One of the teachers brings, at lunch time, a piece of documentation, a photograph, a piece of child's work, and then shows that to the rest of the group, with a question. "How could I have deepened this experience?" or "What do you think was going on in this child's mind?" And then they reflect upon this, and they talk about it, and the teacher gets an idea of how she might want to do something different.

Advocating for Developmentally Appropriate, Play-Based Learning (7:45)

Narrator: Documenting what children are learning and how much they are progressing can help teachers advocate for maintaining developmentally appropriate practice and play-based learning.

Judy Harris Helm: We would like to believe that everybody understands and values what happens in classrooms for very young children, but in reality, they don't. They see the child in there, building with blocks—they don't understand that that's really related to mathematical achievement. One of the things that documentation can do is to lift up—for the parents, administrators—what's actually happening in classrooms and the real value of it.

Amie Theriault: For those families that don't really understand, like, the power of play. You know, they're seeing, "Oh my child has been playing all day. Ok, so what does that mean?"

Girl: Say cheese!

Boy 1: Cheese!

Girl: Janiel, say cheese!

Boy 2: Cheese!

Amie Theriault: So really being able to show them that while José is pretending to make pizza, he's also problem solving, because there's no pizza cutter there, so what will he use? And he's building his social skills, as he and his friend both want the slice of pizza. So really showing those families, with the use of what you've documented, all that their children are learning.

Judy Harris Helm: In the field of early childhood education, we often fight a battle of having people understand what it is we do with children. Some of the things that are very valuable to have happen in classrooms gets squeezed out, because people don't know the value of it. So I think it's almost a responsibility for an early childhood educator today to let people see the value of those experiences, so they will know to preserve them. So they will understand that building that block structure provided many, many more experiences for them than doing a prescribed math activity that every child did everything exactly the same. The only way we're ever going to get people to understand what the value is of those kinds of experiences is if we can lift them up and show them. And when we do that they will be amazed; they will understand; and we'll get to teach the way that we need to teach for young children to learn the way young children learn.

Patty: Why do you think it's falling down? Is there a rock we should switch out and not use in our tower?