

Assessment

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Chapter overview

Assessment is a crucial aspect of teaching and learning, yet often it is seen as a challenge when trying to align external pressures such as government standards with a practitioner's internal values and belief about how learners learn best. The EYFS states that every child deserves the best possible start in life so that they can fulfil their potential and recognises that the experiences children have before the age of 5 have an impact on their future life chances (Sammons et al., 2007; Sylva et al., 2012; DfE, 2014). However, an ambition to achieve what is best for the child can be problematic when different early childhood settings have to grapple with how the impact of learning experiences can be assessed and monitored in a manner that does not undermine effective pedagogy and play-based learning (Sylva et al., 2004), while at the same time attempting to provide continuity between providers through reporting mechanisms and being seen to be accountable. As a result, assessment can take centre stage instead of the child. In this chapter we discuss assessment that takes place in all early childhood contexts, such as childminders, crèche, nursery, preschool or school, as they all can provide quality provision and will use assessment to support and monitor learning. Good assessment practice also recognises the valuable role that parents and carers have in support of their

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child's development, and their contribution to their learning and assessment is a crucial part of understanding the individual child's achievements.

Although in this chapter we explore some of the challenges associated with assessment and record keeping and share examples of effective practice from a number of different perspectives in England, it is important to say that the principles are equally applicable within other countries and can be translated for different ages as well as different settings.

This chapter aims to help you understand:

- the principles of key assessment types
- the challenges between a mechanistic approach to assessment and good practice
- the role of ongoing informed observation in gathering valid assessment evidence.

Assessment types

It is well documented that the experience a young child has during early childhood has a long-term impact on their future success (Save the Children Fund, 2013) and that through quality pre-school experiences, these benefits remain with the child past the age of 11 years thus demonstrating that quality early childhood provision, where teaching, learning, and assessment are used to enable a child to succeed, is highly influential in a child's continuing progress and success, especially for those from disadvantaged backgrounds (Sylva, 2008, Sylva et al., 2010).

Assessment in early childhood education and care is the gathering of a range of evidence about children's learning and behaviours so that judgements can be made about their progress. These judgements can fall into two broad categories:

- judgements about how to design and implement the next steps for further development in learning; and
- judgements on what has been learned and achieved.

Assessment can be divided into two main categories: assessment that is primarily about *learning* and assessment that is primarily about *accountability* (Black and Wiliam, 1998). Across all stages of education, assessment is growing in importance

for the learner's perspective and for accountability purposes. There is a range of different ways in which assessment information is gathered and used, although not all of them place the child at the centre of the process and this can cause great pressure for practitioners and in some instances a cause of stress for the learner and their family (Ward, 2009).

The main types of assessment are:

- diagnostic
- formative
- authentic
- summative
- accountability.

Diagnostic assessment is usually undertaken when an issue is suspected. Its intention is to identify limiting factors that may impede a child's development in order to do something about it and also gives specific measurable knowledge about the current situation through specific tests or standardised activities. It includes specially designed optional tests within the first ten days of life to screen for issues such as hearing loss. Another example of diagnostic assessment occurs around the age of eighteen months for the checking for autism (CHAT). This screening assessment is undertaken by a primary healthcare worker and is usually conducted in the child's home. It includes discussions with the parent(s) as well as first-hand observation by the specially trained professional. These types of assessments tend to be undertaken by other professionals, such as healthcare workers, rather than early childhood practitioners, and the role of associated professionals will be explored in Chapter 15.

Assessment for learning (AFL) forms part of what is termed 'formative practice' and focuses on assessment that has at its core the child's learning and underpins effective pedagogy across all phases of education. Through a series of observations, listening, discussion and reflection, information about the child's learning and development is gathered – information about what the child currently knows and can do and what they still need to know or achieve. This results in the practitioner and learner taking the necessary action to promote further understanding and development (Harrison and Howard, 2009). This assessment process informs the practitioner, the parents and the child about the child's attainment and interests, which then informs the daily planning of experiences and scaffolds the child's learning to further support the successful development of the whole child. This 'taking action' ultimately needs to be done by the learner but scaffolded by the practitioner, and is crucial to the success of AFL. In this ongoing process of 'feedback-for-feedforward' the curriculum is a resource for learning rather than a limiting structure to meet external assessment requirements, and it is this that makes AFL an effective and efficient means of assessment.

