


# VICTORIAN EARLY YEARS LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

PRACTICE PRINCIPLE GUIDE  
ASSESSMENT FOR  
LEARNING AND  
DEVELOPMENT





Practice Principles cultural knowledge story by Dr. Sue Lopez Atkinson (Yorta Yorta) and artwork by Annette Sax (Taungurung)

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# ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide is part of a series of eight guides to the practice principles in the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF).

Use this guide to support individual critical reflection on your practice, for discussion with a mentor or critical friend and as a guide for discussion with colleagues.

The guide draws on the Evidence Paper for Practice Principle: Assessment for Learning and Development written for the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development by the University of Melbourne. For detail about the evidence mentioned in this guide, and for more depth on this Practice Principle refer to the evidence paper found at [www.education.vic.gov.au/earlylearning/eyldf/profresources.htm](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/earlylearning/eyldf/profresources.htm)

## PRACTICE PRINCIPLES – CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE STORY

- Bunjil the Eagle and Waa the Crow represent Aboriginal culture and ***partnerships with families***.
- The water hole symbolises ***reflective practice***.
- The gum leaves with their different patterns and colours represent ***diversity***.
- The stones underneath the leaves represent ***equity***. They reflect the additional support put in place in order for all children to achieve.
- The child and adults standing on 'Ochre mountain' symbolise the ***high/equitable expectations*** we hold for children and adults.
- The family standing on and looking out from 'Ochre mountain' reflects ***assessment for learning and development***. Such assessments draw on children's and families' perspectives, knowledge, experiences and expectations.
- The child and adult figures also represent ***partnerships with professionals***.
- The land symbol as mother earth represents the basis for ***respectful relationships and responsive engagement***.
- The symbols for land, water and people signify ***holistic and integrated*** approaches based on connections to Clan and Country.

(Dr. Sue Lopez-Atkinson, Yorta Yorta)



# WHAT IS ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT?

Assessment is designed to discover what children know, understand, and can do based on what they make, write, draw, say and do. Early childhood professionals assess the progress of children's learning and development, what children are ready to learn and how they can be supported.

All children benefit when assessment reflects a whole-child approach, providing an holistic view of learning and development. Effective early childhood professionals use a range of assessment tools, processes and approaches to build on prior learning, avoid duplication and add value.

Early childhood professionals understand that families play a vital role in their children's learning and development. Early childhood professionals are aware of the health and wellbeing of the family when planning for the child's learning and development.

Early childhood professionals assess children's learning in ways that:

- are authentic and responsive to how all children can best demonstrate their learning and development
- are receptive to and include children's views of their own learning
- include information from a wide range of sources to help them assess and plan effectively
- reveal each child's specific strengths and capabilities and any gaps in achievement that may benefit from additional early intervention
- include the perspectives, knowledge, experiences and expectations of families
- provide families with information and ideas to support the child's learning at home and in other services
- value the culturally specific knowledge about children and their identity, wellbeing, learning and development that is embedded in their communities
- are transparent, giving all adults close to the child access to best 'next steps' in promoting a child's learning and development. (VEYLDF, P. 13)

Assessment serves many purposes and takes many forms. This practice guide examines assessment for learning and development. Assessment for learning and development can be defined as:

*...the process of gathering and analysing information about what children know, can do and understand. It is part of an ongoing cycle that includes planning, documenting and evaluating children's learning*

(Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (EYLF), DEEWR 2009, P. 17).

Early childhood professionals approach assessment in different ways because of their different roles and the service types they work in. Some examples of different assessment strategies or tools and their purposes are listed below.

PROFESSIONAL	PURPOSE	EXAMPLE OF ASSESSMENT STRATEGY OR TOOL
<b>Maternal and child health nurse</b>	To provide a comprehensive and focused approach for the promotion, prevention and early detection of the physical, emotional or social factors affecting young children and their families, and intervention and support where appropriate.	Key Ages and Stages Framework Parents' Evaluation of Developmental Status (PEDS)
<b>Educator in education and care setting</b>	To identify a child's strengths, abilities and interests to inform planning and practice, and to support conversations about children's learning and development with families and other professionals	Anecdotal records
<b>Teacher in the early years of school</b>	To inform (for example) literacy planning and support conversations about children's literacy development and learning with families	English Online Interview
<b>Early childhood intervention professional</b>	To identify the child's strengths, abilities and interests, and to inform planning of supports to promote the learning, development and meaningful participation of children with disabilities and developmental delays in family and community life.	Play-based assessment

Three common kinds of assessment used by early childhood professionals are: assessment of learning and development, assessment as learning and development and assessment for learning and development.

