



The Early Years Learning Framework Professional Learning Program



Tracking learning

Setting the scene

The 'hot topic' over 2011 raised in conversations, on the Forum and Facebook, at workshops and in-field visits has been 'How can we best record evidence of children's learning?'

E-News Issue 6 this year focused on Learning Outcomes; Issues 8 and 14 were on planning for learning; and e-News 9 and 10 talked about documenting learning.

Now, it's time to dig a bit deeper into issues around documentation and assessment.

The *Early Years Learning Framework* (EYLF) reminds us (p. 17) that:

Assessment for children's learning ... is part of an ongoing cycle that includes planning, documenting and evaluating children's learning.

Ongoing assessment in early childhood settings emphasises the 'distance each child has travelled' and educators have a responsibility to gather 'the evidence that demonstrates children are learning'.

The National Quality Standard (NQS), which will be applied in many early childhood settings from 1 January, 2012 is quite explicit about these responsibilities (*Guide to the National Quality Standard*, October 2011 p. 19):



Quality Area 1: Educational program and practice

1.2.1: Each child's learning and development is assessed as part of an ongoing cycle of planning, documenting and evaluation.

1.2.3: Critical reflection on children's learning and development, both as individuals and in groups, is regularly used to implement the program.

1.1.4: The documentation about each child's program and progress is available to families.

The EYLF advises (p. 17) that the five Learning Outcomes:

Provide early childhood educators with key reference points against which children's learning can be identified, documented and communicated to families, other early childhood professionals and schools.

And, the *Educators' Guide to the EYLF* (p. 37) further explains that:

Assessment includes interpreting children's learning against learning outcomes in order to plan for further learning and to report to parents and others about children's learning.

As is evident from these quotes, both the EYLF and the NQS talk quite definitely about 'assessing' children's learning.

New perspectives

Some early childhood educators might not initially be comfortable with the term 'assessment'.

As Sally points out on the Forum:

One of the problems with the word assessment is that it invokes thoughts of tests and worksheets. I think people are fearful of 'making judgements', but that's something we've always done ... What is different about the EYLF is that we are asking people to make judgements against a set of outcomes.

And, as Anne K notes:

The EYLF is focused on learning outcomes and this is a shift from an age-stage developmental focus which has the potential to limit what we see. Where once we might have noticed that a child was using a 'palmar grip' to hold a pencil, and encouraged the development of a pincer grip, for example, we now ask additional questions:

- What is the child learning as he scribbles?
- What is motivating his learning?
- What helps or hinders?
- How far has he travelled from showing little interest in making marks, to wanting to have a go, to showing a sense of achievement as he conveys meaning through his drawings?
- What will I plan? Why?

We did track children's learning over time in the past, but I don't think we tracked them as learners in the same way.

Assessment for learning

The New Zealand Ministry of Education (please refer to link in reference list for more information) suggests that assessment that supports children's learning requires educators to 'notice', 'recognise' and 'respond'.

They stress that educators need to move beyond observing that a child is engaged in an activity, to interpreting the learning and recording *what is being learned*, rather than just what happens. By recognising the learning, educators can respond to enrich and extend that learning or support the child to take it in different directions.

Example 1: Supporting Olivia's art journey

Starry, starry night

As children's interest in art was apparent, we decided to explore a variety of art. We introduced Vincent van Gogh and some of his works to the children. Olivia showed an immediate interest in this and we read the book 'Vincent's colours' to her. After discussing some of the techniques that Vincent may have used in his paintings and the title of these works, we provided a number of images for Olivia to observe and attempt on her own.

'I want to do the Starry Night one' Olivia responded.

Olivia spent time looking at the swirls of the stars, the strokes in the sky and houses at the bottom.

Over a number of weeks Olivia would always ask to do the 'Starry Night one' while at the easel or at the art table inside, at any opportunity.

In bringing the interest to an end, we asked Olivia if we should do a group canvas of the paintings we have looked at. A wonderful collection resulted.