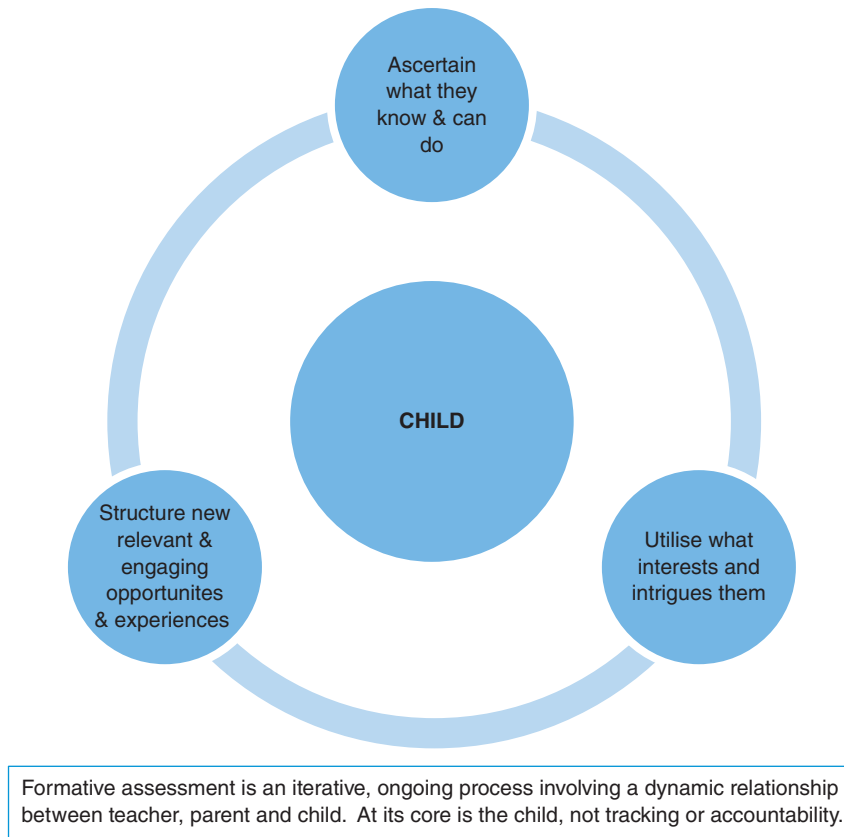


Figure 9.1 *The circle of formative assessment*

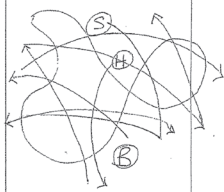
Dubiel (2014) comments on the skill and apparent ease that an experienced practitioner has in finding ‘invisible moments of possibility’ because of their ability to communicate with children, observe with purpose and be prepared to expect the unexpected. In this way they are able to gather evidence of learning (assessment) to inform their practice and scaffold progress. Information gleaned through this ongoing assessment approach is then used to shape the curriculum by considering the child’s personality, their cognitive and physical developmental needs and natural opportunities that may arise within the setting. Any planned scheme of work can then be adapted in response to this process of ongoing formative assessment and can focus on developing a particular skill, deepening cognitive understanding or enhancing a child’s socialisation capabilities within the group.

Case study

Examples of formative assessment

The early childhood practitioners were using observation sheets to gather information and these were the steps that they followed:

- 1 On each play area there was a packet of blank observation forms stuck to the wall.
- 2 If a member of staff suddenly observed something relevant about a child (opportunistic assessment) they would complete a form and then put it in the child's folder (note the example in Figure 9.2 is observing four children).
- 3 At the end-of-the-day briefing, this information would be used to structure the next day's activities or groups (or influence the planning for the following weeks).
- 4 Where there was appropriate learning goals evidence, this was also recorded on the child's profile.

Observation sheet for 4		Adult J. B.	Date [redacted]	Time 2:10
EY Formative Assessment				
The scene BTO Train set				
1. Adam I'm going under the tunnel The shop man's coming! Shu, shu, shu. I've got an electric train at home. (leaves the area).	2. Sam Watch out, train coming + whoo' tututut Oh, we've stuck Excuse me (to Ben) I've got a train now. Somebody has left this. (makes "train" sound effects). Sam left area	3. Harry the train's crashed! "Oops!" - knocks blocks over. - Starts to build them up again. Oops a daisy! You've blocked the tunnel Sir! (to Ben). I haven't got a track at home this is best! Hey - you've broke the track (goes to hit Sam). "Crash" "Stop" "Help! Help!" the train's crashed	4. Ben I need that (takes an engine). Begins to join carriages Ben put a hand hat & reflective pdeet. - left area.	Setting Train - carpet area 
Any surprises Worked well together - little disagreement through observed activity	Involvement/interest Adam left - Sam Harry Ben very absorbed.	What next - encourage extension of this activity next session - use of maps? plans?		
Ben played independently - made no sound effects, no running commentary. Emily arrived - this train is going to the zoo! (she'd previously played here;				

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Observation sheet for 2	Adult J [redacted]	Date [redacted]	Time 9:55 - 10:10
EY Formative Assessment.			
The scene Wet sand.			
<p>Ben</p> <p>1 Ben lets make a sandcastle. Wet, we could pretend ← → "Shee e, shee shee e" — Began shuddering sand, patting & smoothing. "Look, I've found a flag!" "I need people too". Right, we're looking for a flag. Look it becomes a sandcastle. (I asked Ben if he would like to make some flags - offered a range of materials/shades - Ben stuck a label around a cardboard slide) "One for me, one for Stephen. D'you want one Max?"</p>	<p>2 Stephen</p> <p>O.K. but we haven't got a flag look, the snaball has broken Cree creee (Lifting sand) Began to walk away, Ben called him back. Stephen copied. Ben's actions Stephen distracted by other children's playings & noises. "We need a big castle like that." Kate arrived "that's our sandcastle. Shall we get some sand. Kate? Went to get people figures. "Snaballs are coming down from the sky."</p>	<p>Setting</p> 	
Any surprises Stephen was very animated + lots of conversation.	Involvement/interest Instigated by Ben	What next Read - draw?	

Figure 9.2 Example from formative assessment

This seems a very 'manageable' process to give good formative information, which practitioners and other adults in the setting used well. It resulted in excellent assessment and was not onerous as it was often (but not solely) opportunistic. The reason it was good assessment for learning was because it informed next steps, and either activities were restructured to build on the learning or particular children were 'targeted' for specific activities and focused development.



Reflective task

- Formative assessment is central to early childhood education and care in order to understand children's achievements and progress in learning and development. Reflect on the above case study and consider how you can plan activities and the environment around this child.

Authentic assessment is ongoing observation of the child engaged in typical activities and routines in its environment. It is similar to formative assessment, but the information that is gathered with authentic assessment can be used immediately from the practitioners and others such as parents or children as they target learning goals and are personalised to children's skills and abilities.

Bagnato (2007) and Bagnato et al. (2010) describe eight standards for authentic assessment:

- 1 acceptability – focusing on what is desired behaviour;
- 2 authenticity – the use of natural observation methods and contexts;
- 3 collaboration – parent–professional teamwork;
- 4 evidence – evidence base;
- 5 multifactors – synthesis of the gathered information;
- 6 sensitivity – ‘listening to the child’ rather than the standards the child has to meet;
- 7 universality – individual focus on a child;
- 8 utility – usefulness for understanding the child's behaviour.

