

Rich pedagogical documentation and assessment

Your guide to creating rich pedagogical documentation and assessment in early childhood education





New to teaching or want to build your capability?

High quality documentation and assessment is an important part of supporting children throughout their learning journey. It ensures educators are noticing what learning is occurring and linking it to curriculum and relevant theories.

Once an educator has documented and assessed what learning is taking place, they're able to plan opportunities to extend the child's learning and development. Rich assessment is also an effective way to share the child's learning journey with their family and gives the child an opportunity to revisit their learning over time.

This guide is for anyone looking for strategies to create rich assessment to support children's learning. You'll notice a variety of approaches to assessment from a global perspective, adapting the principles of noticing, recognising, responding and revisiting. In this guide, we'll also share tips and suggest ways you can save time, and build your knowledge of assessment.

How this ebook works

Each section of this ebook includes considerations about the stages of pedagogical documentation and assessment for early childhood educators. After each section, you'll find questions for reflection so you can apply the information to your practice.

Note: When we refer to educators we also mean teachers, globally we want to honour both.



We believe children thrive when they're active participants in their own learning.

In this guide, you'll explore:



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The importance of documenting children's learning and development (assessment)

01

What is assessment?

Formative assessment of children in early childhood education (ECE) involves noticing, recognising and responding to their learning. It enables educators to intentionally plan for a child's next steps and support them in their learning journey. Assessment allows children and their families to take an active role in decisions about their ongoing learning.

Pedagogical documentation is about more than recording events – it's a means to learn about how children think and learn. There's no one-size-fits-all approach to documenting assessment. However, it's important that your team has a shared understanding of the purpose and intent of assessment.

Reflective questions

What are your main drivers or reasons for assessment?

How does assessment feature or fit in your centre's philosophy?





Examples of assessment from around the world

The Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA) recognises that each service is different and that,

“... educators can explore a range of styles and methods to determine what works best for their children, families, service and community.”

[\(ACECQA’s Guidelines\)](#)

While they don’t prescribe how assessment should be done, they do provide guidelines.

The [\(ACECQA’s Guidelines\)](#) for documenting children’s learning include:

1. **View documentation** as an important part of your work
2. **Capture** children’s voices and ideas
3. **Try different documentation** methods to find what is realistic, achievable and relevant for your team and setting
4. **Be selective** in what you choose to document
5. **Continue to develop** your documentation practice as a team
6. **Be open to evolving** your documentation as the dynamics of the children’s group or team change
7. **Constantly remind yourself** why you are documenting and for whom
8. **Have a clear understanding** of the standards and learning frameworks you’re using

In Canada, regulatory bodies that share similar messaging include the College of Childhood Educators (CECE) in Ontario and the Early Childhood Educator of British Columbia (ECEBC) in British Columbia. The CECE's practice note, Standard II, states,

“[Educators] draw from their professional knowledge of child development, learning theories and pedagogical and curriculum approaches to plan, implement, document and assess child-centred, inquiry and play-based learning experiences for children.”

[Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice \(CECE, 2017, Pg. 10\)](#)

New Zealand's Educational Review Office notes the importance of ensuring assessment information reflects the cultural contexts in which children live. This may include culturally valued knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours (ERO, 2007).



Why document?

We believe children thrive when they're active participants in their own learning, so rich documentation keeps them engaged in their educational journey.

Rich documentation enables educators to:

- **Engage, share and communicate** with families about their child and their learning
- **Get to know and understand the child** and strengthen their identity as a learner
- **Make learning and development visible** to others for interpretation
- **Learn and reflect** about how children think and learn
- **Identify children's strengths**, interests, learning dispositions, knowledge and skills
- **Show progress** across a child's learning journey
- **Extend and broaden** children's learning and interests through informed planning
- **Be accountable** to their team and service leaders



“Quality documentation should be a multi-modal approach, including stories, video, photos, parent/teachers/child voice. Documentation should show evidence that **learning is being re-visited, valued and grown upon.... Assessment provides a valuable tool to link with the wider whānau (family). It also provides evidence for internal evaluation and professional growth for kaiako (educators).”**

Gail Pierce
Regional Manager
Central Kids
New Zealand

Alison Flutey
Lead Adviser
Central Kids
New Zealand

Creating meaningful documentation

The **ACECQA** suggests that it is not the amount of documentation you have or how beautifully the information is presented that's important. Instead, it's about how the documentation is used.