Reflection: This process has allowed Olivia and her peers to make discoveries and gain an understanding and appreciation of art. It provided a scaffold for self-expression as they explored with new techniques and mediums. Opportunities to revisit their ideas and to extend on these allowed staff to observe how Olivia became more detailed and had confidence to take new risks each time she painted.





The NZ article also notes that:

One important connection between assessment and learning is feedback. Research tells us that feedback to learners improves learning. Some of this feedback will be through documentation (such as assessments that families and teachers can read back to children and photographs that children can 'read' for themselves). Some of it will be verbal. Some of it will be non-verbal (through a gesture, a nod, or a smile). Feedback tells learners what outcomes are valued ... and it acknowledges the goals that children set for themselves.

This conversation between an educator and a family often occurs informally as they share learning events at the end of a day or a week.

Example 3: Learning from found objects

At Bayside Family Day Care in Brisbane, the children found a large, black crow's feather and the educator explained how quills were once used for writing. Paint and ink pots were provided and children experimented with dipping the 'quills' and then moved on to using the feathers in their art.

The educator shared with families that the children were:

- Demonstrating growing confidence and involvement in learning
- Resourcing their own learning
- Engaging in new forms of expression, including visual art, drama and storytelling

The educator planned with children to find other natural materials to use in visual art.

Example 2: Feedback to Maddie and her family

Maddie, today you did a drawing of a fairy. The drawing was the size of your hand and had been carefully cut out with scissors (Notice).

I was very impressed with your detail and care. You have shown that you are a 'Confident and involved learner' (Outcome 4) and that you have extended your own interests with energy and concentration (Interpret).

Over the year, you have moved from drawing two-dimensional pictures to cutting and creating three-dimensional images (Recognise and assess progress).

When we talked, I suggested you may like some cardboard boxes to build a fairy house. We investigated the recycle bin and found shapes and sizes you were looking for; you are able to resource your own learning and transfer understanding to new contexts (Respond).

To Maddie's family: You may have noticed Maddie's creative abilities. Does she spend lots of time with drawing, pasting, cutting or collage at home? What does she create? How can we support this learning? (Provide feedback and work in partnership).



Example 4: Reflections at Gowrie Victoria

At Gowrie Victoria, educators are thinking that:

- To be worth documenting in some detail and keeping for future reference, it should be a 'wow' moment, indicating a skill acquired or significant progress.
- The educator's response can be simply sharing the moment with the child and showing you value their work; the educator may already be providing for next stage learning, or they may think 'what would build on the child's direction here?'
- A 'strength-based, child-centred' approach doesn't mean you stand back and do nothing; you do what is required to consolidate and extend the learning.
- Educators' 'Reflections folder' should contain interpretations of how children's learning is changing over time and how their provision responds to these changes.
- Collections of children's work, where they are used, need to be reviewed regularly to ensure they provide an informative 'history' of an individual child's learning journey.

Example 5: Vittoria's self-portrait

Self-portraits, July 2011

This week we invited the children to consider themselves; their bodies, faces and physical characteristics, and represent them on paper using coloured markers. Some of the children also added their names to their creations. Many of the portraits share similarities, but at the same time they are wildly different. We wonder how the children will see and represent themselves in 6 months, or a year, or 10 years from now? Who will they see in the mirror?

"A self-portrait is an intimate, bold declaration of identity. In her self-portrait, a child offers herself as both subject and artist. When we look at her self-portrait, we see a child as she sees herself."

Anne Pelo 'The Language of Art' p 83



Reviewing and summarising learning

There is always a risk that documentation will become superficial and not necessarily be useful for making curriculum decisions. As Melissa from Gowrie Victoria's Carlton North centre commented—'there are more photos in the world than bricks!' Records can also become so voluminous that it's hard to find the learning in there.

It is both a professional responsibility and a practical necessity to sort through children's records regularly, keeping only those that demonstrate learning and progress over time. Several centre-based settings create time for educators who work with a group of children (including casual staff) to undertake this 'sifting exercise' together, which builds collaborative practices and shared professional reflection. It also has a 'moderating' effect as educators debate why a piece of work is significant and develop criteria for making judgements. Older children and families can often be involved in the 'sifting and selecting' process.