It can be described as an opportunistic assessment as it is often achieved ‘on the fly’ or ‘on the spot’, especially by experienced qualified practitioners as they are attuned to what is significant. These authentic assessments can be documented using a simple system of ‘sticky-notes’ written by the observer and placed in the child's individual folder or ‘box’ or for consideration by the key worker. By having a realistic period of time elapse before reviewing the evidence the key worker is also able to select the best evidence for record keeping purposes. This approach does not interfere with the learning, but runs seamlessly within the normal routine of the setting and capitalises on the moment as described in the following case study.

Case study

Authentic assessment

Previously an individual activity had taken place with the volunteer ‘granny’ who was a regular visitor to the setting and knew the children well. With her guidance each child had carefully planted bulbs for ‘Mother's Day’ and watered them. On a subsequent day the children were left to their own devices to plant sunflower seeds to grow in school, before taking them home. This was part of their topic on ‘pets and plants’.

It was noticed by the teacher that a small group of children decided they were going to water the seedlings by themselves. One 4-year-old girl found using the

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small watering can difficult to manipulate. This was noticed by a young 4-year-old boy who was engaged in a different task nearby. Unexpectedly, he got up and carefully helped to tip the watering can from the base, ensuring the young girl was still 'in charge' of the watering process.

The practitioner who noticed this recognised it as demonstrating a high level of problem solving, and care and consideration for others. This forms part of the English learning goals for 'personal, social and emotional development' and was considered significant as the practitioner recognised that most children of this age would have taken over and watered the seed for the girl, instead of scaffolding her success as he had.

Summative assessment refers to the final outcome and focus on what has been learnt and achieved at the conclusion of a defined period. The main purposes are:

- for accountability
- for tracking purposes
- evaluative
- and form part of the child's permanent assessment record.

It tends to focus on what has been learned when mapped against agreed benchmarks. This type of assessment summarises what the child can demonstrate at a particular point in time and can often be given a numerical value. Statutory national testing is an example where summative assessment data have become a principal means of measuring performance through which settings, schools and specific practitioners can be held accountable. This has led to certain aspects of the curriculum being given prominence over others, including an overemphasis on subject-specific assessments, such as phonological awareness or knowledge of numbers, compared to a more holistic assessment that includes important aspects of learning such as self-concepts and creativity (Dunphy, 2010). There are also summative assessment systems that give a measure of a child's engagement and emotional well-being, such as the Leuven Scales of Involvement and Well-Being (Laevers, 2005), which, in conjunction with other means of assessment, help not just to track development and characteristics of effective learning, but help to shape a more effective learning environment, particularly for those children who might be at risk.

Assessment for accountability: This accountability aspect of assessment is an important part of early childhood education and care. While recognised as necessary, one of the challenges that practitioners have to face is addressing statutory requirements without compromising the learning and well-being of the child. In recent times there

has been a greater tendency for practitioners to limit their assessment evidence to the final products and outcomes (summative assessment) that a child produces with less value being placed on the evidence of the process. This seems to be in response to pressure from statutory assessment requirements, such as required for the EYFS framework in England or the Curriculum for Excellence in Scotland, and has led to a narrowing of the curriculum (NCSL, 2010), leading to an increase in adult-dominated activities so the necessary evidence can be observed and ‘the list ticked’. As shown in Chapter 3, Northern Ireland has stipulated that assessment for accountability is most effective when it includes moderation of practice and the sharing of meaningful information about children’s learning. This may include ‘moderation’ meetings within ‘families’ of providers to share effective practice and ‘tease-out’ specific concerns about the validity or reliability of the collated evidence. Accountability is also likely to include comparing assessment data across similar groups and this usually forms part of a statutory inspection process within a national framework such as Ofsted in England and Eystyn in Wales.

The specifics of this process of accountability vary across the four nations of the UK (see Chapter 3), although they all share the same principles in terms of providing a robust system that gives confidence in the decisions made by the professionals. The inspection process also draws on the summative assessment data to provide professional challenge in terms of ensuring all children are supported in the process of achieving their full potential.

Why assess?

The EPPE findings clearly state the importance of quality experiences within the pre-school period to enhance children’s academic and socio-behavioural development (Sylva et al., 2004). This extensive piece of research identified specific factors that do, and do not, seem instrumental in good development for all children, and particularly in addressing the needs of disadvantaged children. Boys were found to gain significant benefit from quality pre-school experiences in relation to girls, although both boys and girls benefit regardless of part-time or full-time experiences. It seems to be in relation to long-term duration, such as three years of quality experience as opposed to just one year.

Bailey and Drummond’s (2006: 149–70) small-scale research on assessing who is at risk and why in early literacy found that while early childhood practitioners are generally good at recognising which children are struggling with literacy skills development, they are less skilled at pinpointing the cause or how to intervene effectively. They suggest that in order to implement an effective assessment process that informs pedagogy the early childhood team should have continuous professional development.

It is well recognised that better-quality provision has been associated with more staff being qualified and guided by qualified teachers, which is where the current

guidance in the EYFS documentation can contribute to addressing the professional development needs of all persons involved in early childhood provision (Nutbrown, 2012).

The work undertaken by Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2002) found that when educational and social development were seen as complementary and equally important, children made all-round good progress. She identified such things as structured interventions between adults and small groups of children and sustained shared thinking opportunities to extend children's learning as beneficial because they require a deep understanding of child development. The Tickell Review (2011) draws on a wealth of evidence to state that the experiences children have in their early lives have a profound impact on their cognitive, personal and social well-being, not just while in formal education, but throughout their life. She found that those children in the lowest 20% in terms of academic achievement and social well-being at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage were six times more likely to be in the lowest 20% at the end of Key Stage 1.

Central to effective learning and development is an agreed understanding that communication and language, personal, social, emotional and physical development are not just related, but interconnected. It is because of this interconnection that early childhood providers, be they within a home setting or specialist environment, recognise that early experiences matter in terms of achieving an individual's lifelong potential (DfE, 2011: 9).