**Assessment of learning and development** summarises what children know, understand and can do at a particular point in time. Assessment of learning and development includes large-scale, population assessment strategies such as the National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) and the Australian Early Development Census. A Transition Learning and Development Statement is also an example of a summary statement, which can be helpful in supporting the continuity of a child's learning and development.

**Assessment as learning and development** occurs when professionals involve children actively in assessing their learning and development. By monitoring and thinking about what and how they learnt with adults and peers, children see themselves as learners and can use this information to learn more effectively and take more control over their learning. Assessment as learning recognises that children are competent and capable learners from birth. When professionals ask children to explain how they learnt something or who helped them to learn, they are using assessment as a tool to support metacognition.

**Assessment for learning and development** is a continuous process of finding out what children know, understand, and can do in order to plan 'what next', build on previous learning and support new learning.

Assessment for learning and development involves gathering evidence based on what children write, draw, make, say and do. Professionals analyse and interpret the information they collect through critical reflection and discussion with colleagues, families, children and other professionals. In their analysis and interpretation they use:

- knowledge of child development and learning
- deep understanding of the Learning and Development Outcomes including dispositions for learning
- knowledge of the child's social and cultural background (the child in context)
- families' understanding about their children's learning and development at home and in the local community
- information from other professionals involved with the child.

All types of assessment strategies contribute to assessment for learning and development.

Combining professional knowledge and different perspectives contributes to a rich and more complete picture of the child's strengths, interests, abilities and needs, which helps to ensure that the 'what next' planning for learning is relevant and responsive to each child.

### Reflective questions

- For what purpose(s) do you assess?
- What do you look for?
- How do you go about it?

# WHY IS ASSESSMENT IMPORTANT?

Assessment for learning and development is essential for many reasons. Effective assessment recognises and responds to children's uniqueness and individuality. Every child is unique. Age by itself does not necessarily indicate a child's skill or capability because of individual differences such as temperament, dispositions and cultural, family and community background. Planning for children's learning and development requires a clear understanding of each child's strengths, abilities, interests and needs gained from using a range of assessment strategies.

Assessment allows professionals to:

- use/interpret evidence to identify what children already know, can do and are ready to learn
- monitor children's progress and achievements over time
- make decisions about experiences and opportunities to advance learning and development in response to individual children's strengths, abilities, interests and needs
- identify children who may benefit from additional or specialised support and what these supports should be
- communicate and collaborate with children, families and other professionals about children's learning and development
- work in partnership with families and children to plan meaningful learning experiences
- recognise that what professionals plan, do, say and provide contributes to every child's learning
- evaluate and improve curriculum decision making so that what is planned has rigour – that is it is meaningful and worth children knowing and doing.



## Assessment processes can empower children in their own learning

- Assessment can help children to be more aware of their learning. When children are aware of their learning they believe more strongly in their ability to achieve their goals because they can see their progress and experience more clearly the rewards for effort. Thinking about your learning is sometimes referred to as 'metacognition.' Metacognition is linked with dispositions for learning such as confidence, curiosity, resilience, persistence, creativity, enthusiasm, imagination and reflexivity.
- Learning dispositions are ways that children typically respond or act that help or hinder their progress as learners. For example, a child who has the disposition to be persistent is more likely to stay on task and to work through problems, which means she is more likely to progress as a learner. A child who shows a disposition to be impulsive is less likely to listen to others or to think carefully before he starts doing something that may hinder his progress as a learner. Adults can promote positive dispositions through modelling them and talking with children about how they learn so that they begin to understand how certain dispositions can help or hinder their learning.
- Assessment is a dynamic process in which both professionals and children collaborate to document and analyse learning and use that information to negotiate and evaluate learning goals and plans.

**METACOGNITION IS THE ABILITY TO THINK ABOUT YOUR OWN THINKING AND LEARNING AND WHAT HELPED OR HINDERED IT.**

### Case study

Children in a kindergarten program gather in small groups at the end of each session to talk about what they did during the session and to identify what they learnt. The educator asks questions and encourages children to ask questions of each other such as 'How did you know how to do that?', 'Who helped you to learn that?', 'Why did you/should you learn about that?' Over the year, the children become skilled at identifying what they learnt and why and what or who helped their learning. They often volunteer that information without being asked. The children are using meta-cognitive strategies when they reflect on their learning and use that knowledge to support new learning. One child for example, identified that he gets distracted easily when he is writing. He suggested that it would be better for him to work on his own when he needed to concentrate on written work.