To determine whether you're creating meaningful documentation, ask yourself:

- **How does the documentation assist** in planning effectively for children's current and future learning?
- **Is it effective in communicating** about children's learning and progress?
- **How well does it capture** children's understanding, dispositions, knowledge and skills?
- **Am I using this documentation** to inform the content of the curriculum and educators pedagogy?

Reflective questions

What are your main drivers or reasons for assessment?

How does assessment feature or fit in your centre's philosophy?







Look to the past before looking at the present

02

Reviewing a child’s past stories, moments, notes and plans before writing new stories can help you make any links to ongoing learning. These support you in understanding past interests, learning, development and progress from multiple perspectives.

This also enables you to reference parent views, ideas and responses, showing that you’re valuing and making use of each family’s knowledge of and aspirations for their child.

We suggest you create a [Storypark plan](#) either for an individual child or as a group plan. For each child, you can [link previous stories alongside their notes](#) so that you can quickly see their progression and how interests and dispositions have developed over time.

Reflective question

How have you linked or included past learning and documentation in your current stories and planning?





Notice, recognise, respond, and re-visit

03

The assessment process

While the terminology differs depending on your philosophy and setting, assessment generally comprises of these components:

Notice

Noticing, observing, and capturing what the child is doing through their play

Recognise

Recognising and assessing what learning is taking place

Respond

Responding by planning how you will support their learning and development

Re-visit

Re-visiting what they've learnt to further extend their educational journey



Notice

The notice phase is about capturing and recording what significant learning is happening, typically using text to describe the event and actions. This is generally accompanied by photos which could include images of materials created by the child/ren as well as photos of them engaged in their play.

Capture their learning through a combination of:

- Text
- Child's voice
- Images
- Video
- Audio

This phase can be enriched by capturing video, which provides a richer and more accurate account of the interactions, emotions, conversation, actions and involvement. Video can also save you time as you don't need to describe the context or what happened in as much depth so you can spend more time on recognising and responding.

Video also allows families with additional languages to better understand and engage in the learning as opposed to stories with text alone. Recording the child's voice (through text or video) is also important for authenticity and can add additional meaning and context.

If you're looking for tips on capturing photos and videos for your learning stories, see our [quality practice guide on Taking great photos, videos and notes.](#)

Tips for collecting evidence of childrens' learning:

- **Not everything needs to be a story of assessment, but what you capture can add to the overall picture.** Regularly posting snippets, anecdotes, videos, settling and learning notes can give families the opportunity to provide feedback, which can be incorporated into richer learning stories.
- **When selecting photos to add to a story, we encourage quality over quantity.** A good rule of thumb is to add around 5-10 meaningful photos. Keep in mind that using too many photos can make the story hard to load, require excessive scrolling or may use significant amounts of data if families are viewing on their device.

Reflective questions

Throughout your day you will notice a lot happening, how do you decide what to document?

From what you are noticing, are there any past links to previous stories? If so, how do you connect this within your story?



Recognise

To make learning visible, the educator must highlight the learning that is occurring rather than merely sharing children’s experiences via visual media such as photos and videos. The recognise phase refers to the written assessment within a story – a teacher’s interpretation of what learning occurred. Consider what theories, curriculum, values and beliefs you’re drawing on to assess the learning.

Assessment can sometimes be clouded by the observer’s lens, e.g. “I can see literacy in most areas of play and learning but was that really what it was about?”

Before determining what learning was occurring, ask yourself “How visible is the learning in the story?”

Learning and development that may have occurred may relate to:

- Social and emotional development and competencies
- Holistic development
- Relationships, connections, sense of belonging
- Identity, individuality, diversity
- Social responsibility and contribution
- Dispositions or urges
- Skills and or knowledge
- Creativity and the arts
- Movement and physical development
- Communication and language development
- Working on and building theories, concepts and making sense of their world through investigating, exploring, inventing
- Curriculum areas



“

“When educators assess children’s learning, their intention is to find out, make sense of what they discover and to use what has been learnt to facilitate ongoing learning. In this way, assessment becomes one part of the day to day process of teaching and learning. It is an integral rather than separate activity in the curriculum development process.”