While there is still a debate about the distinct nature of development and learning, Davis et al. (2003) suggest that development is the outcome of experiences on an individual's genetic make-up and learning is an outcome of these experiences. It is the depth and breadth of understanding about how children learn, and how subject pedagogy can be structured, that underpins formative assessment. It is the means by which effective assessment can be embedded into daily practice so that a range of strategies and approaches are adapted to enable the child, and children, to become more effective and independent learners, rather than adopting an assessment approach that is bolted on as an additional activity.

The statutory requirements for assessment in the EYFS

Within the EYFS, formal reporting is required at two key points: first between 24 and 36 months of age (initially this was the Progress Check at Age Two, but from September 2015 this became the Integrated Review at Age Two) and then at the end of the Foundation Stage in the EYFS Profile (EYFSP), which is the transition point between Early Years and Year 1. There is also a statutory requirement to have a written overview of a child's progress at least once a year.

Integrated Review at Age Two

The Integrated Review at Age Two was introduced in September 2015 and aimed to combine the Health Check and the Progress Check at Age Two. This review at the age of two attempts to become a supportive mechanism to share understanding of the child with the parents and others involved in the care of the child. However, the quality of the report varied from extremely detailed, which meant it was time-consuming to create, to something that was barely more than a line or two and gave very little insight in terms of understanding the individual and their achievements or their needs, yet both met the statutory requirement and form part of the local authority's data collection.

The example below shows aspects of an effective age 2 review based on the English system. It shows a well-articulated report that explains the areas being commented on and allows the practitioner to explain with short descriptions how the child is achieving. The parent has understood what is being said and has clearly articulated her relief that their child's needs have been understood and her own concerns recognised.

Case study

Callum's review

Full Name: Callum Knowel

Age: 35 months

Room: Nursery education children

Completed: N/A

Parent's Comments and Feedback:

I agree with the report that has been written, I have had concerns about Callum's development and I am relieved something is being done about it.

Next Steps:

To begin a new setting, work on transferring existing skills to other settings

Listening and Attention:

Through positive relationships children respond to eye contact, verbal and non-verbal interaction; they anticipate and initiate communication with others, learning

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to respond in many ways. Children do this through listening to others, watching and imitating them and through joining in with rhymes, stories and games using sounds and words. In this way they learn to attend to important features of communication and to respond, eventually being able to divide their attention between what is being said and what they are doing.

Practitioner's remarks:

Callum struggles to maintain concentration in group and one-to-one situations. Bending down to his level and signing that he needs to be looking and listening, helps to focus his attention, but this may need to be done several times. Experience has shown that although Callum doesn't appear to be listening he is often taking in what is happening. This is demonstrated later by something Callum says or does that confirms his understanding, however usually comes at random and unrelated times. This can make it difficult to understand what Callum is trying to tell you. Callum has particular problems during group activities and he can become frustrated and demonstrate fidgety or disruptive behaviour. We have found that if you are at all able to use digital technology such as an ipad/laptop or story and singing, Callum's well-being and involvement increases dramatically.

Speaking:

Understanding what has been said to them, saying things to others, being treated as a communicator and sharing in talk with others is all part of the communication process. In this aspect of communication and language children will show understanding in many ways including by responding appropriately to what somebody has said, following instructions and responding to and asking questions to check out meaning. Their understanding of what is being said to them far outweighs what they can say. Every experience a child has will extend their understanding if adults are there sharing the experience and helping them.

Practitioner's remarks:

Callum often understands everything that is said to him and around him, he unfortunately cannot always demonstrate his understanding. If asked a question Callum will not be able to give an answer unless it requires a yes or no response. To gain clarity on his understanding other measures have to be taken. For example, if you line up coloured cars and ask Callum to pick out the yellow car, he can do this, if however you pick up the yellow car and ask Callum what colour it is he will become echolaliac and respond 'colour' (see observation).



Reflective tasks

- This is an effective review. Consider what the requirements are for the practitioner in order to complete the review. What are possible ways of communicating the information gathered with parents, other professionals? What skills do you think are required?

Go to the companion website for an example of the Integrated Review at Age Two.

Early Years Foundation Stage Profile

The EYFSP must be completed by all providers in England, including those registered with childminding agencies as well as maintained school, non-maintained schools and

Area of Learning	ELG	Aspect	Emerging	Expected	Exceeding
Communication and Language	1	Listening and Attention		✓	
	2	Understanding		✓	
	3	Speaking		✓	
Physical Development	4	Moving and Handling			✓
	5	Health and Self-Care			✓
Personal, Social and Emotional Development	6	Self-Confidence and Self-Awareness		✓	
	7	Managing Feelings and Behaviour		✓	
	8	Making Relationships		✓	
Literacy	9	Reading		✓	
	10	Writing	✓		
Mathematics	11	Numbers		✓	
	12	Shape Space and Measure		✓	
Understanding the World	13	People and Communities		✓	
	14	The World		✓	
	15	Technology		✓	
Expressive Arts and Design	16	Exploring and using Media and Materials		✓	
	17	Being Imaginative		✓	

Figure 9.3 Example of summative assessment within the EYFS

independent schools. This profile is undertaken during the final term of the year in which the child turns 5 and no later than 30 June. It must be completed for every child using the same criteria for making judgement, including those with special educational needs, known disabilities and those for whom English is not their first language. The practitioner must draw on their observations and records of attainment gathered over a sustained period of time to make their final judgement. In this way it is hoped that they can form a rounded judgement of the child's knowledge, understanding and ability against the stated levels of attainment. The intention is to inform the Year 1 teacher on how 'school ready' the child is and provide a seamless transition between early childhood provision and formal education.

Each child's level of development is based on the early learning goals for England (DfE EYFS handbook, 2015) and a judgement must be made in terms of them exceeding expected levels, meeting the expected levels or not yet meeting these levels (emerging). The statutory reporting requirement can be met using a simple form (as the example in Figure 9.3) as there is no requirement to add any additional commentary, although there has to be an opportunity for the parent to meet and discuss the profile.