As well as the ongoing review and reflection process, educators in a number of early childhood settings have begun analysing learning records at specific times in the year to develop a summary of the distance travelled by individual children to that point in time. This analysis of children's learning allows educators to set realistic goals with families and to plan the educator's role in providing for that learning.

- Analysis and educator reflection are the really important parts of documenting learning.
- Setting goals with families supports collaborative reflection on progress.

Example 6: Learning and Development Statement

Francis aged two

Francis has developed secure relationships with the educators and has formed bonds with other children—especially Duncan. Francis is very independent and she likes to scrape off her plate at morning tea/lunch/afternoon tea. She confidently chooses where to play and includes herself in the activities of others. She likes to do things on her own, but is able to ask for assistance if needed.

Francis confidently explores the environment and tries new things in the program. She is able to share and cooperate with others most of the time and helps educators to care for younger children (she often brings toys or musical instruments to crying children and watches keenly, asking questions as younger children are fed or have their nappy changed). Francis displays an interest in the goings on of the room, routines and events.

Francis is increasingly becoming more verbal and expressing her feelings more. She is becoming more confident in her communication skills and joins in with conversations at the lunch table as well as participating in music and singing times. Francis enjoys reading books, singing songs and dancing around with music.

Francis has a sense of belonging at Gowrie as she always greets anyone who comes into our room and always says goodbye to people—she uses people's first names when greeting them if she knows them. Francis enjoys helping the educators in the room through the daily routines.

Francis is very confident in her physical ability and she likes to challenge herself, either independently or even if she needs assistance, for example, when on the climbing equipment. Francis is mostly gentle with others and with the guidance of educators is becoming more aware of the effects of her actions on others.

Transitions

At times of transition, such as when children move to a new room, begin to work with different educators, or have a significant change in their lives, such as moving house or gaining a new sibling, it is particularly important to 'summarise' how they are going in their learning journey.

At Whitfield Kinder, in Cairns, the educators regularly sort through each child's portfolio to select and document significant aspects of learning with reflective comments in their Planning Book. This documentation provides the basis for the Transition Statement as children proceed into school.

Tree House Child Care also compiles a detailed Transition Learning and Development Statement for children as they enrol at school. The statement includes a photo or self-portrait and contextual information about attendance at kinder. Headings and some extracts from a sample statement are provided below.



Example 7: Treehouse Transition statement

Things that might help Yasmin settle into school:

Yasmin will benefit from the reassurance of predictable routines and knowing she can ask when not sure about anything.

Learning Outcomes:

Identity—Connects well with peers as well as friends.

Community—Makes collaborative plans with friends and peers, sharing and taking turns; negotiates with flexibility.

Wellbeing—Manages change and copes with unexpected events and frustrations.

Learning—Engages in a wide range of learning strategies, including practice, experimentation, collaborative problem solving, researching and consolidating learning by helping friends.

Communication—Very articulate with extensive vocabulary and correct grammar, engaging in group discussions, speaking confidently and clearly; represents ideas using a range of media, writing own name and recognising some familiar words in print.

Yasmin's interests—imaginative play, singing, stories, drawing and painting.

As Anne Stonehouse, one of the lead writers of the EYLF comments:

If educators are assessing in the range of ways that are advocated in the Framework and the Educators' Guide, they will have an ongoing record of changes and progress. I know some kindergarten teachers who say that one benefit of having to do transition statements for children going to school in the following year is that it means they keep good records related to each child's progress in the areas described by the Learning Outcomes. They end up with a record of progress they can share with children and families.



Conclusion

This e-Newsletter has been produced as the final for 2011. We hope it supports educators in reviewing their current assessment practices and setting up for documenting children's learning in 2012.

The e-news bulletins have been funded to continue next year, with an increasing focus on assisting educators to work with the NQS and embed the EYLF further into their practice. A team of experienced early childhood educators will write the newsletters and we plan to provide a tentative 'calendar' of topics at the beginning of the year and to publish two on similar themes each month to promote discussion between educators.

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