



## Part 2: Embedding and sustaining play-based assessment in kindergarten

### Introduction

Teachers are intentional in all aspects of the curriculum and act deliberately, thoughtfully and purposefully to support children's learning through play (Australian Government Department of Education, 2022). This includes planning and embedding meaningful assessment practices in daily work with children and families.

This two-part research insights series examines assessment in Queensland kindergartens. Part 1 discusses the purpose of assessment in play-based teaching and learning, assessment as pedagogy and the role of critical reflection in supporting meaningful assessment. In this second part, we focus on adult and child intentionality and the role of teachers and children in assessment, and offer some practical strategies to embed assessment practices meaningfully and sustainably within a play-based context.

### Intentionality: The role of the teacher in assessment

In kindergarten, teachers and educators draw on their specialist early childhood knowledge and skills to plan, implement and evaluate their assessment practices. Cloney et al. (2019) put forward the following characteristics of effective assessment in early childhood education and care (ECEC) as essential to supporting the teacher's intentional role in assessment:

#### 1. Assessment addresses established components of children's learning.

Recognising the holistic and integrated nature of learning, development and wellbeing, it can be difficult to know where to focus our attention. Acknowledging children as competent and capable learners, and adopting a strengths-based perspective, the QKLG learning and development areas provide an evidence-informed reference point for observation and assessment. Building familiarity with the key focus areas and related significant learnings helps us to be intentional in what we assess and document, and how assessment informs ongoing planning.

#### Reflection

Assessment is not just about content knowledge and skills, e.g. evidence of colour recognition, subitising, labelling emotions. How do you capture:

- learning dispositions
- depth of thinking
- changes in understanding?

#### 2. Assessment enables teachers to describe a continuum of learning.

In kindergarten, we are interested in children's engagement in the program, and progress towards, and achievement of, broad learning goals. Recognising that children's learning is fluid

and ongoing, effective assessment supports us to build a rich picture of learning and to describe individual progress on a continuum.

The QKLG Continua of learning and development (the Continua) helps us to embed focused assessment in the daily program. Offering examples of *observable learnings*, the Continua supports us to observe, analyse and assess individual children's learning. It helps us to communicate what and how children are learning through the range of intentional experiences and support provided.

#### Reflection

- How does the Continua shape your decision-making around the experiences and support you provide in the *everyday* program?
- How does the Continua help you to communicate with families what children can do and how you are supporting their learning?

### 3. Assessment is valid, reliable and fair.

Assessment can be likened to a form of research — we need to ensure that assessment practices are fit for purpose, assess significant learnings, and enable diverse learners to demonstrate what they know and can do in a range of different contexts. To do this well, we need a suite of assessment practices that assist us to build our knowledge and understanding of individual children.

To ensure our practices are valid, reliable and fair, we need to consider:

- what learning we are assessing
- how we are assessing, e.g. observations, conversations, artefacts
- where and when the assessment will be done to enable individual children to demonstrate their learning
- why this information is significant and needs to be documented — perhaps most important of all.

Critically reflecting on what, how and why of assessment helps us to establish a strategic and sustainable approach to assessment and avoid over-documentation and over-assessment.

#### Reflection

- How do you ensure the information you gather is varied and presents an accurate picture of what the child knows and can do?

### 4. Assessment is conducted in a way that enhances engagement and relationships.

Aligned to the national EYLF V2.0 (Australian Government Department of Education, 2022), the QKLG comprises three elements:

- i. principles
- ii. pedagogical practices
- iii. learning and development areas.

We need to critically reflect on all three elements to plan and implement meaningful assessment in kindergarten. Situated in the context of play-based learning and teaching, meaningful assessment practices are informed by relational and play-based pedagogies and support equitable access and engagement for all children.

#### Reflection

- How do you assess learning in equitable ways to ensure that all children can authentically demonstrate what they know, understand and can do?

## 5. Assessment involves the child's community and informs professional partnerships.

Effective assessment practices are supported by our relationships and partnerships. This includes collaboration with the child themselves, their family, community members, and other professionals, e.g. allied health professionals and school transition officers. We work with others to build a rich picture of children's learning over time and in different contexts, informed by a range and variety of sources, observations and artefacts. This is best supported when teaching teams work closely together to gather, document and critically reflect on children's engagement and learning in the kindergarten program.

### Reflection

Recognising that assessment is an ongoing process, and that it takes time to make judgement calls about learning, some of your documentation will not be family-facing.

- How do you share updates with families and seek their input?
- How regularly might this occur?

## Children's intentionality and assessment

Kindergarten teachers recognise that children have agency and act with intentionality in their play and learning. Facilitating children's participation and voice is at the heart of assessment as learning — where teachers plan ways to engage children in assessing and documenting their learning.

Recent Australian research reinforces children's ability to play a meaningful role in informing assessment, highlighting the benefits of this for children and teachers. During the study, children demonstrated their ability to set their own learning goals, identify effective learning strategies, and monitor and assess their progress towards their goals (Harrison et al., 2025). These are important skills and dispositions to nurture and practice, supporting children to develop a habit of lifelong learning. Involving children as active participants in assessment also offered rich insights to teachers and educators to support and extend both teaching and learning.