### Case study

A family day care educator uses strategies to encourage metacognition when she talks with the children at lunchtime. She talks about what happened in the morning and encourages the children to share what they have learnt so that they become more aware of the different ways that learning has happened. She can see how this has helped the children to see themselves as learners. A baby joined the group several months ago, and the children delight in not only watching new learning emerge but commenting on what the baby has figured out and why. The educator gave two examples: figuring out how to drink from a cup with a lid and that pulling a string moves a toy nearer. She says that the children now know the term 'trial and error' and have become very astute observers of the baby's new learning!

## Assessment processes can empower families in their child's learning

When early childhood professionals and families collaborate to support children's learning and development they share information with each other. Each has valuable perspectives and information that can benefit the other. Each is in a stronger position to build on children's prior learning when they share information about what takes place at home and in the service. Going beyond reporting to families, professionals can engage families in the assessment process. Supporting families to see their child as a capable learner, highlighting strengths and interests and noting progress are particularly useful.

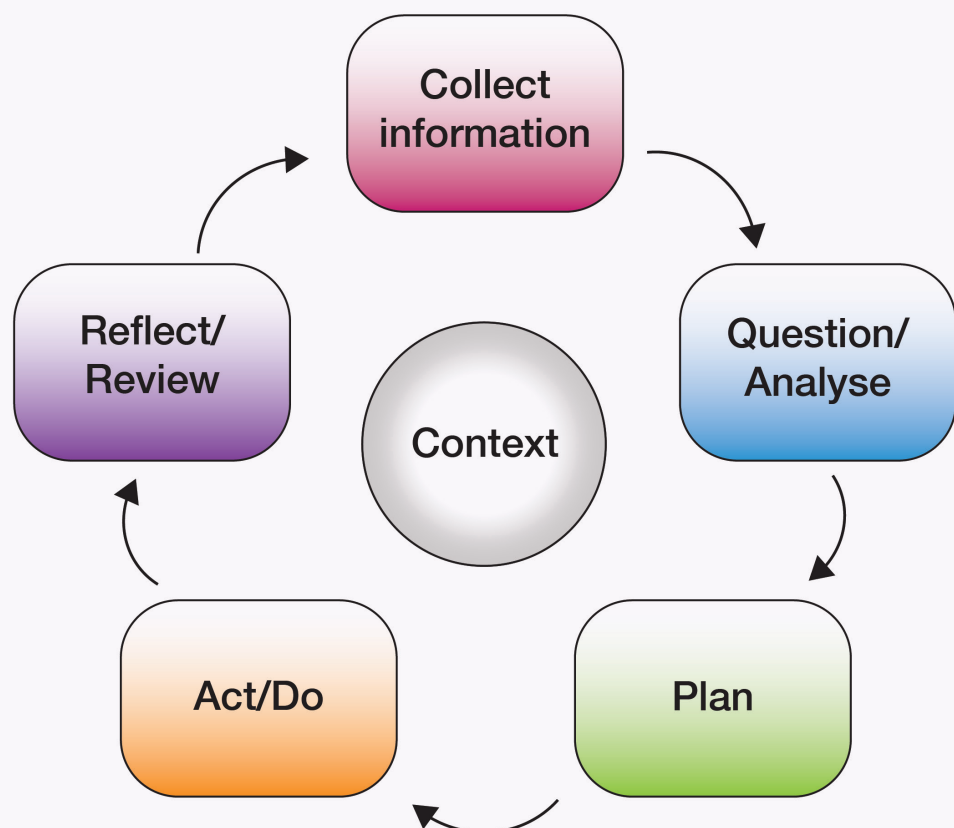
### Case study

A maternal and child health nurse explained how she reminds all parents that babies communicate with us from birth. Some parents recognise that their baby uses particular noises or facial expressions to show delight or anxiety for example, while others haven't noticed the subtle ways their baby communicates different feelings or needs. When families can see those efforts, they are more likely to respond, which reinforces learning.

# HOW DO YOU ASSESS FOR LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT IN PRACTICE?

## Early Years Planning Cycle

Reflection occurs at every step in the Early Years Planning Cycle.



The EYPC is adapted from the *Educators' Guide to the EYLF* (2010)

The diagram shows that gathering and analysing evidence of children's learning and using it to plan (i.e. assessment for learning and development) is an ongoing and essential element in a planning cycle. The key purpose of assessment for learning and development is to provide professionals with the knowledge they need to plan ways to consolidate, build and enrich each child's learning and development and inform their practice.

**Collect information:** Assessment requires professionals to collect information about children's learning and development using a range of strategies and tools including (but not limited to):

- observations (for example, running records, anecdotal records)
- conversations and interviews with children
- samples of children's work
- checklists
- rating scales
- video or audio recordings of children's conversations or play
- webs of children's ideas about a topic from initial discussions and throughout a project
- photographs
- event and time sampling
- tests
- conversations with families, colleagues and other professionals.

