

# Ethical assessment

Assessment is an important element of early childhood pedagogy.

## KEY DOCUMENTS

Two key documents that influence the decisions and approaches of early childhood educators as they undertake assessment are *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (EYLF)* (DEEWR, 2009) and *Early Childhood Australia's Code of Ethics (ECA, 2010)*.

The EYLF locates assessment as an essential part of pedagogy, referring to assessment for learning as a process of '... gathering and analysing information as evidence about what children know, can do and understand. It is part of an ongoing cycle that includes planning, documenting and evaluating children's learning' (DEEWR, 2009, p. 17). The ECA *Code of Ethics* includes responsibilities for educators to '... develop shared planning, monitoring and assessment practices for children's learning and communicate this in ways that families understand' and '... work to promote community understanding of how children learn in order that appropriate systems of assessment and reporting are used to benefit children'.

## BUILDING ON WHAT CHILDREN KNOW AND UNDERSTAND

Both documents emphasise the importance of assessment for clear purposes, connections between assessment and learning and reporting to the benefit of children, families and communities. They are also underpinned by commitments to authentic assessment that provides opportunities for children to demonstrate and build on what they can do, rather than what children cannot do, nor understand. This does not suggest that assessment should ignore areas in which children experience difficulties or face challenges. Rather, it reflects the view that very few learners will benefit from consistently being told what they cannot do or do not understand. All of us are more likely to engage with learning when we have a balanced set of information that notes our strengths, as well as indicating how we could build on these strengths as we also tackle new challenges.



## AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT

There are many strategies and techniques that can be used in assessing young children's learning and in reporting this to children, families and communities. Authentic assessment occurs when children's capabilities are noted over time as they engage in experiences that are part of the everyday curriculum, as well as being worthwhile and meaningful to those involved. The context for authentic assessment must be one of support and positive relationships: children are much more likely to demonstrate their competence in a familiar environment with people they know and care about.

All educators have a responsibility to promote ethical assessment. This involves using a range of assessment strategies over time in the gathering and analysis of information to promote children's learning and development. Not only educators, but also families and communities can contribute to this information. Children also have an integral role to play in this process as they engage in self-reflection and self-assessment.

It is important to remember that the process of assessment involves making judgements about the information that has been generated. In making these professional judgements we should also note that assessment relates as much to the opportunities we provide as educators—that is, our own teaching and learning—as it does to children's learning.

## ONGOING ASSESSMENT

The importance of ongoing assessment, over time and involving people who are familiar to children, is critical. Without this, there is the risk of one-off assessments that can provide a distorted view of children's capabilities. Ethical assessment generates and shares information in ways that acknowledge children's strengths as well as areas of challenge. It recognises the diversity of children's experiences and celebrates children's range of achievements and areas of potential. Ethical assessment looks to the future as well as recognising the present and reflecting the past.

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### References

Early Childhood Australia (ECA) (2010). *Code of Ethics*. Canberra, ACT: ECA.

### Assessment in the Early Years

Develop, review and strengthen approaches to assessment, in line with the Early Years Learning Framework.



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