(Drummond, 2003, Pg. 14)



Enrich your assessment through team collaboration

Ongoing collaboration...can enrich and deepen perspectives, values and unquestioned understandings. It can enrich and deepen perspectives and can challenge educators to consider new ways of seeing, thinking and practices

[\(BC ELF, 2019, Pg. 50\)](#)

Prior to publishing a story, it can be beneficial to seek other educators' views. Multiple perspectives can enrich and enhance the interpretations and analysis of the experience. They can also deepen understanding and provoke new learning possibilities.

“Rich documentation incorporates multiple perspectives, including the voices of children, educators, peers, families and other professionals.”

[Educators' Guide to the EYLF](#)
[\(ACECQA, N.d, Pg. 37\)](#)

Storypark's [story collaboration tools](#) include a shareable drafts feature. Educators may choose to share draft stories with team members in view mode, which allows others to read but not edit the story. The author can also transfer edit access to their peers so they can exchange insights, media, and ideas. Whether it's to capture a range of perspectives or hand off a story for completion, this tool enables educators to collaborate and share their perspectives on the child's learning journey.

Highlight learning outcomes and theories with learning tags

When writing your story in Storypark, you can add [learning tags](#) to showcase how the learning links to your curriculum, philosophy, learning outcomes, goals, standards, learning theories, and or unique setting. Your written assessment should correlate to the tags you've chosen.

Consider what the main learning outcomes were for the child and select 2-3 tags to highlight the learning that occurred. You can then generate a [learning trend report](#) to identify specific trends in the learning that has been happening.

Tips for using learning tags effectively:

- Providing [parent-friendly descriptions](#)** for each tag helps parents understand what these links mean for their child.
- Published stories** that have tags added can be [filtered](#) to provide an overview of interests, learning and activity within your programme and to support your planning.
- Over-tagging** will not provide an accurate picture or data of what has been occurring within your service and will produce reports that are less helpful to your team.

Each learning set has folders that organise your tags and descriptions. We suggest only having relevant and meaningful learning sets, which can be a mix of ones you've created and ones you've copied from the Storypark library.



“

“We’re so excited about using learning sets! Our educators have already been expanding their language, references, and exploring new styles of pedagogical documentation because of them!”

Cheryl Schweer

Program Supervisor
Municipal Child Care Centres
City of Peterborough



Consider the following sets to highlight children's learning and development:

- **Local/country curriculum** and guiding documents
- **Ways of learning**, e.g. learning dispositions, habits of mind, urges, schema, etc.
- **Centre philosophy**
- **School curriculum** (to support transition)
- **Encyclopaedia of Early Childhood Development**
- **Methods of learning** that are relevant to your service e.g. Montessori, Reggio Emilia approach, Steiner, Language nests, etc.

Consider the following as learning sets to highlight centre and teacher development:

- **Teaching standards**
- **Appraisal goals**
- **Centre philosophy**
- **Ethics**

Reflective questions

How visible is the learning in your stories?

How are you collaborating with other educators who were part of the learning experience?

Have you included the child's voice in your documentation?



Respond

Responding builds on the understandings and hypotheses educators have developed about children's interests and learning from the *recognising* phase.

In this phase, consider possible pathways – such as children's learning trajectories. Plan for ideas and future opportunities to support and extend a child's current interest and learning. You may also include how you responded in the moment. Intentionality is an important aspect of responding, so consider what actions you need to take, as well as the strategies, resources and team support required to make this plan happen.

When considering the 'where to next' or future opportunities phase, explore any underlying aspects beyond their visible interest, such as what motivates the child, as our hypotheses are not always on the mark. This is why involving multiple perspectives can provide a wider lens on what is going on for the child.