**Question/Analyse:** Information gathered requires analysis to make it meaningful and useful. Talking with others, including children, families, colleagues or other professionals, supports analysis. The following questions can help you analyse all forms of evidence of children's learning:

- What is the child learning currently? Identify learning related to one or more of the Learning and Development Outcomes. For example, learning how to transfer knowledge from one context to another (Outcome 4); learning to become confident in a group context (Outcomes 2 and 4).
- What is the child showing me that he or she has learnt? For example, can they initiate conversations with other children or adults; can they create imaginative play roles and dialogue.
- What is the child ready to learn? How do you know that?
- What 'gaps' are there in the learning? Is there learning I expected to observe that is not evident? Why might it be missing?
- Who or what is helping the learning – for example, another child or available resources?
- What is interfering with the learning – for example, too much noise, too big a challenge, not challenging enough?
- At what stage is the learning – beginning, emerging, exploratory, practising, consolidating, extending, confident, mastery?
- What learning disposition(s) is the child using? For example, persistence, imagination, resilience, curiosity.
- What is the purpose of the learning? For example, do children know why the learning is important?

**Plan:** Decide what to do next based on your analysis and discussions with others and on the understanding that the child's experience across the entire session or day matters and needs to be planned for. For example, if analysis showed that a child was not able to discriminate between the sounds in words (phonemic awareness) planning for that child could include working with him or her to strengthen learning about the differences in sounds in the environment more generally as that provides the skill foundation for phonemic awareness. At this point you may also consider other services and supports with which you could link a family and their child.

**Act and do:** This element of the planning cycle is about implementing plans using intentional strategies to ensure children's learning progresses.

**Review:** Reflect on what works well and what doesn't (in terms of children's learning and your professional practice) and how children are being supported to learn across all the Learning and Development Outcomes. What other services and supports might you be able to link with to better support a child and their family?



# EFFECTIVE ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Effective assessment:

- uses authentic and appropriate approaches
- provides an holistic understanding of each child's learning and development
- is objective and non-judgemental
- is ongoing, measuring progress over time
- recognises cultural diversity and perspectives
- incorporates children's views
- incorporates families' and other professionals' views
- incorporates and uses assessment of all aspects of the curriculum or program.

Each of these points is explored below.

## Authentic and appropriate assessment in practice

Authentic assessments take place:

- in environments that are familiar and natural to children
- when children are comfortable
- when children can engage with experiences, materials and equipment that interest them
- in everyday experiences.

### Case study

Maria observed Paul working on a box construction near to where some other children were building with blocks. Paul, diagnosed earlier in the year as having autism spectrum disorder, plays on his own and interacts rarely with other children. Maria has noticed some progress however, as he responds most times when children ask him a question or make a request directly. Maria watched as Paul looked in the direction of the children nearby and said 'Can someone help me hold this so I can tape the wing on?' He repeated the request and a child came over. 'Hold it like this', he said as he showed her the angle he wanted the box to be. When the taping was completed, he made eye contact and said 'Thanks for that.' As this was the first time she had noticed such an interaction, Maria mentioned it to his dad when he came to pick Paul up and later she discussed it with the ECIS key worker and made a note in Paul's folder. Based on her assessment, Maria planned experiences that would encourage interdependence between the children to continue to encourage and extend positive, equal interaction, and promote Paul's friendship with the child who had helped him as she knew this child was quietly confident and showed empathy for others.

This educator learned by observing Paul's play carefully that he is able to ask for help from other children, is confident to give instructions to another child and shows appreciation for the help. She wondered if this project, which interested him very much, contributed to the learning that she observed.

Assessments are more authentic when children are interested and when they have the opportunity to demonstrate skills and knowledge across a number of domains and in different contexts. Evidence of learning and development can be found when children:

- have conversations with other children and with adults
- participate in daily routine experiences such as mealtimes
- engage in child-directed play indoors and outdoors
- take part in adult-led experiences, such as learning a new song
- are on their own
- interact with others
- face challenges.

Effective assessment involves using a range of approaches that are appropriate for each child's abilities because children learn and demonstrate their learning in many different ways. Assessment needs to:

- be both informal and more formal (observations or a standardised assessment tool, for example)
- occur in a number of different ways
- take place in different contexts and settings (during arrival time and in outdoor play experiences, for example)
- be culturally appropriate
- use a variety of tools or strategies appropriate for the purpose.

