

## CHAPTER 8

# The Tools of Assessment: Watching and Learning

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### What is assessment?

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The word 'assessment' is used in different contexts to mean different things. Nutbrown (2011a) has suggested three different purposes for assessment, arguing that different tools are needed for different purposes. *Assessment for teaching and learning* involves identifying the details of children's knowledge, skills and understanding in order to build a detailed picture of their individual development and subsequent learning needs. *Assessment for management and accountability* prefers scores over narrative accounts of children's learning. Such assessments

included the *baseline assessment* system which measured children's progress in predetermined objectives (SCAA, 1997) and allowed the 'value added' by the school to be calculated. *Assessment for research* includes (often numerical) assessments which are used specifically in research projects where quickly administered measures are needed and where uniformity of approach is necessary. Table 8.1 summarises the characteristics of these three purposes of assessment.

**Table 8.1** Some characteristics of the three purposes of assessment

<i>Assessment for teaching and learning</i>	<i>Assessment for management and accountability</i>	<i>Assessment for research</i>
Focus on individuals	Focus on age cohort	Focus on samples
Concerned with details about each individual learner	Concerned with a sample of group performance	Concerned with performance of the sample
Is ongoing	Occurs within specific time frame	Takes place at planned points in a study
'Takes as long as it takes'	Is briefly administered or completed from previous assessment for teaching	Can be brief, depends on assessment and ages
Needs no numerical outcome to be meaningful	Numerical outcome provides meaning	Numerical outcomes often essential
Is open-ended	Often consists of closed list of items	Often consists of closed items
Informs next teaching steps	Informs management strategy and policy	Informs research decisions, and findings – measures outcomes
Information relates primarily to individuals	Information relates primarily to classes, groups, settings or areas	Information relates to the sample, not to individuals or schools
Assessments required for each child	Some missing cases permissible	Some missing cases permissible
Main purpose is teaching	Main purpose is accountability	Purpose is to add to knowledge
Only useful if information is used to guide teaching	Only useful when compared to other outcomes (of other measures of cohorts)	Only useful as evidence of effectiveness of research study
Requires professional insight into children's learning	Requires competence in administration of the test	Requires competence in administration of the test
Depends on established relationship with individual children to be effective	Can draw on information derived through interaction with individual children, but not dependent on relationship	Often requires no previous relationship, but the ability to establish a rapport with the child at the time of the assessment
Requires on going professional development and experience	Requires short training session/ learning the test and practice	Requires short training session. Learning the test and practice

Source: Nutbrown, 2011b: 6

Assessment of young children, whatever the purpose, raises a number of concerns in relation to their well-being and self-esteem and how children come to see themselves as learners (Roberts, 2006).

## Why assess young children's learning and development?

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Children's learning is so complex, so rich, so fascinating, so varied, so surprising and so full of enthusiasm that to see it taking place every day, before one's very eyes is one of the greatest privileges. Watching young children can open our eyes to their astonishing capacity to learn, and make us marvel at their powers to think, to do, to communicate and to create. As well as being in awe at young children's capacities, early childhood practitioners must understand, really understand, what they see when they observe.

Several pioneers (Froebel, Piaget, Vygotsky and Isaacs) and more recent researchers and commentators (Donaldson, 1978; Athey, 2006; Elfer, Goldschmied and Selleck, 2003; Nutbrown, 2011a) have illuminated children's learning and development and provided practitioners with strategies for reflecting upon and interpreting their observations of children. This rich resource illuminates the meanings of children's words, representations and actions. For example, those who work with babies and toddlers can draw on recent work to embellish their own understanding of the children (Elfer et al., 2003; Goldschmied and Jackson, 2004; Abbott and Moylett, 1997; Page et al., 2012). When early childhood educators use the work of others as a mirror to their own, they can see the essentials of their own practice reflected more clearly and so better understand the learning and development of the children with whom they work.

The observations of Susan Isaacs (1929) can be useful to present-day educators as tools for reflection on children's processes of learning and as a means of moving from the specifics of personal experiences to general understandings about children's thinking. Isaacs' Malting House School in Cambridge was the setting (from 1924 to 1927) for her compelling accounts of the day-to-day doings of the children which show clearly how children's intellectual development can result from reflecting on detailed anecdotal insights. Isaacs described the development of the basic concepts of biology (change, growth, life, and death), illustrating the process with a rich body of observational evidence:

18th June 1925

The children let the rabbit out to run about the garden for the first time, to their great delight. They followed him about, stroked him and talked about his fur, his shape and his ways.

