

Assessment Using Children's Portfolios

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The two broad methods of assessment that are appropriate for the Foundational Stage are **observations of the child and analysing artefacts** that the child has produced as part of their learning experience.

Source: National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage. Section 6.2 Methods and Tools of Assessment. p. 173

In this article, as part of 'analysing artefacts', I describe how 'children's portfolios' can be created and used for assessment.

In the context of Early Childhood Education (ECE), a portfolio refers to a collection of documented evidence and materials that showcase a child's growth, development and learning over a specific period. The primary purpose of it is assessment. It helps determine the child's status and progress, inform instruction, and provide information for reporting and communication. Additionally, it helps in identifying children who might need special help. Portfolios also provide insights into children's abilities, interests, and needs.

The Teacher should analyse the portfolio of the child with regard to specific outcomes and mark the child's progress against competencies. The organisation of a child's portfolio should clearly indicate outcomes to be achieved. Each child should have a dedicated folder to store their relevant artefacts.

Source: National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage. Section 6.2 Methods and Tools of Assessment. p. 178

Key elements of children's portfolios

Portfolio items vary with the age and development of children, and the goals of the programmes and curriculum. The items need to be informative, easy to collect and representative of meaningful classroom activities. Below are the suggested items that can be kept in portfolios.

1. Basic and general individual information: The basic details, like the child's name and date of birth, parents' names and background information, the

child's older/younger siblings, likes and dislikes, cultural background, etc.

2. Health-related information: A snapshot of the child's health and well-being with respect to key health indicators, like height, weight, growth, immunisation, etc.
3. Activity books and work samples: Activity books and worksheets in progression. The child's class work, such as drawing, painting, pasting, collage work and activity photos, in a file or scrapbook.
4. Assessment tools: Observation records, checklists, anecdotal records, time and event samples.
5. Digital resources: Photos and videos of the child involved in significant work or play.
6. Teacher reflections: Teacher's reflection on the information gathered about the child over time, which helps in planning the future growth and learning opportunities.
7. Holistic Progress Card (HPC): NEP 2020 suggests that HPC is a 'multidimensional report that reflects in great detail the progress as well as the uniqueness of each learner in the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains.' (para 4.35).ⁱ It may contain not just the assessments done by the teacher but also comments and observations by the parents and simple self-assessments by the children themselves.

Organisation of children's portfolios

The items and work samples need to cover all the domains – language, cognitive, socio-emotional, creative, physical, and physical well-being. It is important to organise the work samples domain-wise and in chronological order. The teacher needs to maintain the date and child's narrations about their work. Below are some sample prompts/ questions that the teacher can ask to enable the child to reflect upon and talk about the work that they have done.

1. Tell me what you have done here.
2. Tell/show me how you did this?
3. Why did you decide to draw/write/make ...?
4. What were you thinking when you drew/wrote/ made ...?

5. What do you like about this?

From time to time, the teacher can go back to a previous work of the child and ask them to improve or do it differently by asking:

1. Do you want to change anything in this?
2. What would you do differently if you were to do this again?

Use of portfolios

Once a child's portfolio is organised, the teacher can evaluate the child's achievements. Appropriate evaluation compares the child's current work to their earlier work. This evaluation should indicate the child's progress toward a performance standard consistent with the curriculum and appropriate developmental expectations. For example, a teacher identified the lack of fine motor skills (grip and control) in a child based on the observation of the child's artwork. This helped the teacher set up a goal for the child and the child was provided with more opportunities to improve by way of free drawing more often on the running blackboard and colouring a shape either on paper or the floor with the teacher placing small seeds on the outline of the shape. The child's fine motor skills have improved as seen in the same kind of artwork over a period of time.

Portfolios are not meant to be used for comparing children with each other. They document an individual child's progress over time. The teacher's conclusions about a child's achievement, abilities, strengths, weaknesses, and needs should be based on the full range of the child's development, as documented by the data in the portfolio, and based on the teacher's knowledge of curriculum and stages of development. The portfolio helps the teacher identify each child's unique characteristics and ways of learning and using this to support the child's learning in the classroom.

With the portfolio as the basis for discussion during parent-teacher meetings, the teacher and parents can review concrete examples of the child's work rather than trying to discuss the child's progress in an abstract way.

1. The portfolio allows the sharing of valuable information about the child's achievements with parents, other family members and, in the future, with primary school teachers.
2. The portfolio supports smooth transition from preschool to primary school. It is a valuable tool in ECE as it provides a holistic view of a child's development and helps ensure that educational

and care practices are tailored to each child's unique needs.

3. The portfolio is a positive statement of the child's achievements in the *anganwadi* centre/ preschool, at home and in the community.
4. Children's portfolios can serve as a meaningful way to involve parents in their child's education and development.



Figure 1. Children's portfolio bags in a classroom.

Role of the teacher

The teacher should have the autonomy to judiciously choose the appropriate tool for assessment and the periodicity of assessment-related record keeping. While such autonomy is important, systematic record-keeping of children's assessments should be seen as an important part of a teacher's professional responsibilities without it being a burden on the teacher.

An accurate assessment allows an early childhood educator to indicate a child's progress in a way that is beneficial to the child, the family, teachers, and administrators. To do this, the teacher needs to do the following:

1. Visit households and get complete details of each child from their parents.
2. Prepare profile sheet, collect work samples for each child systematically.
3. Provide equal opportunities to all children.
4. Provide the necessary materials and time for children to do activities. Also provide extended opportunities for the work they have already

done to gauge the progress in a single competency over a period.

5. Observe children's activities, record these in the form of check lists, anecdotes, and event samples, etc., and make the necessary plans for the children's development.
6. Record their reflections about each child and plan their class keeping these in mind.

Conclusion

Portfolios are useful, effective tools to aid early childhood professionals in acknowledging and

documenting each child's progress. They are unique to each child, and their contents can focus on the child's specific interactions with their environment, materials, peers, and teachers. Portfolios are practical and useful as both reporting and planning tools; their form and format are adaptable for various types of educational programmes for young children. This systematic process is useful for teachers in achieving curricular goals for children by the end of the Foundational Stage and also for a smooth transition to the next stage.

Endnotes

- i National Education Policy 2020. Transforming Assessment for Student Development. Para 4.35. p 17



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