



## National Quality Standard Professional Learning Program



# Noticing and recording learning



'[Educators] notice a great deal as they work with children and they recognise some of what they notice as learning. They will respond to a selection of what they recognise' (Drummond, 1993).

The process of noticing and recording children's learning is an essential practice of effective early childhood educators. Noticing meaningful learning encounters and then collecting this information in a number of ways enables us as educators to fulfil that promise we make to children and their families when they become a part of our services—that we will 'extend and enrich children's learning from birth to five years and through the transition to school' (Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2009a, p. 5).

Noticing and recording learning provides an information base that enables educators to successfully analyse and plan for children's learning. Without thoughtful noticing and recording, educators are in danger of offering experiences to children because 'this is what has always been done' or making assumptions about what children know, can do and are interested in. This can lead to programs that are mediocre at best where children (and educators) are bored and disengaged.

There are some key questions around 'noticing' and 'recording'. It may be helpful to work through the questions as a group—adding your own ideas, clarifications and practice examples as you go.

## What do we mean by noticing?

Noticing is the act of noting or observing; it is about perception and attention. It is anchored in respect for others. It is a fundamental practice of an educator in an early childhood setting and relies on a commitment to build collaborative relationships with children and their families.

When educators notice, they enact this principle in the *Early Years Learning Framework* (EYLF):

### Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships

Educators who are attuned to children's thoughts and feelings, support the development of a strong sense of wellbeing. They positively interact with the young child in their learning.

Being attuned to children means that educators will be in a position to notice—they will actively 'be with' the children, getting to know them so they can be alert to what is happening and take note of it. If we are too busy or distracted we will fail to recognise what is worth noticing.

### Reflective questions ...

- How attuned are you to the children you work with?
- What does attuned look like, sound like?
- What stops you from being with children?

## What do we mean by recording?

Recording involves a process of gathering information and documenting in written, oral and visual forms what is noticed. When, as educators, we record children's learning we are able to track progress and support further learning. Of course, if educators recorded everything they noticed we would be swamped by information. The quality of what we record depends on the next question—what do I notice? Without an active filter that helps us to determine what is meaningful, educators become lost in random data which won't help them to plan effectively.

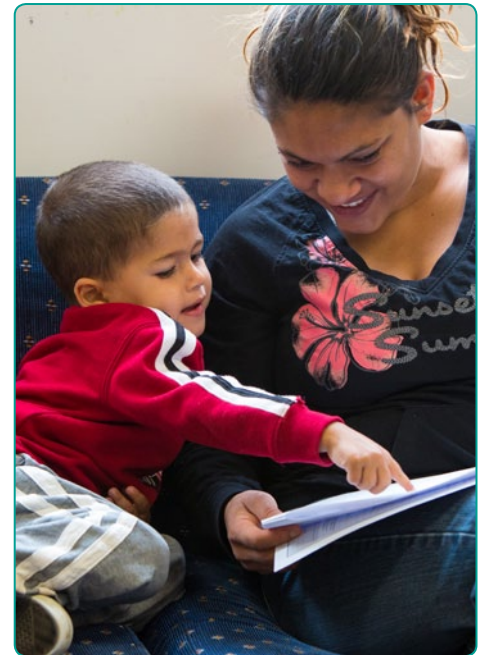
### Reflective questions ...

- What is your understanding of recording information about children learning?
- Is it seen as part of your commitment to children learning?
- Are you swamped by random recordings or is what you record helpful in understanding children?



## What are we noticing?

Determining what to notice and record is critical. Not only will this help us be more effective in supporting children's learning but it will stop us feeling overwhelmed by the 'noticing/recording/planning' process. When we pay attention to the most meaningful encounters with children, the whole process becomes easier, more engaging and more satisfying. The danger is that our records describe children passing time rather than engaged in important learning. Self-imposed rules requiring educators to collect a particular number of observations or learning stories per week are not a useful guide if the events they record are not significant or meaningful.



## So what do we mean by meaningful?

Meaningful noticing relates to the children and their families in each place and will look different at different times and for different ages and groups of children. But, generally speaking, meaningful noticing tells us something about:

- Individual children—their learning and development (dispositions, interests, strengths, fears, what they enjoy, what they know, can do and understand).
- Children's apparent sense of belonging, being and becoming—for example, noticing how children connect with others—children and adults—across different experiences and at different times of the day.
- Children's learning in relation to the five learning outcomes—knowing the detail of the learning outcomes helps us notice learning and helps us assess the distance travelled for each child.
- Children's joys and their complexities—what are children's challenges, or the things they find difficult to manage? For example, a child may find putting their belongings away in their bag a big challenge, or talking up in a group, or waiting for their turn.
- Group experiences and group learning—how do children cope in a group setting?—Are they overwhelmed or do they actively participate?
- Routines—including meal times, toileting, arrival and departures.
- Relationships and interactions—between children and with adults—for example, the ways in which an infant might attach to educators as they settle into the program.

### Reflective questions ...

- This list is a start—what might you add?
- What is 'meaningful' in your context?
- What aspects of children's involvement and engagement do you notice?
- What things do you think you miss or don't give attention to? Why?
- What strategies would help you notice with more meaning?

## Who notices and who records?

Noticing and recording are more effective when they are shared amongst those who are part of the experience. When we share the process of noticing, we open ourselves to learn more and strengthen the community of learners. Each of the following groups can be invited into the process:

### Educators

Ensure that every member of the team including relief, casual and ancillary staff has an opportunity to communicate what they notice. This is made easier when leaders explicitly invite contributions and encourage everyone to build relationships with children. Providing shared mechanisms such as notebooks, reflection diaries and more structured recording methods such as interviews with children, mean that many people can take part.