13th July 1925

Some of the children called out that the rabbit was dying. They found it in the summerhouse, hardly able to move. They were very sorry and talked much about it. They shut it up in the hutch and gave it warm milk.

14th July 1925

The rabbit had died in the night. Dan found it and said: 'It's dead – it's tummy does not move up and down now.' Paul said, 'My daddy says that if we put it in water it will get alive again.' Mrs I said, 'Shall we do so and see?' They put it into a bath of water. Some of them said. 'It's alive, because it's moving.' This was a circular motion, due to the currents in the water. Mrs I therefore put a small stick which also moved round and round, and they agreed that the stick was not alive. They then suggested that they should bury the rabbit, and all helped to dig a hole and bury it.

15th July 1925

Frank and Duncan talked of digging the rabbit up – but Frank said, 'It's not there – it's gone up to the sky.' They began to dig, but tired of it and ran off to something else. Later they came back and dug again. Duncan, however, said, 'Don't bother – it's gone – it's up in the sky' and gave up digging. Mrs I therefore said, 'Shall we see if it's there?' and also dug. They found the rabbit, and were very interested to see it still there.

Isaacs' diary entries about the play and questioning of young children formed the basis of her analysis of children's scientific thinking and understanding and offer rich evidence of the development of children's theories about the world and what they find in it. Isaacs learned about children's learning through diligent and meticulous reflection on observations of their play. Practitioners need continued opportunity to practise their skills of observation as well as time to reflect with colleagues on those observations. Many researchers and practitioners have followed Isaacs' observational practices (Rinaldi, 1999; Clark, 2001; Jenkinson, 2001; Athey, 2006; Nutbrown, 2011a). The pioneering practice of Reggio Emilia in northern Italy is developed largely through careful documentation which includes observations, notes, photographs and reflections upon the children's work as it unfolds in their learning communities (Filippini and Vecchi, 1996; Abbott and Nutbrown, 2001).

Goldschmied (1989) illustrates the importance of close observation of babies. Watching babies playing with the Treasure Basket can give the adult valuable insights into their learning and development. The following extract from an observation of Matthew shows the fine detail of this 9-month-old's persistent interests:

Kate places Matthew close enough for him to reach right into the basket. He immediately reaches in with his right hand and selects a long wooden handled spatula. 'oohh, ahh,' he says and looks directly at his mother. She smiles at him in approval. Still holding the spatula he proceeds to kneel up and lean across the

basket in order to reach a long brown silk scarf. He pulls at the scarf and squeals in delight as he pulls the fabric through his fingers, 'oohh, ahh,' he repeats. He lets go of the spatula and abandons the scarf to his side, his eyes rest on a large blue stone, he picks up the large stone with his right hand and turns it over on his lap using both hands. Still using both hands he picks the stone up and begins to bite it, making a noise as his teeth grind against the hard surface. He smiles; looking at his mother as he repeatedly bites the stone over and over again.

(Nutbrown, 2011b)

Other reasons for observing and assessing young children centre around adults' role as provider of care and education. Young children's awesome capacity for learning imposes a potentially overwhelming responsibility on early years practitioners to support, enrich and extend that learning. When educators understand more about children's learning they must then assume an even greater obligation to take steps to foster and develop that learning further. The extent to which educators can create a high quality learning environment of care and education is a measure of the extent to which they succeed in developing positive learning interactions between themselves and the children such that the children's learning is nurtured and developed.