### Discussion starter

Carla is interested to assess the communication skills of Mali, a 30-month-old child in her group. This child's family are refugees who have been in the country for just over a year. She knows that Mali understands much of what is said to her, but she speaks infrequently. Carla has only heard her use a few words in English that she recognises. Occasionally Mali speaks in her home language but when she realises that no one understands, she stops. Carla and the educators she works with are concerned that there may be a need for a more formal assessment, but they want to collect some information first.

- What would be general considerations about the way you would go about doing this assessment?
- What would you do first?
- Who would you involve?
- What specific approaches might you use and why?

## Holistic assessment in practice

Assessment needs to be comprehensive or holistic. Holistic assessment involves exploring and assessing different aspects of children's learning and development in different contexts, environments and relationships. The purpose of holistic assessment is to gain a clear and comprehensive picture of children's learning and development so that you can plan appropriately across all the Learning and Development Outcomes.

### Discussion starter

Melissa, an educator in a toddler room, encourages her team to be on the lookout for new learning that the children are demonstrating. She says that becoming really familiar with the Outcomes in the Frameworks has given them a 'mindset' about two things: 'We're really aware now that evidence of learning happens all the time and also that it doesn't make sense to look at the Outcomes in isolation. An example of one is usually an example of two, three, or more.' She gave an example of walking with a 17-month-old to the office to hand over a form. The child stopped to point out fish in the aquarium, said the word 'fish', handed the form confidently to the person in the office, led the way back to the room and stopped at her locker to show Melissa the photo of her family displayed there. Melissa said, 'In that simple everyday activity there's evidence of learning in most of the Outcomes. For example, the child understood this routine in the way she confidently participated and led the way back to her room (Outcome 5: Communication - children understand the pattern of routines; Outcome 3: Community - children make predictions about their daily experiences). The important thing is for us to be aware of learning and to plan how to extend or consolidate the child's learning and to ask the question, what does this mean for my practice?'

- What other learning in the five Outcomes can you identify in this example?
- What might you plan next for this child based on your analysis of her learning? Try to think of plans other than or in addition to traditional learning experiences.
- How do you and your colleagues look for evidence of learning over the entire day or session?
- Identify examples of how you plan for children's learning in routines.
- How do you ensure that you plan for learning that links to more than one Outcome?
- How can you improve your understanding of the Outcomes to help with holistic, appropriate and ongoing assessment of children's learning? What are some specific steps you could take?

## Objective assessment in practice

Assessments of children's learning and development require analysis by professionals, who use their knowledge of the Learning and Development Outcomes and take into account their understanding of the child and the context of the child's life.

The Practice Principle, High expectations for every child, reminds professionals to critically reflect on any biases or stereotypes they may bring to assessment and how these might affect their analysis and interpretations. For example, some professionals may not be aware of a bias towards girls or boys. They may expect more or less of one gender, which means their assessments of boys and girls may be flawed because they expect to see different things.

Another example is that if professionals assess a child who is learning English as an additional language, or a child who has difficulties with oral communication as 'a child with no language,' they show a limited understanding of what being an effective communicator in any language means and the many effective ways children communicate with others. For example, children with verbal communication challenges or children who are learning English as an additional language can be effective communicators through facial expressions, body language, sign language or using media such as art, dance or movement.

## Reflective questions

- Do you always think of boys and girls as learners in the same way?
- Have you encountered different expectations for boys and girls in your professional experience? If so, where do these ideas come from?
- Do you talk with families to challenge their expectations of boys and girls?
- How do you ensure that your program and practice do not reflect or reinforce gender stereotypes? What about stereotypes related to language and cultural background?
- How do you ensure that your approach to assessment fosters positive attitudes to children from culturally and linguistic diverse backgrounds and minimises stereotypes or judgemental attitudes?

## Ongoing assessment over time

Children's behaviour varies from day to day and from situation to situation. Children's learning is not always a linear or step-by-step process, because they don't merely absorb knowledge or information like a sponge. Children have to actively make sense of what they experience, hear, see and do, and that can mean re-constructing or co-constructing learning as they understand something more deeply through practising it over and over or doing things in different contexts or working with others, for example.

The most informative assessments take place continually over a period of time with a range of assessment tools or strategies. Assessment identifies progress, or the 'distance travelled' in learning and development for each child over time. The distance travelled may include major changes or small steps in learning, all of which should be recognised and used to inform planning 'what next' for a child.

The VEYLDF and the EYLF shift the focus for assessment from developmental domains and identifying deficits in children's learning and development to identifying children's learning in the five Outcomes using a strength-based approach. This is based on the principle that children are competent learners from birth. Developmental information remains important because it helps professionals recognise typical or non-typical development and how that is connected to children's learning. The following example highlights this shift.