For example, plan actions to:

- **Build on** current knowledge and interests
- **Support, scaffold, and extend on** what they're learning
- **Add complexity** and depth to learning

Encourage multiple voices to contribute to your story

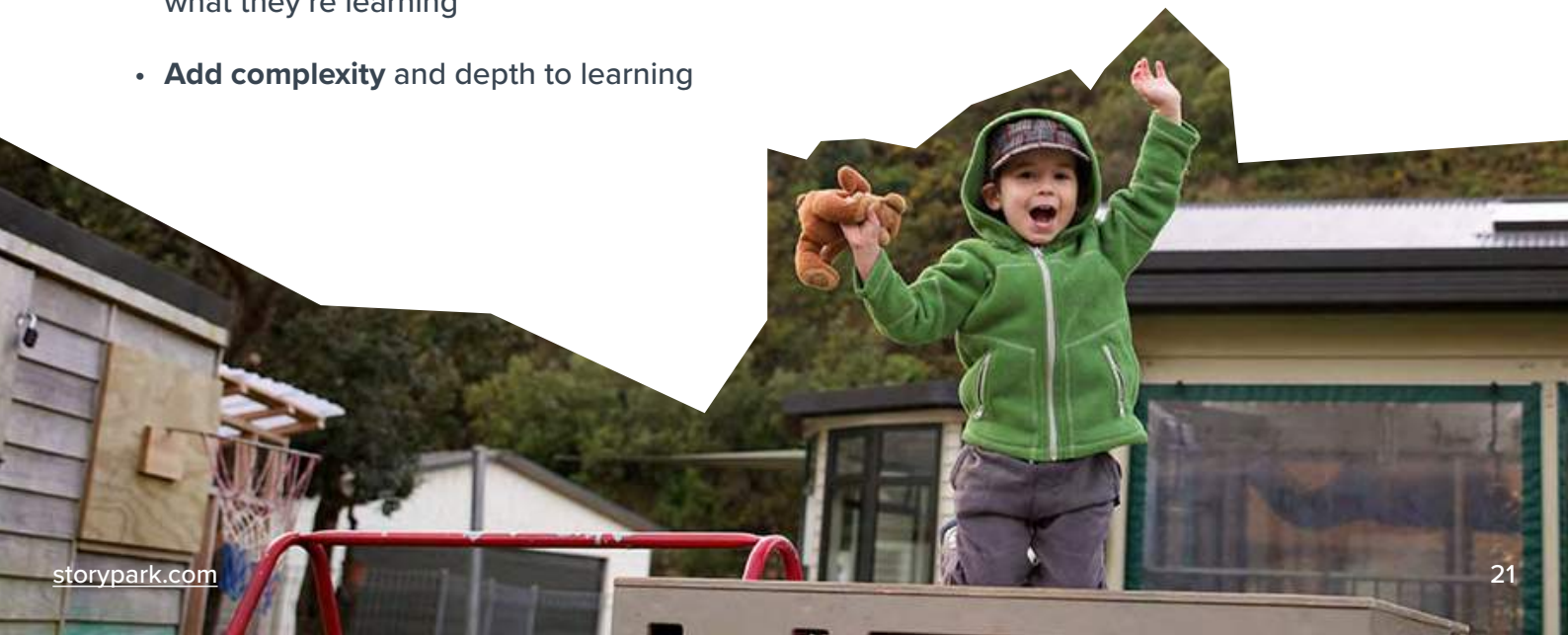
Consider asking the family a question at the end of your story to increase their involvement and encourage their sharing of ideas. Questions should empower family members, positioning them as experts in their child's development. Not every post needs a question, so think about creating a balance between strengthening engagement and over-burdening busy families.

Story responses allow the child, educators, specialists and family to share context, ideas and suggestions to further support intentional teaching and therefore the child's learning. Families can share what is happening at home via moments using the [Storypark for Families app](#).

Reflective questions

How are you ensuring your response has been actioned over time?

Is your response specific enough so that parents and families know your intent?



Revisiting

When children look back on their learning experiences, they can deepen, plan for, and extend their learning.

Revisiting stories acts as a memory tool, and invites children into new conversations about their ideas, which allows them to think more deeply about them. When educators revisit with children, they can better understand the context and learning that occurred so they can plan, support and add complexity to future experiences.