'Quality' is often culturally defined and community-specific (Woodhead, 1996) but whatever their setting and wherever they are located, where educators watch children and use those observations to generate their own understandings of children's learning and their needs, they are contributing to the development of a quality environment in which those children might thrive. When educators observe young children they are working to provide high quality learning experiences. The evaluative purpose of assessment is central for early childhood educators, for they cannot know if the environments they create and the support they provide for children are effective unless they watch and unless they learn from what they see. *Observation can provide starting points* for reviewing the effectiveness of provision and observational assessments of children's learning can be used daily to identify strengths, weaknesses, gaps, and inconsistencies in the curriculum provided for all children. *Assessment can be used to plan and review* the provision, adult involvement and teaching as well as to identify those significant moments in each child's learning which educators can build upon to shape a curriculum that matches each child's pressing cognitive and affective concerns. *Observation and assessment can provide a basis for high quality provision.* Curriculum, pedagogy, interactions and relationships can all be illuminated and their effectiveness reviewed through adults' close observation of children. Despite the introduction of the EYFS and the EYFS Profile, formal assessments continue to be used routinely to diagnose children's abilities and there is a danger that over-formalised assessment at the age of 4 can limit the opportunities children are offered rather than opening up a broad canvas of opportunity for learning. It is important, however, to use the active process of assessment to identify for

each child the next teaching steps so that learning opportunities in the immediate future are well matched to the children for whom they are offered.

This focus on the *next steps* in teaching and learning takes us into the ‘zone of proximal development’ – a concept developed by Vygotsky (1978), who argued that assessment does not end with a description of a pupil’s present state of knowing, but rather begins there. Vygotsky (1978: 85) wrote: ‘I do not terminate my study at this point, but only begin it.’ Effective assessment is dynamic, not static, and can be used by educators as a way of identifying what she/he might do next in order to support children’s learning. Assessment reveals learning potential as well as learning achievements.

Observation and assessment are the essential tools of watching and learning with which practitioners can both establish the progress that has already taken place and explore the future – the learning that is embryonic. The role of the adult in paying careful and informed attention to children’s learning and reflecting upon that learning is crucial to the enhancement of children’s future learning.

## Values and vision

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Against the backdrop, in England, of the EYFS Profile, and an emphasis on the acquisition of some identified elements of knowledge, skills and understanding, practitioners can assess children in ways that are appropriate to their age and learning stage. As devolution gathers pace around the United Kingdom, different policies are being developed to allow, to varying degrees, a freedom of practitioners to decide how and what to assess. Whatever the national policy, practitioners’ bring to assessment their personal and professional values and their beliefs about children. Whatever the framework for national assessment, wherever in the world that might be, how children are assessed depends upon adults’ views on the nature of childhood, children’s behaviour, children’s feelings, and their personal approaches to living and learning. Whenever, wherever educators observe, assess and interpret young children’s learning, they are influenced by personal beliefs and values.

Policy since the early 1990s shows a shift in the language about children and childhood and the purposes of early education and care which perhaps indicate a change in the dominant political view of childhood. The language in policy documents of the 1990s suggested that ‘childhood’ had been reconstructed for policy (or perhaps *through* policy), with very young children becoming ‘pupils’ and early ‘experiences’ designed to promote learning giving way to ‘outcomes’ (Nutbrown, 1998). In 2000, a more appropriate language re-emerged, with talk of ‘foundations’, ‘play’ and ‘children’. However, target-driven assessment remained until 2002, when the Foundation Stage Profile heralded a more flexible approach to ongoing assessment of young children’s learning and needs through observation. It is crucial that early

childhood educators are supported in articulating their own personal vision of early experiences for children (how things might be), because such vision derives from the values they hold, and their own constructions of childhood. Practitioners must challenge the language of policy when it is at odds with a holistic and developmental view of children's early learning.