### Discussion starter

In the following table, read the assessment example in the left hand column.

- Is the example familiar?
- Are you using this type of observation, analysis and planning? Why?
- What are the limitations of this approach when you are using the VEYLDF and the EYLF?

Now consider the example on the right.

- What is different about this approach?
- Does this approach mean developmental information doesn't matter? Why or why not? Think about the child's age.
- What do you notice about the planning and practice decisions? How do they connect with the VEYLDF Practice Principles and the Outcomes?



DEVELOPMENTAL DOMAIN-FOCUSED ASSESSMENT		LEARNING-FOCUSED ASSESSMENT	
<b>Place:</b>	Toddler room, drawing table	<b>Place:</b>	Toddler room, drawing table
<b>Child:</b>	Asher	<b>Child:</b>	Asher
<b>Age:</b>	2.6 years	<b>Age:</b>	2.6 years
<b>Observation:</b>	Asher is holding a large crayon in her right hand, using a full handgrip and making marks on the paper.	<b>Observation:</b>	Asher is confidently holding a large crayon in her right hand and making circular marks on the paper. She does this over and over and smiles at me and at the drawings she makes and says, "Look, look, me, draw!" She chooses to do this activity many times each day this week.
<b>Developmental domain:</b>	<b>Fine motor</b> Asher is using fine motor skills using her hand and wrist to draw marks on the paper. She is unable to use a pincer grip.	<b>Analyse/ Question:</b>	What is Asher learning as she makes marks?  Asher is learning about being a mark maker, which is an important way to communicate with others and make meaning. She seems to understand the power of making marks, as she wants to repeat this over and over. Maybe she has some awareness of its importance in our community? Her parents said she likes being near them when they are writing at home and that she wants to join in. She is writing on everything at home including the walls!
<b>Planning objective:</b>	For Asher to improve her fine motor skills.	<b>Links with Learning and Development Outcomes:</b>	<b>Outcome 5:</b> Children are effective communicators and <b>Outcome 4:</b> Children are confident and involved learners.
<b>Activities:</b>	Play-dough and tearing paper to strengthen hand and wrist muscles and flexibility.	<b>Planning:</b>	Continue to observe Asher's mark making and to talk about this with her parents.  Provide daily opportunities for her to make marks with a range of media (crayons, pencils or paint). Ensure these tools are comfortable for her hand and that she has access to large paper. Talk with her about writing and its purpose when I am taking notes or filling in information sheets for example.

## Culturally and linguistically appropriate assessment in practice

Assessment needs to take into account how family, cultural and language backgrounds influence the knowledge and skills that children acquire and the type of learning opportunities they have. For example, a child may be learning English as an additional language, or the child's family may be recently arrived refugees and have experienced the difficulties associated with this process.

When children from refugee backgrounds enrol in school or an education and care setting for the first time, the focus for planning and assessment might be on their wellbeing, as this is essential for children to feel safe and secure to explore and learn. Part of the focus on wellbeing would be to encourage the maintenance of children's home language as they begin to learn English as an additional language.

Assessments for young children learning English as an additional language require careful attention if they are to show professionals what children know and can do. An effective way to assess young children's comprehension skills is to read or tell them a story they like and follow up by asking them questions about what happened in the story and who was involved. This is best undertaken with individuals or small groups, as some children can be reluctant to answer questions in a large group.

For a child learning English as an additional language, story comprehension could be assessed using their first language if there is access to an adult who speaks that language. Appropriate assessment for children learning English as an additional language could also include asking children to draw or act out their responses.

## Assessment incorporating children's views in practice

The EYLF promotes the idea that learning is most effective when children are active agents or participants in and contributors to their learning and the assessment of their learning. They benefit from getting feedback from professionals and other children about their learning and development. Making sure they have opportunities to respond to your feedback is crucial.

Children also benefit from being able to contribute to goal setting related to their learning. Similarly, the Principles of Learning and Teaching P-12 state that children learn best when they feel valued and when they are encouraged and supported to take responsibility for their learning. The following example highlights these Principles in action.

### Case study

In a Grade 2 classroom where projects are part of an integrated approach to learning, the teacher encourages children to discuss their progress each week. He has found that this helps children to be more independent in their project work as he gives practical feedback on what seems to be working or not. Together they find solutions to problems such as where the child could find more information about a topic. Peers also provide feedback when each child presents a progress report on their project.

