

## DOCUMENTATION FEATURES IN PRACTICE



- 1. Documentation involves a specific question that guides the process, often with an epistemological focus (focus on questions of learning).**
  - Articulating a question--usually with a focus on how children build knowledge--can guide how and what to document and keep it connected to student learning.
  - Formulating a question helps to focus and limit data collection and sharpens the analysis.
  - Identifying hypotheses (forecasts), as well as questions, can be very helpful in advancing teachers' thinking and structuring observations around a particular question.
- 2. Documentation involves collectively analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating individual and group observations; it is strengthened by multiple perspectives.**
  - Documentation does not stop with the photograph or tape recording or written notes. The next and critical step is analyzing and interpreting this documentation.
  - Collaborating with a partner or partners reduces the subjectivity of a single person's analysis and interpretation.
  - Collective analysis deepens understanding of a learning experience.
- 3. Documentation makes use of multiple languages (different ways of representing and expressing thinking in various media and symbol systems).**
  - Using multiple forms of documentation (e.g, words and pictures) deepens the understanding of a learning experience.
  - Photographs are especially effective for capturing emotional or social dimensions.
  - Student reflections and adult analysis of key moments of learning add new meaning.
- 4. Documentation makes learning visible; it is not private. Documentation becomes public when it is shared with learners, whether children, parents, or teachers.**
  - Publicly sharing documentation allows children and adults to reflect on, evaluate, and build on their previous work and ideas.
  - Sharing documentation with learners can take many forms: a photocopied sheet of paper, words repeated back to students, work brought back to a small group or put up on a wall, a carefully arranged panel, or a formal presentation.
  - Protocols can be useful for structuring conversations about documentation that promote deeper understanding.
  - Documentation is an act of communication; it makes public a conversation about what we value.
- 5. Documentation is not only retrospective, it is also prospective. It shapes the design of future contexts for learning.**
  - Analyzing and interpreting documentation leads teachers to compare what they thought they would observe to what really went on; it informs decisions about where to go next.
  - Documentation helps teachers stay close to students' learning and interests as they think about next steps in the learning process.
  - Reviewing documentation influences curriculum in terms of the amount of time a group spends on a topic and the level of student involvement in shaping an activity or unit.