Children play an active role in formative and summative assessment. Harrison and colleagues encourage us to use strategies that promote and support children's appreciation of their own learning and understanding of how they learn (Harrison et al., 2025).

### Formative assessment with children

- Plan time across the week to sit with children individually or in small groups to reflect on their engagement in the program.
- Build critical reflection skills by modelling reflective questioning and documenting thinking and learning in a shared accessible space, e.g. scribed on a sheet of butchers' paper or journal, or audio recorded on an iPad.
- Consider which mediums will be engaging for the children, e.g. drawing, conversation, video recording, reflecting on photos from the week.
- Remember, the focus for reflection will vary, e.g. a new concept or skill they have recently learned, how children are feeling and why, what they have been interested in and why.
- Maximise the value of these reflections by providing time for collaborative planning discussions about where they might extend play and learning next.

### Summative assessment with children

Children have a right to participate in decision-making that impacts them (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989).

When preparing to write mid-year summaries or transition statements:

- Plan opportunities to sit with each child to reflect on their time in kindergarten. Depending on the child, you may invite them to sit alongside you in a designated spot while you write, or you may ask to sit with them while they play.
  - Tell children what you are doing and why, and seek their interest and assent prior to embarking on the conversation. Have some open-ended, reflective questions ready, e.g.
    - what they like most at kindergarten
    - what they believe they are good at
    - things they are still learning
    - what they are looking forward to at school
    - things they might need help with when they start school.
- Be prepared to follow their lead also.

## Establishing a manageable and sustainable approach to assessment and documentation

Observing and documenting children's engagement in learning is a longstanding professional practice and an integral component of the planning and assessment cycle (Barblett et al., 2021).

The key question (Harrison et al., 2019) is: How can teachers and educators document children's learning in ways that are empowering, meaningful to self and others, and not so time consuming?

It is important to note that the National Quality Framework (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, 2024) doesn't prescribe the type, frequency or volume of assessment required in ECEC. There is also evidence that being prescriptive about assessment practices and setting monthly targets for observations can lead to reduced quality in pedagogical documentation (Irvine et al., 2018).

To support meaningful and manageable assessment that can be embedded in daily practice and sustained over time, assessment and documentation must be contextualised to the kindergarten community.

Having a clear plan and purpose for assessment, and identifying who can contribute, support effective practice. There are a range of practical factors that both service providers, teachers and educators should consider when designing and reviewing assessment practices, including:

- **Teacher and educator pedagogical considerations**
  - What is working well and what needs attention to support meaningful and manageable assessment *for*, *as* and *of* learning?
  - What are strengths and opportunities to embed playful assessment and assessment with children in the kindergarten program?
  - How do you use your allocated time to prioritise meaningful assessment and documentation? What could you let go of?
  - Recognising that teaching teams will look different in different services, how does your team work together to support meaningful assessment?
  - How do you facilitate assessment conversations and tap into team members' strengths and perspectives to inform and support sustainable planning and assessment?
- **Service provider operational considerations**
  - How many children attend the program, and what are their attendance patterns?

- How do you manage the allocation of non-contact time to support teachers and educators to lead assessment and documentation? Who receives non-contact time, and how are responsibilities shared?
- How do you support families to have realistic expectations about communication and documentation of their child's learning over the year?

In addition, it is important to factor in how our focus and workloads may shift across the kindergarten year. Events, such as parent-teacher interviews and writing transition statements, may impact non-contact time. Developing ways of embedding practices in the everyday program, to be done in collaboration with children, ensures that they are sustainable and meaningful year-round. Not only does this consider teacher workloads across the year, but it also enables planning cycles to be more responsive and flexible to what is important for children at any given point in time. For instance, focusing on Identity and Connectedness to develop a sense of belonging to the kindergarten community at the beginning of year, then building on their relationships, and increasing independence and perseverance to engage in Active learning for planning and resourcing their own learning later in the year.

## Conclusion

In assessment, the teacher's role is to gather and interpret evidence of how each child is engaging in the kindergarten program, and to exercise their professional judgment regarding children's capabilities and progress towards learning goals over time, and the future learning children may be ready for (Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2024).

Children can contribute rich and valuable insights to the assessment process, and benefit when supported to engage in reflection and assessment of their learning. In kindergarten, assessment is a planned and embedded process that informs evidence-based teaching to support children's learning, development and wellbeing. Intentionality in assessment helps to ensure quality teaching practices, so that all children benefit from their time at kindergarten.

## Kindergarten research insights contributors



**Susan Irvine** is an early childhood teacher with diverse work experience in early childhood education and care, spanning policy, service provision and higher education. She is currently a professor of early childhood in the School of Education at Queensland University of Technology. Her research interests include: ECEC policy and quality standards, workforce development, leadership and professional practice. Susan was a member of the research team for the Australian Learning Frameworks Updates project.



**Georgia Irvine Casey** is an experienced early childhood teacher currently working at Goodstart Red Hill. With over 12 years in the ECEC sector, she has worked in kindergarten, long day care and outside school hours care, and in ECEC policy. Georgia is passionate about bridging research and practice in early education. In 2022, she completed a Master of Education at Queensland University of Technology, furthering her commitment to evidence-informed teaching.

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