Reflective task

As the practices around the completion of the EYFSP vary among settings, reflect on the assessment process:

- Are there any tensions between what is best practice and what is statutory request in the EYFS?
- Rate the child's participation in their own assessment process.
- Consider whether the impetus of the assessment is for developing the individual child or a record keeping system.

While EYFSP data are not publically published, local authorities are monitored and judged by the aggregated EYFSP scores without due consideration to the rate of progress of individuals or their specific contexts that might impact on their attainment rather than their ability. For example, this might include a child having only recently arrived in England and for whom English is an additional language. This aggregation of scores might lead to undue pressure being put on practitioners to adopt approaches that over-emphasise a narrow range of attainment in order to achieve their local authority target.

An over focus on summative assessment and testing may also have had a detrimental effect on teacher's confidence in terms of their own knowledge and understanding

of a child's attainment and achievements. This lack of confidence appears to stem from policy makers' general distrust of teachers' ability to assess in a reliable and valid manner (Black et al., 2013) and has been attributed to causing a 'tick box' mentality in some settings, including schools.

Summative judgements in the early childhood setting should be underpinned by ongoing observations and ongoing record keeping which might be done by hand, using an individual child's progress book such as shown in Figure 9.4.

Area of Learning		Personal, Social and Emotional Development	
Aspect		Self-confidence and self-awareness	
	Development matters	Dates	Observation and Assessment
30 - 50 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can select and use activities and resources with help – e.g. combines toys together in play such as brick and cars. Welcomes and values praise for what they have done – e.g. delights in own successes; shows a sense of pride in own achievement. Enjoys responsibility of carrying out small tasks – e.g. pours drinks out; puts on coat; uses rubbish bins. Is more outgoing towards unfamiliar people and more confident in new social situations – e.g. can handle changes in regular routine; willing and happy to play with children who are new to the setting. Confident to talk to other children when playing, and will communicate freely about own home and community – e.g. shows another child how to play with a toy; talks about significant events at home (wedding/birthday) to others; initiates interactions with others. Shows confidence in asking adults for help – e.g. asks what and why and how questions. 	10/12 11/12 10/12	Used the jammy for a soup in the home 'Greatest when planned' tries to do more. [redacted] was chosen a class monitor for [redacted] to me - took the role very seriously & did it up afterwards.
Progress and planning notes [redacted] is a very mature child. To do to encourage make [redacted] game, and fun ideas so that she can relax & enjoy the company of her peers.			

Figure 9.4 Example of summative assessment for PSED



Reflective task

- All of this recording of information takes a considerable amount of time, which some have argued is time that could be better spent with the child (Dubiel, 2014). Reflect on what the role of the assessment is and consider whether in the EYFS the priority should be to assess for the child or practitioners' time spent with the child.

A similar approach to ongoing assessment is used in Scotland and Northern Ireland, and, from September 2015, Wales (see Chapter 3) will be using the Early Years Development Assessment Framework (EYDAF) to develop a single overarching

framework for a Foundation Phase Profile (FPP). This will include a range of assessment tools that will help chart a child's progress across early childhood. The aim is to create an effective system that has consistency and is manageable.

Challenges associated with summative testing

The issue for many practitioners, regardless of setting, is the overemphasis that is placed on summative assessment and achieving certain predetermined goals, especially when these are used in high stakes scenarios. The EYFSP is meant to focus on opportunities for next step development and provide a holistic summative assessment before a child reaches statutory school age. However, it is increasingly common that data collected from these individual assessments are also being used for high-stakes judgements about the quality of the practitioner and the settings.

A recent issue being faced by practitioners in England is the introduction of 'optional' baseline assessment of 4-year-olds from September 2016. It is the intention of the Department for Education to dispense with the EYFS Profile (which was an attempt to capture what a child can do spontaneously, independently and consistently over a range of contexts) and replace this with specific tests from authorised providers. These standardised tests will draw on the manipulation of virtual toys or real objects in order to provide correct or incorrect answers which will then translate into a score. Currently the DfE (2014) states that where English settings chose not to 'opt-in' they will be judged purely on attainment 'floor standards' (these are targets set by the local authority based on their centrally set targets). It is highly likely that settings will consider they are duty bound to undertake these 'optional' tests as there appear to be various other criteria for them to meet which will be extremely hard to achieve unless these are undertaken.

The prime purpose of these new baseline tests is focusing on effectiveness and accountability, rather than a child's learning or development needs, and this focus has been heavily criticised, not least because it seems to move the focus away from reporting to parents on the progress of their child to monitoring provision and managing performance of settings (Early Education, 2015). The emphasis for these baseline tests is supposed to be to provide information on the progress of a cohort of children throughout their primary school years. However, it currently fails to recognise that the individuals within the original cohort are unlikely to be the same children at future reporting points, which will invalidate the integrity of the data.

These baseline tests have been a controversial idea from the outset and many experts, including Professor Cathy Nutbrown and Dr Jane Payler (cited in Early Education, 2015), have argued that these tests are not in the best interest of the child and will take practitioners away from their prime role of educating, and place testing and preparation for testing at the core of the curriculum. Their argument draws attention to the recent experience of baseline tests when first introduced in Wales in 2011,

which were then later withdrawn in 2012 because they were time-consuming and distracted from essential teaching time. They also argue that baseline assessments, such as the ones proposed, lack validity and reliability and are likely to narrow the curriculum offered to young children and undermine effective pedagogy.

