



Assessment – keeping it in context!

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Debra Verstege is an early childhood professional with over 25 years experience in early childhood education and care (ECEC) programs. She has directed a long day care service leading a team who was involved in both the trial of the *Early Years Learning Framework* and the Educator's Guide. More recently she has returned to a professional support role within Gowrie Queensland and the wider early childhood community. Over the past two years she has been involved in participating and facilitating an Action Research Model of professional development. She believes that this model is one that fits extremely well with implementing early childhood programs that require reflection and ongoing learning to be part of educators' pedagogical practice.

Assessment is a word that many educators in early childhood services would have once seen as an anathema to our way of working with children to ensure that they were making progress in their learning. It was often equated with the notion of school and testing.

In the current climate we are required to show how children are progressing against Learning Outcomes within the approved frameworks used by early childhood services across Australia. This article looks broadly at assessment in relation to meeting the outcomes in the *Early Years Learning Framework* and the *Queensland Kindergarten Learning Guideline*.

To make the word 'assessment' one that we can have a common understanding about, we must define what this word means in programs for children in before-school services. We need to make it '**our word**' and know what assessment means in practice for the educators, children and families who are part of our learning communities. What will not serve us well is a narrow definition of assessment; therefore examining assessment processes that support educators to find out about each child as a learner can really make assessment work for us and for children. Through using **assessment for, of and as learning**, educators are finding this gives a holistic picture of each child as a learner. This requires that we include the context in

which the learning takes place so the picture supports meaningful teaching responses as educators plan rich learning environments for children.

Assessment for learning is about the ongoing, on the spot type of judgements we make about a child or groups of children as we interact, notice and record what we see during everyday moments during the daily program. This formative process is a familiar one and provides us with many firsthand instances about learning. As we watch, listen and interact with children we are often reflecting 'in the moment' about the significance of what we are noticing. We also engage in many of the intentional teaching moments as we respond to children immediately to support their learning (Gowrie Australia 2010 pg.4). When many of these 'moments' are gathered, over time, the assessment becomes holistic in nature rather than one-off observations with the expectation that you should plan some experience for the child.

In a practical sense this information needs to be recorded. Many educators note this in a reflective diary or a child's portfolio to be used later on for some longer term planning. It may be in the form of dot points or sentence form, could include some narrative, may have a photo of the child's participation or play with

materials. If the information tells a story then it may also be recorded as a learning story with an interpretation about the learning and a link to one or more learning outcomes and some planning possibilities e.g. 'Where to next?'

Assessment as learning helps educators provide feedback to children about their learning and is often what we share with families. This assessment process makes visible the achievements, learning strategies and the dispositions a child uses (Gowrie Australia, 2010, pg 6).

Recording this assessment can include wall documentation, learning stories, group project work, discussions and information and reflections from children and educators, written information or ideas that families have contributed or that an educator has recorded (with permission) after a conversation with a family. It can add rich ideas, theories, thinking and understanding to the original documentation. It is a powerful way to sustain the learning as children are supported to further investigate and discover as new learning emerges.

Assessment of learning is a summative process where children's learning is described in a broad way. It shows what children know, can do and understand at particular points in time (Gowrie Australia 2010, pg. 9).

In practice, this type of assessment is usually done when children transition from one room to another, an educator has a scheduled or requested meeting to discuss a child's learning with a family during the year or when educators are preparing a transition statement before the child makes the transition to school.

Summary

Whatever type of assessment you are using, it is essential to remember to keep that assessment in context, to tell the real story of the child as a learner. To do this there must be room for the voices of children and families in the assessment process.

References

Russell, A 2010, *Assessment in the Early Years*, Gowrie Australia.



Jonty and teacher Melissa Lee share the assessment process