

Assessing learning in kindergarten

Research summary

Introduction

This resource summarises research on assessment specific to the kindergarten years. It aims to support ongoing strengths-based planning and assessment processes. The research summary provides an overview for teachers, educators, families and carers to gain further insights from the literature into current and effective play-based assessment practices.

Summary of research articles

Title and authors	Description
New directions for kindergarten education: Embedding assessment in play-based learning DeLuca, Pyle, Valiquette and LaPointe-McEwan (2020)	Summary The qualitative interview and teaching practice observation study of 20 early childhood teachers in Ontario, Canada, provides insights into the integration of play and assessment in kindergarten to support children's learning. The study examines how the teachers conceptualise the connection between play and assessment, their play-based assessment practices, and the challenges of implementing assessment within play-based kindergarten settings. It reports on the increase in academic demands on children in kindergarten and the need for multiple assessment methods. The authors explore the challenges for teachers adopting play-based learning to support: 1. academic assessment tasks, such as early alphabet and numeracy knowledge 2. children's social-emotional development. The study's results suggest most teachers: • prioritise assessment of both academic (literacy and numeracy) and social-emotional skills • engage in assessment practices occurring within the context of children's play • recognise each child's individual development when assessing and analysing data • use a combination of written documentation and technology for assessment, such as notes, photos and videos, in addition to checklists • feel overloaded with too much documentation and experience difficulty in organising the assessment data, such as photos and notes • report difficulty finding time to interpret the information. The researchers note a disconnection between their interview-reported practices and classroom observations of teachers' assessment practices. Specifically, assessment collection did not always occur through play, instead by removing children from play experiences for one-to-one targeted assessment.

Title and authors	Description
	Consideration and reflection The article supports teachers and educators' understanding of the complex challenges of assessing multiple areas of children's development within play-based pedagogies, particularly with summative assessment decisions. The article may support teachers and educators to reflect on their own assessment practices, noting: • the time requirements for planning and analysing assessments • decisions around integration of formative and summative assessments during planned and child-led play.
<i>Play based assessment part 1: The purpose of play-based assessment in kindergarten</i> <i>Play based assessment part 2: Embedding and sustaining play-based assessment in kindergarten</i> Irvine and Irvine-Casey (2025)	Summary The QCAA research insight presents a two-part discussion paper summarising key kindergarten assessment research and considers current debates around the purpose of assessment in Australian early childhood contexts. The authors provide clear definitions and practical ideas for formative and summative assessment highlighting: • the purpose of holistic play-based assessing practices • critical reflection as it relates to assessment • the role of the adult and child intentionality • strategic and sustainable assessment approaches to documentation • how assessment is supported by relationships with children and partnerships with families, communities and other professionals. As a way of managing sustainable workloads and over-documentation, the authors emphasise the importance of embedding assessment into everyday program planning and involving children in the assessment process. Assessment practices also need to be fit for purpose and consider how, where and when assessment takes place, and importantly why the information needs to be documented. Teachers and educators' professional judgements, including critical reflection, around children's capabilities can further inform future learning opportunities. Consideration and reflection The article provides practical examples with assessment theory overviews relevant to Queensland kindergarten contexts, including links to the QKLG. Teachers and educators may find applying the authors' practical suggestions, example questions around critical reflection and intentionality, beneficial for enhancing their current assessment practices.
<i>Assessment in Teaching Early Years Curriculum, Pedagogy, and Assessment</i> Taylor, Ishimine and Page (2023)	Summary The book chapter describes assessment practices in early childhood, including definitions about assessment <i>for</i>, <i>as</i>, and <i>of</i> learning, the different types of assessment practices, and the importance of assessment in transition to school. Examples of different types of assessment are presented, e.g. portfolios, observations, work samples, and reflections with families and children. The authors highlight: • how assessment guides intentional teaching • the importance of including families, children and professionals to ensure authenticity of assessments and a diverse, deeper understanding of children's learning outside of the early learning context, e.g. home contexts and communities

Title and authors	Description
	• authentic and culturally relevant assessments that capture language, cultural knowledge, and capabilities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children • purposeful assessments with clear principles guiding assessment that benefits children • the five domains of assessment focus areas including physical, social-emotional, language and literacy, cognitive, and reasoning/engagement. Assessment in early childhood education: • occurs over time in play-based situations and learning experiences • is a holistic process of observing, recording and documenting what children know, understand and can do, say, make, write or draw, and provides clear evidence of children's strengths and capabilities • involves the design and selection of assessment including standardised assessments (e.g. assessments by clinical specialists) and informal assessment (e.g. portfolios, artifacts and naturalistic observations) • includes consideration for transition to school where documentation is easily translatable to a school curriculum. Consideration and reflection The chapter is relevant to teachers and educators interested in assessment within an Australian kindergarten context, and supports reflections on how they: • include the voices of families, children and relevant professionals in their assessment practices • use assessment to progress learning prior to transition to school.
Assessment in play-based kindergarten classrooms: An empirical study of teacher practice Pyle and DeLuca (2016)	Summary In this survey, interview and classroom observation study, Pyle and DeLuca (2016), examined how assessment practices differ based on teachers' conceptions of the purpose of play in learning. Three questions guided the research: • What do teachers believe children learn through play? • What learning do teachers assess in play-based kindergarten contexts? • What tools do teachers use to assess learning in play-based kindergarten contexts? The authors determine that play: • allows children to guide their learning at their own pace • provides an opportunity to bring academic and developmental learning together. The article outlines three integrative principles for assessment in kindergarten: • assessment of learning as a continuous process • assessment in multiple formats to engage diverse learners • assessment reflecting academic and developmental learning. Consideration and reflection Teachers and educators can review the article to reflect on their own assessment practice through play-based learning experiences, by considering their perspectives on the purpose of play and what can be assessed through play.

References

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