## National policy on assessment of early learning – up to August 2012

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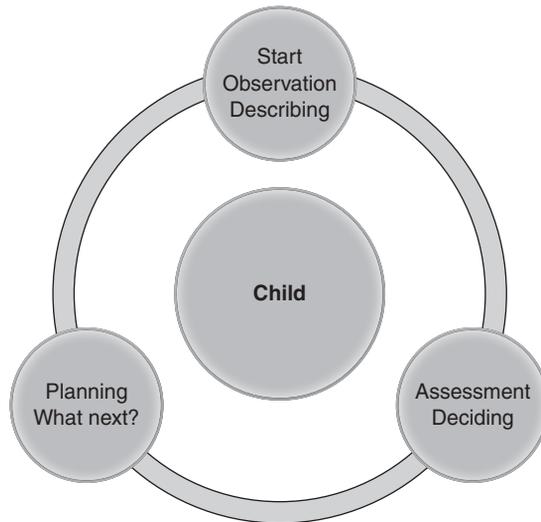
The first Early Years Foundation Stage became statutory in September 2008. Education and care, brought together in a single framework, focus on the holistic development of each child (DfES, 2007a). Echoes of baseline assessment of the early 1990s rang in the ears of many who raised concerns about the new framework and its potential for misuse. The statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfES, 2007a) was paralleled by the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile – a summative assessment at the end of Foundation Stage 2 – just before children enter Key Stage 1. The intention is that evidence collected over two years is used to compile the Profile, using observation, analysis and planning. The language used is formal and on a par with that used in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 summative assessments. Additionally, there is an element of reporting and accountability not dissimilar to that of KS1 and KS2; local authorities are permitted access to the outcomes of children's end of EYFS assessments, which is across 13 scales. This means that the potential for 'league tables', 'value-added' judgements and versions of baseline assessment remains. Even with the EYFS Profile young children may, yet again, be invisible as individuals if settings, local authorities and government resort to generalised statistics to demonstrate their overall success in 'raising standards'.

Despite changes in policy that emphasise observation and ongoing assessment of young children's learning and development, the tendency to use assessment for purposes of *management and accountability* remains. Though official league tables of performance for the youngest children no longer apply and despite the long awaited abolition of SATS for pupils up to the age of 14, assessment is still used as a way of showing how well (or poorly) a setting has done. *Assessment for management and accountability* often involves numerical assessment of young children's progress and fear has been expressed that the EYFS Profile will result in 'checklist' type assessments of babies, toddlers and young children which are given a percentage score. Settings and local authorities are often tempted to demonstrate their success in achievements by producing tables that list high achieving institutions (and of course those who do not achieve high assessment scores are also identified). If such assessments are used it is important to remember that such assessments are not useful in teaching young children and for that, the different tools of observation and reflection are needed in order to identify next learning steps for each child. However, the

underpinning philosophy of *personalised learning* in the EYFS will succeed if practitioners experience effective professional development, and receive appropriate support and leadership which accentuate *all* children's learning and lead to high quality inclusive provision.

## Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage – from September 2012

The new Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, 2012) incorporates both formative and summative assessment formats. The formative or ongoing assessment is at the core of learning and development during the Foundation Phase. It encourages practitioners to tune into children using a cyclical format with observation being key. Figure 8.1 illustrates this.



**Figure 8.1** Formative Assessment Cycle (Adapted from *EYFS Statutory Framework, DfE, 2012*)

### Formative assessment

The purpose of formative assessment requires practitioners to get to know children really well, over time and using observation to build a clearer picture of the child, including their needs, interests and learning styles. Moylett and Stewart (2012: 43) articulate this process:

Practitioners tune into individual children's signals and communication (observation), consider what this means (assessment), and decide how to respond in the next moment (planning).

To get to know children well necessitates regular and extended periods of time interacting with children. The Statutory Framework (DfE, 2012) suggests using a key person approach to achieve this. In fact, there is a legal requirement for every setting to implement such a system (Moylett and Stewart, 2012). This echoes the work of Elfer et al. (2012) and it would be beneficial for leaders and managers to read this work to consider how to implement a key person approach that will be workable in practice. An approach needs to be beneficial to children, parents and practitioners and to achieve this will require some creative thinking. For instance, if a child does not see the same familiar face each morning this could make a smooth transition more challenging. Staff shifts, leave, absence and turnover make this more challenging to achieve in reality.

The call for limited paperwork when recording children's formative assessment is welcoming. The focus here is upon interaction with children, ensuring that paperwork does not detract from this. This is important, but maintaining a good balance will also be vital. Moylett and Stewart (2012: 44) suggest 'Write down only the "wow moments" instead of wasting time on routine matters'. However, some everyday and taken-for-granted happenings could tell a great deal about a child and be overlooked. It calls for practitioners to be well trained, knowledgeable and know children well in order to be confident about what is relevant to record about individual children.

## Summative assessment

The summative assessment within the new framework comes in the form of a Progress Check at Age Two and the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile at the end of the Foundation Stage.