A valuable teaching and learning strategy that links to including children's perspectives in assessment is using shared, sustained thinking and interactions and conversations with individual children or with small groups. In the example above, the conversations about learning between the teacher and a child reflect the use of shared, focused and sustained thinking to improve learning. Shared, sustained interactions and conversations between adults and children promote learning when adults:

- ask authentic open-ended questions
- encourage children to ask questions
- make meaningful comments
- offer explanations at times and also encourage children to explain
- promote collaborative problem solving
- clarify concepts or ideas
- collaborate to create new ideas together (co-construction)
- make connections with previous learning
- extend conversations
- discuss children's theories and hypotheses.

Participating in these types of interactions supports children and adults to understand more about the child's learning and to use that understanding to plan for further learning.

## Discussion starter

Read this transcript of a conversation about dinosaurs between two four-year-old children and their educator and answer the questions below.

Brian and Kylie, playing together at the collage table, are talking about making dinosaurs out of boxes. Paula, the educator, also sitting at the table, is listening to their conversation.

**Brian:** 'Dinosaurs live in the bush!'

**Kylie, shaking her head:** 'No! I went to the bush and I didn't see dinosaurs.'

**Paula:** 'Brian, why do you think dinosaurs live in the bush?'

**Brian:** 'My big brother told me.'

**Kylie:** 'No, I didn't see any dinosaurs in the bush.'

**Paula:** 'Remember when we read those books about dinosaurs? What did they tell us about dinosaurs?'

**Kylie:** 'Some of them were very big and some were small.'

**Brian:** 'Yeah, the big one is called T Rex and he could eat us.'

**Paula:** 'Yes, you're right, there were different sizes and the biggest was called Tyrannosaurus Rex. Do you remember where they lived?'

**Brian:** 'In a jungle I think.'

**Kylie:** 'No, in a forest, not a jungle, wasn't it Paula?'

**Paula:** 'Yes, more like a forest. Are the dinosaurs still alive?'

**Brian:** 'No, they got extinct.'

**Paula:** 'You've got a good memory Brian, to remember the word 'extinct'. What does that mean do you think?'

**Brian:** 'When things are gone, like King Kong and things.'

**Kylie:** 'It means you are dead.'

**Brian:** 'And it means there aren't any more like you too.'

**Paula:** 'So if the dinosaurs are extinct Brian, do you think they are living in the bush?'

**Brian:** 'Maybe they are living in bush far away from here.'

- How does this example demonstrate shared, sustained thinking and interactions?
- Using the dot points in the previous section, list the features of sustained shared interactions and conversations, to assist your thinking.
- How did Paula prompt the children's thinking and extend their learning?
- Why were her strategies effective?
- How could a transcript of an interaction like this example be used as an assessment strategy or tool?
- What learning processes were happening during this conversation?
- What literacy learning is evident in this example? Make specific links with the preamble and descriptors in Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators (VEYLDF, p. 22).
- What do Brian and Kylie know about dinosaurs? What misunderstandings were evident?
- What could Paula do next to consolidate or extend their learning?

## Assessment incorporating families' and other professionals' views

Families play an essential role in their children's learning and development and are a valuable source of information about their children. Families can give information about their child's past experiences, cultural background, temperament, interests, abilities, behaviour and learning in different settings. This information helps professionals to plan relevant learning experiences and to identify families' concerns. One example of incorporating families' perspectives in assessment is the use of the Parents' Evaluation of Developmental Status (PEDS), used widely by maternal and child health nurses to identify parents' perspectives about their child.

### Case study

Mindy's mum told her family day care educator that Mindy is very interested in 'big writing' as she calls it, especially when her older siblings do their homework. The educator said she could support this interest by including writing materials such as notebooks and pencils in the home corner space so that Mindy can practise learning to be a writer. The educator also suggested that Mindy could write in the sign-in book alongside her mother's signature. The parent and the educator continued to find authentic and purposeful ways to encourage Mindy's learning to communicate through writing along with other ways such as drawing, painting and talking.

This example shows how an educator made intentional planning decisions to promote a child's learning as an effective communicator (Communication Outcome 5), in particular:

- using writing to communicate for a specific purpose (sign-in books, sending a message)
- experiencing different ways of communicating (writing, drawing, painting and talking)
- practising being a literacy user as a writer.

New understandings about a child as a learner arise from combining families' and other professionals' perspectives (See Practice Guide: Partnerships with Families, and Practice Guide: Partnerships with Professionals for further ideas on collaboration with families and professionals.)