The benefits of children revisiting their learning include:

- **Giving the child agency** in their learning, which develops their sense of self
- **Developing their identity** as a learner
- **Supporting them** to organise their thinking
- **Supporting them** to reconnect to the experience and idea
- **Recognising** what learning is valued
- **Providing the opportunity** to practise clarifying and articulating their ideas and theories

Strategies to support re-visiting:

- Co-author** with the child by sharing the photos and writing the story/ comments/reflection together
- Dictate** children's commentary
- Record** the revisiting
- Revisit** children's stories/moments from home
- Record** the child's voice as a comment
- Hold group discussions** on group learning
- Use child mode** on the Storypark IOS educators app to capture the revisiting. *To find out more about child mode, attend our free Introduction to the educators app webinar or read our blog post about child mode.*

“Documentation becomes pedagogical when it is interpreted and analysed by the educators and children who create the content and those that view it.”

(Diane Kashin, 2016)





Children thrive when families and educators work in partnership to support children's learning.



Family engagement

04

Children thrive when families and educators work in partnership to support children’s learning (ACECQA, 2023. Pg. 14). Communicating with sensitivity and respect helps parents to build trust with educators. This ultimately results in more intimate knowledge being shared about the child, and a better understanding of how to best support their child’s learning.

Educators can guide parents by asking questions, encouraging them to reflect on their child’s learning, and involving parents in discussions. Providing and valuing multiple ways of communicating can help to build this trust and shared understanding and decision-making.

Tips for getting families to engage with your stories:

- If you ask parents and family for their feedback and ideas, it’s a good idea to include their input into your ongoing plans for children’s learning.
- Use language parents are familiar with.
- Acknowledge family responses to encourage further sharing.

Reflective questions

How do you encourage family input?

How do families know the value of sharing their knowledge, views and aspirations?

When families provide feedback and thoughts, how do you acknowledge it and what do you do with what they share?





Considering your audience

05

When creating your documentation and assessment, consider the priorities dictated by your ECE governing body and local curriculum. ACECQA recommends constantly reviewing and reminding yourself why you are documenting and for whom. (ACECQA's Guidelines, Pg. 1, 2018).

Families are generally not versed in the language of pedagogy, and there's a chance they may disengage if they don't understand the words you use. Tailor the stories to what you know about the parents in order to include their aspirations and expectations. Don't forget about the children! Try to strike a balance between what will be relevant for the parent and what will appeal to the child when they interact with their stories (children love photos and videos!)

Ways you can consider your audience in creating learning stories:

- Try to be consistent** in the amount of stories you post for all children - families talk! Use activity reports to keep track.
- Print for purpose.** Is your service paper-based, all-digital, or somewhere in between? While many services have opted to go paper-free, and many families prefer interacting with Storypark, some services still print for the children and are more selective about what they add to their profile books.

Reflective questions

Who is your audience? Are you writing to and for the child, their family, or regulators?

How do you adapt your writing for families with English as an additional language?





Nurturing quality and capability

06

Mistakes or inconsistencies can affect the credibility of your service. Ensuring documentation is completed to a high standard makes it more likely that families will engage with it.

Tips for creating high-quality documentation:

- Take high-quality photos, videos and notes.** Learn how to record observations, take and edit photos and videos, and manage your files in [our quality practice guide](#).
- Turn on spell check.** Everyone makes mistakes, but grammatical errors can detract from what is otherwise a meaningful learning story. You can turn on spell check in your web browser or for additional support use a free spelling and grammar extension such as [Grammarly](#).
- Avoid publishing stories at home outside work hours** or when parents may be sleeping. You don't want to set an expectation that you'll be publishing or responding to stories 24/7.

- Print out story guidelines** and make them accessible. These might include a checklist of things that are important to include in a learning story, a copy of your curriculum, centre philosophy, or exemplars.
- As a team, make sure everyone is on the same page** by setting expectations around:
 - Story length
 - The number of learning tags
 - The number of photos and videos
 - Timeframe for taking stories from drafts to the approval/publishing phase
 - The balance of individual versus group stories