Assessment and children with English as an additional language

For children whose home language is not English, providers must take reasonable steps to provide opportunities for children to develop and use their home language in play and learning, supporting their language development at home. Providers must also ensure that children have sufficient opportunities to learn and reach a good standard in English language during early childhood while ensuring children are ready to benefit from the opportunities available to them when they begin formal education in Year 1. A similar emphasis is placed on English and Welsh in Wales. In England, when assessing communication, language and literacy skills, practitioners must assess children's skills in English. If a child does not have a strong grasp of English language, practitioners must explore the child's skills in the home language with parents and/or carers, to establish whether there is cause for concern about language delay. Capturing evidence of attainment during meaningful episodes of learning needs to be done in time-efficient ways. When done within a formative practice approach such as 'assessment for learning', the information gleaned is more valid and more enjoyable for the child than withdrawing them from their chosen activity to sit at a table with an adult and being asked to write specific letters or saying the sounds to match a picture in order to demonstrate their attainment of phonemes and graphemes. Here are some strategies that can assist when working with children with English as an additional language:

- Create an engaging and rich role-play area (for an example see the companion website)
- A summary of a child's attainment entered into an electronic record of attainment for that individual and in this way their progress is tracked over time
- Personalised learning activities

Assessment and children at risk

Throughout this book it is emphasised that in an early childhood education and care environment it is essential to plan appropriate learning and monitor over time for children's effective learning and development. This process is a complex matter, however, as learning does not conform to a recipe and tangible progress can be made in

very tiny steps. This is also the case for children identified as having special educational needs or those eligible for additional funding such as the English Pupil Premium Grant (PPG), where small steps might indicate significant progress for that child, and children who are struggling with emotional engagement (see Chapter 16).

The role of partnership in assessment

Throughout this chapter an emphasis is placed on the key role of practitioner support in assessing and structuring a child's learning and development. Working with the family and seeking the child's views, valuing their opinions and valuing the observations of practitioners is an important part of creating a rich picture of the child's capabilities. It is through observation of the child at play in isolation or interacting with their peers, and their engagement and response to adults' questions, that future learning opportunities can be structured. It is in collaboration with parents and carers that individual needs can be understood, such as identifying what the child likes doing and what they do not like doing. By asking about the sort of things that engage the child for sustained periods of time it is possible to understand and then build on the child's thinking and behaviours and attitudes in a constructive and beneficial way. This valuable information and engagement with parents, carers and others, including specialists such as health visitors, educational psychologists and social workers, is the collaborative assessment process that helps with the early identification of additional needs. For this information to be effective it has to be acted upon, otherwise it is just a summative measure at a certain point in time. This 'action' and 'partnership' is the fundamental difference between formative and summative assessment. In the case of the Early Learning Goals this is an opportunity for formative observations to be used as evidence to make a summative statement. It is also a means of tracking the rate of progress over time and in this way informing practice as part of the process.

The role of observation in assessment

As has been demonstrated above, the variation of different approaches to children's assessment can create anxiety due to ever-increasing pressures to collect data for accountability and this has driven some settings to adopt a mechanistic approach to assessment and a culture of 'testing' where assessment becomes a stand-alone activity (Dubiel, 2014). When assessment practice and practitioners' beliefs about theories of learning are conflicting, the focus shifts away from the child onto the assessment process. It is sometimes thought by policy makers and some teachers, that to make an 'accurate' summative assessment judgement there has to be a specific directed activity or 1:1 'test' rather than recognising the validity of 'on the fly' formative judgements, which can come about through unexpected authentic assessment opportunities as part of the normal

day-to-day experiences of these children. For these unexpected authentic assessments (see the companion website for examples from a pre-school setting serving a mixed socio-economic area) observations are central. The role of observation is discussed in detail in Chapter 8, thus this chapter only emphasises the importance of observation in assessment as a valid tool for systemic collection of information about children's learning and development in formative and summative ways, as it helps practitioners to:

- collect and gather evidence that can offer an accurate picture of children, their learning and development;
- understand the reasons behind children's behaviour in certain situations;
- recognise stages in child development;
- inform planning and assessment;
- provide opportunities for collaboration with parents and other services;
- find out about children as individuals;
- monitor progress;
- inform curriculum planning;
- enable practitioners to evaluate their practice;
- provide a focus for discussion and improvement. (Palaiologou, 2012)



Reflective tasks

- Study Chapter 8 and with the help of the examples on the companion website reflect on the value of observations to formative and summative assessment.

The role of digital technologies in assessment

Dubiel (2014) suggests that practitioners have become absorbed with paperwork that seeks to 'tick a box', rather than to support a child's learning. Other chapters in this book explore the role of digital technologies in early childhood in relation to support for children's learning and development (Chapters 18, 20, 21, 22 and 23) as well as partnerships with parents (Chapter 13). However, digital technologies can become a useful tool in the assessment process. They can assist practitioners in the assessment and recording process, and this use of online technology to assess children's learning could potentially have a significant impact on the amount of time taken to complete children's record of assessments (Dubiel, 2014; Bruce et al., 2015).

A number of digital systems have already been created that are capable of capturing a child's learning journey as it occurs and these can be easily shared with parents and carers through a secure site, as is demonstrated in Chapter 13.

Case study

The use of digital assessment in a childminder setting to support children's learning

Working as part of a childminding partnership, I wanted an effective way to observe and assess children that fitted into my day, that I could also do while I was out on visits with children. I discovered an online interactive system which enables me to log on through my phone, tablet device or laptop. This flexibility has meant that I am able to observe children in situ, wherever I am.

For example, observations are linked to the Characteristics of Effective Learning, with the opportunity to link the observation to as many different learning outcomes as required. Photos can also be easily uploaded and again linked to the learning outcomes. This enables me to easily track a child's development in all areas of development or to search under an area of learning for all the successes the child has achieved within specified times. Reports can be instantly designed, including termly reports. The review at age 2 can also be completed with ease, as the system takes the information from the child's uploaded photos and observations, creating an annotated profile.