### *The EYFS Progress Check at Age Two*

The National Children's Bureau and Department for Education guide to the Progress Check states that parents should be 'supplied with a short written summary of their child's development in the three prime learning and development areas of the EYFS ... when the child is aged between 24–36 months' (NCB/DfE, 2012: 2). The purpose of this progress check is primarily about early identification of any additional needs that a child may have so that appropriate support can be put in place from an early age. Where there are concerns about a child's progress practitioners are asked to share the progress check summary with other agencies such as health visitors and inclusion coordinators, with the consent of parents. Part of this process requires practitioners to be reflective, in terms of considering possible reasons as to why a child may not be reaching expected levels of progress, such as the birth of a sibling (NCB/DfE, 2012: 18). If the progress check is used appropriately, it will be important for identifying children who indeed require significant support and who might ordinarily slip through the net. Children's attendance at a setting would also be key to the success of this progress

check. Additional details of the aims and principles of this check can be found in *A Know How Guide ...* (NCB/DfE, 2012: 3).

There is no prescriptive way of doing this so practitioners can be creative; however, this may also leave room for vast variations in terms of quality. The progress check calls for the identification of children's strengths and any areas where it is deemed that a child is not progressing at a typical rate. The prime areas have to be reported upon and beyond this will be for practitioners to decide upon in relation to individual children. Early Education (2012) suggests commenting on the three characteristics of effective learning, if this is relevant. Again this needs practitioners to be well trained, sensitive and knowledgeable about how children learn and develop. This will ensure that decisions are made that are appropriate for individual children.

Practitioners undertaking this check should hold on to the fact that children are individual and progress at different levels and rates. Early Education (2012: 45) notes this fact:

Research shows that children's learning is not linear, progressing smoothly from one step to the next, but occurs in overlapping waves, with stops and starts, reverses, plateaus and spurts.

Acknowledging that individual rates of learning go in peaks and troughs is a philosophy that should be shared with parents to avoid potential anxiety or additional pressure being placed upon a very young child. Parents may also feel that they have in some way failed to support their child if they are not at the same stage as their peers. Children may also pick up on a negative overtone being related to their learning and this could impact upon their confidence and identity as learners, when some children will 'move forward more quickly with no special attention' and just require some additional time to develop at their own rate (Moylett and Stewart, 2012: 46).

An example of this nowadays can be related to the usual impatience to get children toilet trained. The following case study discusses this.

### Case Study 8.1



*Isla was 2 years and 8 months and the staff at her setting kept asking her mum if she was ready to be toilet trained. Claire, Isla's mum, knew that all her friends' children were already toilet trained or going through the process of becoming toilet trained. She felt a pressure to move on with this despite Isla showing no signs of being ready for this. She discussed this with one of her friends who talked about the fact that both her children were toilet trained by their second birthday. She also said that some children were now starting school without being toilet trained because modern nappies meant that toddlers did not know they were wet, suggesting an element of laziness or apathy. Claire felt she must*

*move forward with this so bought Isla some pants and explained that she would wear the pants and use the potty. The first day Isla wet herself 12 times. Each day Claire was sending her to her setting with several sets of clothes to change into after each accident. After a week, with no signs of improvement, accidents all over the house and a mountain of washing with Isla's baby sibling to consider too Claire decided not to bow to this pressure any longer. She put Isla back into pull-ups and decided to wait for the right time. When Isla was 3 years and 2 months she asked to wear pants. After just a couple of accidents Isla was dry within a few days. Claire reflected on this experience and felt she should have stood firm on this one and waited just a while longer to meet Isla's needs rather than go with the typical expectation.*

We need to guard against pushing children too early. The *Development Matters* guidance provides 'a typical range of development' and suggests 'a best-fit approach' acknowledging that there will be individual variations (Early Education, 2012). One of the principles of the Progress Check is to allow children to contribute and to listen to them through their learning experiences. This needs to be evident in practice, showing respect for individual children rather than pushing before they are ready. This is important for children's personal and emotional development and ultimately to nurture their motivation and disposition to learn and develop.