### Children

Children can become active noticers and recorders of their own learning when educators include them in conversations about what they experience and record their insights. Many services offer children the use of digital cameras. You can record children's ideas about what they understand, what they know they can do and what matters to them in their daily experiences by writing their reflections under photos, for example.

### Families

Encouraging families to share what they notice and capturing their insights in recordings is a powerful way to make children's learning visible to children, educators and other important adults. There are many experiences that families have with their children that they are keen to bring to the attention of educators. Educators can invite such contributions by getting to know families and welcoming their stories in undemanding ways, through spontaneous exchanges and passing chats.

Project approaches offer children lots of opportunity to be part of the noticing and recording process. Gina works in the 3–5 room in a busy suburban service and recently concluded a project about spiders after the children discovered a large huntsman on the wall. She interviewed the children and recorded what each of them knew about spiders and asked them to draw what the spider looked like. After much investigation and discussion over about six weeks she repeated the process, sharing with them their original thoughts and ideas. The children were able to point out how their first ideas had changed and share new insights. This approach actively included children in the process of noticing and recording.

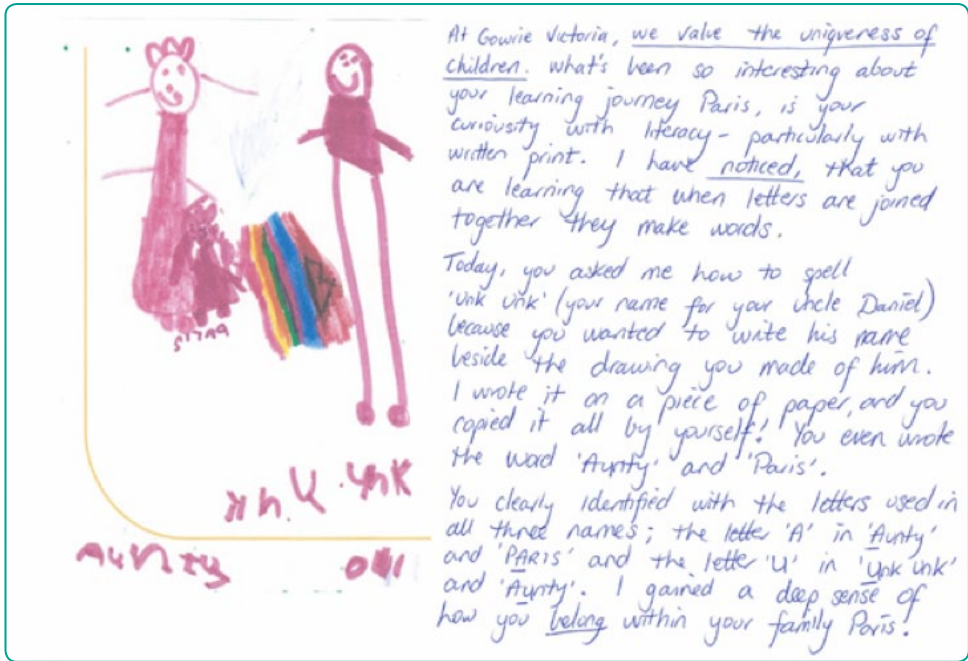


## How do we record?

Educators ideally use a range of recording techniques to gather information about children. If a single technique, for example, photos or learning stories is dominant, it may not provide a holistic picture of children's learning. When we collect information in a range of ways the results are richer, and in turn, that helps us to analyse, plan for and assess children learning in rich ways.

Recording techniques can include:

- Observations—recorded through video, photographs or on audio tape
- Observations—anecdotal records, running records
- Checklists (most helpful when there are concerns about children's development—it's a good idea to do these in conjunction with the support of a specialist professional like an inclusion support facilitator)
- Discussions with families— anecdotal information
- Using information about standard norms or developmental milestones
- Portfolios
- Learning stories
- Discussions with colleagues (for example, visiting professionals)
- Conversations with children
- Specific testing (where issues of concern are raised, sometimes undertaken by a specialist.)
- Reflection book or diary
- Learning journals
- Discussions with school educators about school readiness and transition matters
- Work samples
- Enrolment records.



This example demonstrates how the educator focuses in on a key learning (in this case expressive language—Outcome No.5: Children are effective communicators) and records the information in a way that gives it priority and makes the learning visible.

While some of these techniques have fallen out of favour in recent times, they have their place if used for the appropriate purpose and in a thoughtful way. It is important that educators talk together (using the reflection questions below as a start) about the different ways we record information, how these are used and in what circumstances. Educators may also come up with new ways to record learning.

Paying attention to the practice of noticing and recording is not only a valuable professional pursuit but a vital way to ensure that children's learning is enriched and extended. When we notice well, and record effectively, learning outcomes for every child are achievable, visible and available to be celebrated.

- Reflective questions ...**
- What recording techniques do we use?
  - Are we using a range of techniques?
  - Have we abandoned some techniques? Why?



**Author Biography**

Catharine is an early childhood consultant and writer. Catharine began as a teacher in a sessional kindergarten program and went on to manage a range of services for children and their families from child care in the Northern suburbs of Melbourne to school-based programs in Papua New Guinea. Catharine has a Masters in Early Childhood Education specialising in early childhood policy and governance, the delivery of integrated services and the exploration of innovative programs to engage vulnerable children and their families.

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Jenni Connor undertakes research and writing into learning, curriculum and educational issues generally. She was author of the 2011 e-Newsletters and responsible for coordinating the 2012 and 2013 series.

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**An Australian Government Initiative**

The NQS Professional Learning Program is funded by the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.



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