Observation: 16/01/2014	Orlan was asked to choose the red pen from a selection of red, blue and yellow pens, Orlan chose the blue pen and used the palmar grasp to colour in the first bear. Orlan was then asked to choose the blue pen from a selection of red, blue and yellow pens, Orlan chose the yellow pen and used the palmar grasp to colour in the second bear. Orlan was then asked to choose the yellow pen from a selection of red, blue and yellow pens, Orlan chose the yellow pen and used the palmar grasp to colour in the third bear
2.07.2014	Nyree Nicholson Shows an interest in the way musical instruments sound. 22 Months - 36 Months
Observation: 02/07/2014	Active Learning (MOTIVATION) - Being involved and concentrating - Showing high levels of energy, fascination The musical instruments are out... Orlan selects a set of bells then plays with the bells with high levels of energy and vigour. Orlan next selects a fish scale musical instrument and pulls a wooden stick down the corrugated edge to create a sound. Orlan explored the different instruments, experimenting with the sounds each one makes
4.12.2013	Nyree Nicholson Experiments with blocks, colours and marks. 22 Months - 36 Months
Observation: 08/04/2014	See daily observation
Observation: 09/04/2014	Orlan is decorating an Easter Egg. He was given a choice of different coloured eggs to choose from and he selected the orange egg. Orlan independently spread the glue on the egg, repeatedly dipping the brush in the glue and back on to his egg. Orlan was provided with a selection of different materials, from which he carefully selected the ones he wanted and added them just as carefully to his egg. When he had finished he proudly held his egg up 'finished Nyree'
Observation: 05/06/2014	Playing and Exploring (ENGAGEMENT) - Finding out and exploring - Showing curiosity about objects, events and people 2/2 Orlan spent time picking up the ice cubes, holding them in his hand. Orlan attempted to try and melt the 'hands' by holding it in his own hands. Orlan enjoyed the sensory experience
Observation: 04/09/2014	Active Learning (MOTIVATION) - Enjoying achieving what they set out to do - Being proud of how they accomplished something, not just the end result. Orlan looked in the mirror at his reflection. We talked about the colour of his skin, hair, eyes. Orlan used the paint to create a recognisable face. Orlan struggled on colour recognition.
01.07.2014	Nyree Nicholson Enjoys joining in with dancing and ring games. 30 Months - 50 Months
11.02.2014	Nyree Nicholson Explores colour and how colours can be changed. 30 Months - 50 Months
24.02.2014	Nyree Nicholson Uses various construction materials. 30 Months - 50 Months

Figure 9.5 Example of a child's learning journey in expressive arts and design

This technology is also useful when children are attending more than one setting, as the setting (with parent permission) can also have access to the child’s learning journey with another provider and add their own observations or photos, or comment on those that are already added. It is opening up the way for providers to truly work in a multi-agency way, ensuring that valuable learning experiences are shared and developed. Children’s interests can fully be explored, enabling practitioners from a variety of settings and parents to get to know the many different facets of a child’s learning. I have a child who attends a school nursery setting. The nursery observes the child through a different online tool that the school and parents have given me access to, and as a result I can see what she is doing in school and they have access to the software I use, enabling us both to plan around the child’s interests displayed in both settings.

Moving forwards I can envisage options for this digital account of a child’s learning journey to potentially move from setting to setting, if settings have the same online program, enabling children’s learning journeys to be seamless, a continuous learning journey from the first day of a setting to the last.

Diary Observations linked to Progress:

The Observation you enter below will be displayed within the View Diary page below the Observations you entered above (if applicable).



In addition, this Observation will also be displayed within Orlan’s Progress beneath the Early Years Outcome you select below, it will display as an Observation note.

For this Observation to appear within Orlan’s Progress you must select the Area of Learning, Aspect and then the Early Years Outcome that this Observation is linked to.

Select CoEL: Maintaining focus on their activity for The Characteristic of Effective Learning you select will be added to the Observation below.

Observation: * 180 Characters remaining

Active Learning (MOTIVATION) - Enjoying achieving what they set out to do - Enjoying meeting challenges for their own sake rather than external rewards or praise. Orlan and Alexandrina have found the brick box. They each begin individually building their own structure. Gradually they gravitate towards each other and take it in turns to each add a brick to the tower. Orlan circles as the tower wobbles but doesn't fall over. When

Enter an Observation in the box to the left and then select one or more Early Years Outcomes that this Observation should be linked to and displayed beneath within the child's Progress section, there are no limits on the number of Early Years Outcomes this Observation can be linked to.

Link the Observation to one or more Early Years Outcomes, it will then appear beneath the selected Early Years Outcomes within the Progress section.

Select Area of Learning, Aspect and Early Years Outcome:

PSED	Making relations	(30m to 50m) - Can play in a group, extending and elaborating play ideas, e.g. building up a role-play activity with other children.	✕
EAD	Exploring and us	(30m to 50m) - Uses various construction materials.	✕

Add an Early Years Outcome +

Add another Observation +

Figure 9.6 Example of an observation linked to characteristics of effective learning and outcomes

(Continued)

(Continued)

I am also able to upload photos and YouTube clips and link these to outcomes. This enables a learning journey to emerge of the child, through their own interests and achievements, in real time.

I like the fact that parents are also able to add their comments, photos or observations, which enables the practitioner to link these contributions to the Early Years Foundation Stage where appropriate.

The role of record keeping and testing

Assessment reporting needs to be shared with parents and professionals in language that can be understood and not full of jargon or acronyms that might be misunderstood. Thus it is very important that records are kept in a format that can be communicated with all involved in children's progress.

As was shown in Chapter 5, the role of the practitioner is a complex mix of meeting the needs and interests of the individual child, working with their family, and respecting their perspectives while also being held accountable by external bodies. The effective practitioner will use assessment evidence to reshape and mediate opportunities for the individual to thrive and develop. This ongoing assessment is achieved through frequent observations of the child during their play and thoughtful moments. It includes interactions with the child to understand what they are doing, what they like and discussions with the parents so that a fuller picture of attainment and achievements can be gleaned. Key evidence of learning can then form part of a record keeping process. Record keeping is a necessary and a valuable part of the assessment process, but if it becomes burdensome it will distract from the teaching and learning and push the needs of the child into the background.