### *The EYFS Profile*

The second form of summative assessment in the Early Years Foundation Stage is the Profile. This is completed for all children during the final term of the academic year in which the child becomes 5 (see the Statutory Framework [DfE, 2012] for additional details). This assessment is informed by formative ongoing observation and assessment. Children's levels of development are assessed using the early learning goals in both the prime and specific areas. The profile must also report on whether children are:

- meeting expected levels of development
- exceeding expected levels
- not yet reaching expected levels (emerging)

Having to state whether children are meeting typical levels of development is slightly at odds with the fact that children develop at different rates. Using the *Development Matters* guidance (Early Education, 2012) and the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (DfE, 2012) alongside each other needs to maintain a focus on what children can do. Again, like the Progress Check, we should avoid pushing children too early or dwelling on what they cannot do. Reporting to parents at the end of the Foundation Stage could potentially be a negative experience if children are classed as

‘emerging’. This echoes the baseline assessment in the 1990s. For children who did not score highly on some or all of the desirable outcomes this provided a negative start to school life. The new summative assessment (DfE, 2012) needs careful management to avoid potential negative identity being impinged upon children.

All children are assessed using the early learning goals on the profile, including children with special educational needs. The Statutory Framework (DfE, 2012) does state that ‘Reasonable adjustments to the assessment process for children with SENs and disabilities must be made as appropriate’. The framework also says that specialist assistance may need to be sought for help in such instances. How this is interpreted will vary greatly. This will need to be considered sensitively and respectfully in order to make sure that some children are not disadvantaged by the use of a one size fits all assessment model. Similarly, settings will have to think about how English as an Additional Language (EAL) learners can be accurately assessed across all areas of the profile. Assumptions based on their levels of English language should not mask their true ability.

The EYFS encourages ‘snap shot’ observations of children – both spontaneous and planned to create individual portfolios, which document children’s learning journeys. Table 8.2 summarises four ways to document children’s learning which can be used for formative and summative assessment.

Practitioners may need time to try different observation techniques for different purposes and to analyse or interpret observations and question how they inform practice or individualised children’s learning. When it comes to learning – it is not the case that ‘one size fits all’ and settings need to focus on individuals in order to remain distinctive in their ethos and pedagogy.

**Table 8.2** Some types of observation and their main purposes

<i>Observation</i>	<i>Purpose</i>
Time sampling/Target child	To capture detail relating to the behaviour and language of a child (Hobart and Frankel, 2004)
Learning stories	To look for behaviours that link in with the strands of the curriculum. Observation is woven into the curriculum with a focus upon strengthening learning dispositions (Clark, 2001; Palaiologou, 2008)
Snap shot	To record spontaneous or planned observations focusing on a short episode on any area of the curriculum
Observation without a note book	A narrative observation that usually lasts about 10 minutes. The observer watches the child with no fixed agenda but a concern for overall holistic development. Significant events in the observation episode are recorded after the observer has stopped watching. Some things, such as the detail of dialogue could be lost but advocates of this approach say that essential details are remembered and recorded (Elfer, 2005)

Elfer (2005) suggests that practitioners are better able to focus on the child if they observe *without* taking notes, spending 5–10 minutes watching a child then moving to a different space to write up their observation. The following is an example:

### **Example: Without a notebook**

Sophie has been in the setting for 30 minutes. She snuggles up on the lap of her key worker. She is sucking her thumb and strokes her face with her square of comfort blanket. They are sitting at a table with Lego boards and bricks laid out ready for the children. Three other children are standing around the children. They have selected their boards and are busy building and chatting about their creations. Sophie is watching the Lego building from the safety of her key worker's lap. She does not speak but her eyes watch the creation of the boy by her side. This continues for several minutes. Sophie's key worker then takes a board and starts to build. Sophie's attention is now diverted to her key worker. She watches for a couple of minutes and then she picks up a brick and offers it to her key worker. This is repeated several times until the design is complete and her key worker announces in a sing-songy style, 'Da-Dah!!' A smile forms from behind Sophie's thumb.

Elfer's point is that what has been learned remains in the mind of the observer with key events, information and emotions being written down later. Such observations can result in fewer words but a higher quality of observation and insight. Children's words and conversations are less likely to be recorded but, as part of a range of observational strategies the '*without a notebook*' approach has an important place.

## **Using observations to inform planning**

It is important to personalise learning, and many practitioners use PLOD planning (Possible Lines of Direction; Whalley, 2007) to achieve this. This tool can be used to plan individual or small group learning across six areas of learning. All practitioners and parents can contribute suggestions to such planning tools. This form of personalised learning planning can be effective if based on observation and practitioners should feel confident in experimenting with different planning formats and tools that are flexible and allow for spontaneous experiences to be developed (DfES, 2007b).