- **Group stories are important for showing relationships, collaboration and interactions** but it's important to include how each individual fits in. Parents will be more engaged if they feel you've noticed their child. Sometimes it's better to **create a group story and then duplicate it for each child** to personalise the experience and learning.
- **Support educators to incorporate feedback and self-correct.** Setting up story approval for educators is a great way to build confidence and skills while ensuring consistency. When an educator posts a story for approval, the approver can write feedback and suggestions in a different coloured text box before saving and exiting (This could include questions such as: *What else was the child learning? Is the child's voice represented? Is the curriculum being met? Why did you prepare that for today?*) **Once you have added your feedback, let the educator know via the Storypark conversation tool.** It's important to grow an educator's capacity by coaching instead of simply making improvements yourself. The best outcome for everyone is to work towards stories not needing to be approved. However, **even confident educators can benefit from peer reviewing now and then.**
- **Find ways to create time-saving efficiencies** such as making sure stories are approved in the shortest possible time and printing wirelessly directly from a portable device. See our 'Making the most out of technology guide' for more tips about using devices in your ECE setting.
- **Create your own story types to support your educators to write rich stories.** The use of prompts, story starters and considerations encourages deeper thinking and reflection about the learning so educators can build their writing capabilities over time. (Depending on your region, story types may be an add-on feature of Storypark).
- **Attend (or watch on demand) Storypark's free professional learning and development webinars** individually or as a team.



“Buddy teachers up, and ask them to comment on each other's stories for the week, then swap buddies at the next staff meeting. Talk with them about the importance of reading each other's stories so you can build upon the learning for the child.”

Dr Kath Cooper
Strengths coach

Create high-quality documentation with Storypark story types

If your organisation or service wishes to grow the capability of educators and deliver consistent, high-quality documentation, then story types can support you in achieving this. Story types provide educators with a structure that guides the creation of documentation.

Key benefits:

- **Increase** documentation quality
- **Grow** your educators' knowledge and skills in story writing by having consistent frameworks to guide them
- **Provide** 'just in time' support for new or untrained educators
- **Include** organisational content around particular requirements/themes/philosophical points in your educators' assessment and documentation
- **Save** educator's time
- **Strengthen** educators' reflective knowledge and practice



What are story types?

Story types are customisable prompts that guide educators as they document children's learning and their own reflections on practice. When an educator selects 'Create a Story' they are provided with a selection of story types with prompts. You can use the Storypark library to use, edit, or adapt the story types or create your own to suit your setting. **To find out more, search story types in the [help centre](#).**



Create rich assessment for children on Storypark

Storypark exists to help every child fulfil their unique potential, by connecting and empowering the community around them. Storypark helps early childhood educators document learning and engage families, as well as enables educators to intentionally plan for a child's next steps and support them in their learning journey.

It's a simple, customisable tool, designed to complement any service - no matter their context, philosophy or practice. With the help of leading early childhood experts and advisors, Storypark supports continuous professional development through a range of advice and resources, such as this e-book, all designed to help empower and build the capability of the people that matter most to children.

[Learn more about how Storypark can support your service today](#)

For more in-depth support with writing stories on Storypark, check out these help articles:

[Create a story](#)

[Spell check](#)

[Linking multiple stories and notes together](#)

[What are moments?](#)

[What are learning tags and sets?](#)

[Add a comment to a story](#)

[Add a child comment to a story](#)

[What are learning tags and sets?](#)

[What are public learning sets?](#)

[Create learning sets and tags](#)

[Manage learning sets and tags](#)

[Add tags to a story](#)

[Filter stories by tags](#)

Resources for further reflection on documentation and assessment:

[Blog post: Using the right avenue to engage with vulnerable families](#)

[Blog post: Paper-based or digital? Let's talk about documenting children's learning](#)

[Blog post: Ask yourself why](#)

[Blog post: Less can be more when documenting children's learning](#)

[Blog post: Who is documentation of children's learning really for?](#)

[Quality practice guide: Strengthening family engagement.](#)

Further reading

Australia

[ACECQA helps unlock the door on documentation](#)

[ACECQA EYLF Planning cycle](#)

[ACECQA EYLF Planning Cycle Printable Poster](#)

[ACECQA: Documentation – what, why and how](#)

New Zealand

[ERO Early Learning Curriculum](#)

Canada

[BCELF: Revised Curriculum](#)

[How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years](#)

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Enhance quality practice,
improve family engagement
and empower your team

[storypark.com](https://www.storypark.com)

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