Tension clearly exists between teacher assessment based on ongoing observations and interactions with a child as part of their normal experiences, and those that are test-based assessments which usually require a more formal organisation and often involve the withdrawal of the child from their choice of play.

Unfortunately some assessment practice has led to unnecessary bureaucratic record keeping and the keeping of vast numbers of photographs, sticky-notes, pieces of work and even making the child do specific 'tests' through prescribed activities or questioning in order to measure their attainment. This approach seems to be based on a belief that 'measuring' a child's learning using fixed criteria for success, which can then be translated into a numerical formulae, is an accurate indicator of the child's ability and progress and can then be tracked and monitored through graphs and spreadsheets.

This accent on what can be measured easily can lead to negative labelling of a child as the emphasis is often on what the child can't do rather than what they can achieve or enjoy doing. This focus is often led by the criteria stated within the statutory assessment process and can result in a distorted view of the child's development characteristics which then leads to a restricted curriculum in a drive to achieve higher assessment outcomes within these narrow criteria.

Effective record keeping

Making a record of a child's achievement and attainment is an important part of the assessment process; however, there is a danger that the record keeping process becomes more important than the learning process. This can place unreasonable pressures on the practitioner and child. Sometimes these pressures are perceived rather than actual, especially when it comes to evidence gathering for a formal inspection, where practitioner anxiety leads them to undertake extra record keeping in the mistaken belief that this is what is required. There is also a significant amount of evidence collection using pre-structured forms, however, that distracts from good play-based learning and has been associated with testing situations such as 'baseline' data collection and phonics screening tests.

Useful record keeping needs to hold close the principles of early childhood education and care, and can be achieved in partnership with the parent and professionals involved in the care of the child. The child's development is a complex interaction between them, their environment and other people and it is through relevant record keeping that continuity and progression can be achieved within the setting and beyond.

Characteristics of useful records are that they:

- encompass and build on the principles of good early childhood pedagogy;
- help maintain a partnership between parent, child, teacher (and other relevant professionals where necessary);
- are user-friendly, time-efficient and effective;
- use a range of techniques to gather a range of valid evidence such as written, photography, video and audio recording;
- link assessment of a child's progress within a context and point in time;
- comment on the progress made and the next necessary steps to take for individuals (and or groups of children);
- are linked to the statutory requirements of the day in a purposeful way;
- are easy to review and summarise. (Adapted from Bruce et al. 2015: 20)

Chapter 10 provides guidance on some very interesting and helpful ways of record keeping.

Summary

This chapter focused on assessment in early childhood education and care with a focus on the requirements of EYFS. Assessment is important in order to understand children's learning and development. Although it is welcomed, the two-stage assessment process within EYFS, which includes the Integrated Review at Age Two and the EYFS Profile at the end of the Foundation Stage year, do raise some concerns. The focus of these assessments appears to be on 'school readiness' as an overall aim of early childhood education and care rather than what is the best development progress for that individual child. A concern has been that this assessment information should support learning, not drive a narrow curriculum by being limited to 'school readiness'. The EYFS Profile is intended to bring together a holistic picture of children's interests, ways of learning and their development. This collated information is very important in relation to effective transitions and enhancing learning potential through planned experiences (as discussed in Chapter 11). It can be a tool for all those involved in a child's education and care to discuss and celebrate a child's achievements, their rate of progress and their enjoyment and engagement in their learning and socialisation with their peers as well as adults.



Key points to remember

- There are two key types of assessment – summative and formative – and both need to take place in early childhood settings as they serve different purposes.
- Formative and summative assessment is a necessary and valuable aspect of effective teaching and learning. It is through a systematic approach to gathering a range of evidence of children's learning and development through authentic assessment opportunities that a practitioner is able to:
 - find out about children as individuals;
 - provide opportunities for meaningful collaboration with parents and other services;
 - create a holistic picture of children's learning, development and interest;
 - understand the reasons behind children's behaviour in certain situations;
 - recognise stages in children's development;
 - monitor progress and help identify areas for intervention;
 - inform curriculum planning;
 - evaluate their practice in terms of effectiveness and efficiency;
 - provide data for monitoring and accountability.
- The child should be at the centre of all assessment practice, with the curriculum providing the context for learning.

- Assessment of children should include parents' 'perspectives' of their children through a partnership approach.
- Assessment practice and record keeping need to be time-efficient and effective.



Points for discussion

- What do you consider that the appropriate balance of assessment approaches through practitioner-led, practitioner-initiated and child-initiated activities would look like to assist the assessment process for differently aged children?
- When you are in practice or work placement try to create an open-ended problem solving opportunity to assess through 'watching' and 'listening' for a specific age of child, rather than specific assessment task. After you have experimented a few times doing this, what are your thoughts about this approach? What possibilities can you find to use this alongside EYFS assessment requirements?
- Think of a recent situation where through an 'on the fly' observation you gained significant information about a child. How was this evidence 'captured' and then used?

Further reading

Books

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Report

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Useful websites

The Association for Achievement and Improvement through Assessment offers a useful way to keep up to date with assessment matters across all ages:

www.aaia.org.uk/category/aol/statutory/

Early Education: The British Association for Early Childhood Education:

www.early-education.org.uk/press-release/sector-unites-call-oppose-introduction-baseline-assessment

National curriculum and assessment guidance for Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales and England:

www.educationscotland.gov.uk/learningandteaching/earlylearningandchildcare/curriculum/supportingearlylevel/implementation/assessment.asp

www.nicurriculum.org.uk/foundation_stage/assessment/index.asp

<http://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/earlyyearshome/?lang=en>

www.lbhf.gov.uk/Directory/Education_and_Learning/Schools_and_Colleges/School_Staff_Zone/EYFSP%20Handbook%202015.pdf

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