Observation is crucial to understanding and assessing young children's learning. Effective and meaningful work with young children that supports their learning must be based on appropriate assessment strategies to identify their needs and capabilities. The *fine mesh* of learning requires detailed, ongoing and sensitive observations of children as they play. Importantly,

aspects of respectful assessment can include the development of inclusive practices which seek to allow children to 'have their say' in the assessment of their own learning (Critchley, 2002).

## Key aspects in assessing young children

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If assessment is to work for children it is important to consider the following questions:

- *Clarity of purpose* – why are children being assessed?
  - *Fitness for purpose* – is the assessment instrument or process appropriate?
  - *Authenticity* – do the assessment tasks reflect processes of children's learning and their interests?
  - *Informed practitioners* – are practitioners appropriately trained and supported?
  - *Child involvement* – how can children be fittingly involved in assessment of their learning?
  - *Respectful assessment* – are assessments fair and honest with appropriate concern for children's well-being and involvement and do they inform planning of next learning steps?
  - *Parental involvement* – do parents contribute to their child's assessment?
- (adapted from Nutbrown, 2011a)

## With due respect ...

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This chapter has considered *why* early childhood educators should observe and assess young children in the context of assessment policy in England. Answers to remaining questions depend upon the principles on which early education and assessment are based; the principle of *respect* is crucial. Assessment must be carried out with proper respect for the children, their parents, carers and their educators. Respectful assessment governs what is *done*, what is *said*, how *relationships* are conducted and the *attitudes* that practitioners bring to their work. Those who watch young children – really watch and listen and reflect on their learning – will know that time to watch and reflect is essential to really understanding what young children are doing. Observations that are not reflected upon are wasted effort. It is only when practitioners seek to understand the *meanings* behind what they have seen that the real worth of observational practices is realised.

Whatever the implications of the EYFS Profile in England, and policies and practices around the world, two things are essential: the involvement of parents and practitioners in generating respectful understandings of children's learning, and professional development for educators which is worthy of children's amazing capacity to learn.

*Time* for teaching and assessment, *confidence* in educators' capabilities, *recognition* of the judgements practitioners make can create the important climate of *respectful early assessment*. The concept of *respect* can underpin and inform the way adults make judgements about young children's learning and how curriculum and assessment policies are developed and implemented:

Respect is not about 'being nice' – it is about being clear, honest, courteous, diligent and consistent. (Nutbrown, 1996)

Teaching young children requires clarity, honesty, courtesy, diligence and consistency. It means identifying what children *can* do, what they *might* do and what their educators need next to do to support and challenge them in their learning. Despite repeated policy attempts to 'keep it simple' supporting young children as they learn can never be other than complex. Watching young children as they learn and understanding their learning moments is complex and difficult work, and places the highest of demands upon their educators. There are no short cuts, instead there are long, interesting and unique journeys.

## Key points to remember

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- Assessment can be for a range of different purposes.
- Observation and assessment are important for supporting and scaffolding children's learning and development.
- The EYFS guidance should be used to nurture children's development and learning at their own rate.



### Points for discussion

- How do individual children and their needs underpin practice?
- Thinking about the EYFS, what steps might be taken in your setting to further develop children's involvement in their assessment?
- Table 8.2 shows examples of observation types. Is there a place for each type of observation? Have you used any of these in your setting? Could you try to evaluate a method you have not used before?
- How can parents be involved in the assessment of their children's learning?

## Reflective task

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- Consider the case study of Isla and her mum, Claire (p. 136–7). Discuss how various approaches to toilet training could impact on children's development. Consider how pushing children too early could be related to other situations in early years practice.

## Further reading



- Moylett, H. and Stewart, N. (2012) *Understanding the Revised Early Years Foundation Stage*. London: Early Education.
- Nutbrown, C. (2011) *Key Concepts in Early Childhood Education and Care*, 2nd edn. London: Sage.



To access a variety of additional web resources to accompany this book please visit: [www.sagepub.co.uk/pughduffy](http://www.sagepub.co.uk/pughduffy)

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