The Practice Guides can be found at:

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/edcare/Pages/profresource.aspx>

EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFESSIONALS VALUE COMMUNICATION WITH FAMILIES AND WHAT THEY LEARN FROM THEM. THIS INCLUDES DEVELOPING AN UNDERSTANDING OF EACH CHILD'S HOME LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AND THE HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF THE FAMILY. (VEYLDF, P. 13)



## Case study

An educator explained how she works with early childhood intervention professionals to support her understanding of and planning for children with disabilities. The early childhood intervention professionals contribute their perspectives on the children's learning and development, especially factors that might challenge children's progress in learning, such as low muscle tone or difficulty with auditory processing. In consultation with families and the children, together they develop learning plans. These plans provide a starting point for a program that will further stimulate learning and development to ensure that the children continue to progress in their learning through active participation in everyday experiences. For example, for a child with low muscle strength in his hands, which made using tools such as cutlery, brushes or pencils difficult, they used specialised equipment to support him to develop a strong sense of wellbeing (Outcome 3) and effective communication skills (Outcome 5).

## Reflective questions

- How do you involve families in assessing children's learning and development? What more could you do?
- How do families know that you value their knowledge about and perspectives on their child? What is the evidence?
- How do you involve other professionals who work with a child in assessing their learning and development?
- What more could you do or what can you do better?
- How do you share assessment information with families to support learning and development in the home?

## Evaluation of curriculum or program components to support assessment

Professionals not only assess children's learning, they also evaluate or assess their program or curriculum (environments, resources, routines, experiences, events, interactions, conversations) and how it supports or limits children's learning and development. Reflecting on practice both contributes to assessment of children's learning and follows from it.

Professionals gather information that supports, informs, assesses and enriches decision-making about appropriate professional practices, use evidence to inform planning for early childhood experiences and practice, and challenge and change some practices

They collaborate with colleagues, families and children to reflect on a particular part of the curriculum or environment to determine whether or not it is supporting learning and development.

**CRITICAL REFLECTION INVOLVES CLOSELY EXAMINING ALL ASPECTS OF EVENTS AND EXPERIENCES FROM DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES. (EYLF, P. 13)**

### Discussion starter

In a study of children's literacy and numeracy experiences in the year prior to school entry, families took photographs of these experiences in their home and community contexts. In the photographs one child was shown doing word-finder puzzles with her mum, using a calculator to do simple addition and making up songs to sing on her toy karaoke machine. This child's meaningful and interesting literacy and numeracy learning at home contrasted with the experiences available in her kindergarten program, where she often seemed uninterested and disengaged as she wandered around the room. Reflecting on the photographs and having a discussion with the parents and the child, the educator recognised that she needed to plan differently to extend this child's learning. For example, she provided word games and puzzles, encouraged the child to teach other children her own song compositions and helped her to write the words down. She also introduced calculators for children to use in their dramatic play. She noticed that other children were also ready for these literacy and numeracy learning experiences.

- How does this example show the link between thinking about practice and curriculum decision-making that supports or extends children's learning?
- What was the benefit to the educator from what the parents shared with her?
- How does your literacy and numeracy curriculum build on what each child knows, understands and can do from their home and community experiences? How could you improve this knowledge sharing with families and children?

# IN SUMMARY

Early childhood professionals draw upon a range of assessment practices and strategies to find out about children's learning and development – what they know, can do and understand. They use this knowledge along with information from families and in collaboration with children and other professionals to plan for the next steps in a child's learning and development.

Assessment is ongoing and frequent. It is integral to and informs everyday practice and curriculum decision making. Effective assessment practice requires professionals to:

- work collaboratively with children, families, colleagues and other professionals
- recognise the importance of analysing evidence of children's learning so that they can make sense of it for themselves, children, families and other professionals
- use assessment strategies that are ongoing and that match the dynamic and holistic nature of children's learning and development
- use the evidence gained from assessment to inform teaching and learning.

# REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

Clark, P. (2009). *Supporting Children Learning English as a Second Language in the Early Years (birth to six years)*. Melbourne: Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA).

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Katz, L. (2012). Professor Lilian Katz: *Integrated Teaching and Learning Approaches and the Project Approach*. DEECD, Melbourne. Lecture available online:

<https://fuse.education.vic.gov.au/Search/Results?AssociatedPackageId=&Querytext=lilian+Katz&SearchScope=All>

Further advice and professional learning modules on assessment for learning and development can be found on the DET website: *VEYLDF Module 4: Assessment for learning and development: the early years planning cycle*

<https://fuse.education.vic.gov.au/ResourcePackage/LandingPage?ObjectId=a905a8f1-69e8-438d-a480-9a8b850d358f&SearchScope=All>

Prep to Year 10 assessment advice

<https://fuse.education.vic.gov.au/Resource/LandingPage?ObjectId=ac9c5b27-9b98-443a-a29f-6a9a38241882&SearchScope=Primary>

