

Early Childhood Resource Hub newsletter

What to document

The topic for this newsletter began with a conversation with an educator who spoke about how much time is spent photographing children, rather than interacting with them. On the other hand, visuals can be an efficient way of capturing a moment for further reflection.

What activities should form part of your documentation? Educator Louise Dorrat provides advice and strategies in her article 'Documentation and assessment: I am drowning in it!'

Explore a range of resources that provide support in this area.

Documentation and assessment: I am drowning in it!

Are you drowning in observations, reflections, journals, goals, outcomes *and* wondering what to do with the 200 photos on your memory stick? Are you standing in the office waiting for 22 learning stories to be printed so you can add them to each child's individual portfolio? Do you have to do two observations per child per day and then upload pictures to the software for parents by 3pm each day?

It is not about ticking outcome boxes, it is not about templates, and it is not about the perfect software. Documentation and assessment ensure that 'each child's learning and development is assessed or evaluated as part of the ongoing planning cycle' (National Quality Standard 1.3.1, 2018).



Think about why you document and who you document for

- **To make the learning visible:** It is not what children are doing; it is what children are learning.
- **To assess children's learning and development:** What do the children know, what can they do and what do they understand? (EYLF p15).
- **To promote your pedagogy:** Be proud of what you do. What do you want to show children, parents, students and advisors?
- **To plan ahead:** Use the documentation to inform you of 'where to next' in relation to the children, environment, routines, your language, experiences, work in challenging bias, etc.

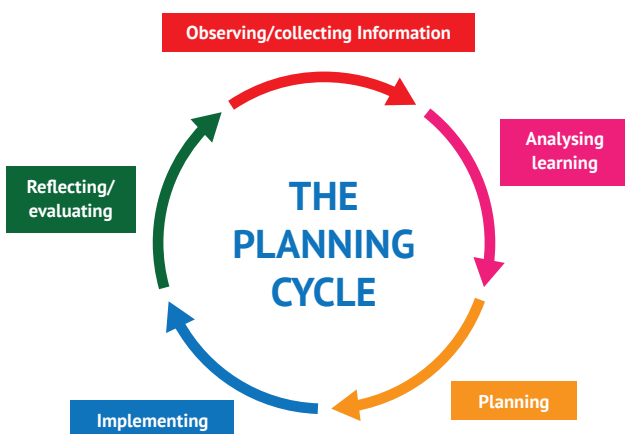
A great place to start

Use the early years planning cycle (National Quality Standard 1.3.1, 2018) to keep you on track.

‘Each child’s learning and development is assessed or evaluated as part of an ongoing cycle of observation, analysing learning, documentation, planning, implementation and reflection.’

(National Quality Standard 1.3.1).

A break-down of the early years planning cycle (National Quality Standard 1.3.1)



‘Documentation is turning the experiences that you observe and hear into written or pictorial records that can be shared, revisited and extended over time.’

(Educators’ guide to the EYLF, p37)

Observing/collecting information

- **Think about what information is important to collect:** Will it support you to in assessing where the children are at?
- **Collect a range of information:** This may include photos, observations, child’s voice, background information, artwork etc.
- **Collect information over time:** What is the point of collecting a one-off drawing? Three drawings over a period of time can show a child’s development.

- **It is the quality of the information collected rather than the quantity that is important:** Collect enough information to get the essence of each child.

Analysing learning

- What learning is taking place?
- How is this meaningful or important for each child?
- **Who else can help interpret or** analyse the information collected (children, families and other professionals)?

Planning

- Plan for each child’s holistic learning using the learning outcomes (ie planning to use books and to have discussions about racism contributes to Outcome 2: ‘Develop the ability to recognise unfairness and bias and the capacity to act with compassion and kindness: EYLF, p28).
- Plan the learning environment and teaching strategies (EYLF, p12).

Implementing

- Implement the plans.
- Ensure there are sustained and respectful interactions with all children (Educators’ guide to the EYLF, p12).
- ‘Be intentional in your teaching; Deliberate, purposeful and thoughtful in your decisions and actions’ (EYLF, p15).

Reflecting and evaluation

This is not about: ‘Today was a lovely day’.

- Reflection occurs in every step of the planning cycle (VEYLDF, p8).
- What is working and what can we improve? (Educators’ guide to the EYLF, p12).

Critical reflection

- Reflective practices that focus on implications for equity and social justice (EYLF, p24).
- Examining all aspects from different perspectives (EYLF, p13).
- Asking who is advantaged when I work this way, who is disadvantaged? (EYLF, p13).

Do not be like Madame Zelda.

Madame Zelda, an educator from Fountain Lakes Lighthouse Academy was living and breathing documentation. She was documenting all day every day and well into the night because her Assessment and Rating visit was coming up. She ended up being diagnosed with PSDD (Post-Traumatic Documentation Disorder) and to make matters worse, she was rated 'Working Towards' for Quality Area 1 as there was no evidence of each child's learning and development. Madame Zelda tried to argue with the Authorised Officer, explaining that the children's individual portfolios were fatter and more colourful than ever! (see picture)



Image source: © Louise Dorrat

To summarise

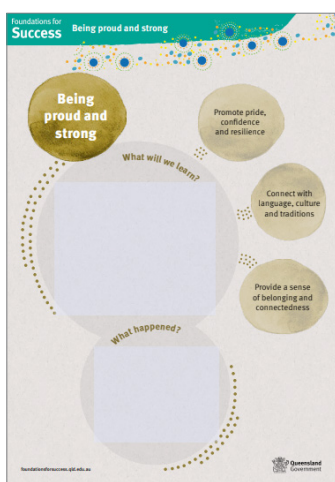
- Documentation and assessment must meet the National Regulations (73 to 76, 2012) and the National Quality Standard (1.3, 2018).
- The intention of documentation is to *explain* not merely to *display* (Reggio Emilia approach).
- Document what each child is learning not what they are doing.
- It's the *quality* of the documentation and assessment that matters, not the *quantity*.
- Document the *extraordinary* in the *ordinary* (Fleet, Honig, Robertson, Semann, Shepherd, 2011).
- There is no one size fits all. Documentation recognises the *uniqueness* of each service.
- There are no templates for a very good reason.
- Be *selective* in what you choose to document because it is not possible to capture all the rich experiences and learnings that occur every day.
- Educators are empowered to explore a range of styles and methods to determine what works best for their children, families, service and community (ACECQA, 2018).

Louise Dorrat, Early Childhood Consultant, has a Masters of Education and teaches Bachelor of Education courses at a number of universities, including the Institute of Koorie Education at Deakin University. She delivers training across Australia and assisted in the establishment of the first bush kinder in Australia. Her website is www.louisedorrat.com.au.

Resources

Documenting and reflecting for children's learning

The Queensland Government [Documenting and reflecting](#) page explores the purposes of documentation. It provides templates that support educators to work intentionally and to reflect on daily activities. There is also a video showing how one service goes about documenting what children are doing. It shows how educators use the example learning behaviours for 'being proud and strong' to analyse their observations.



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Guidelines for documenting children's learning

Find information about documentation in the ACECQA-published [document](#), Find the time for meaningful documentation.

Find the time for meaningful documentation

Writing in *The Spoke*, Amanda Wilson argues that, among other benefits, quality documentation of children's learning helps to professionally position the early childhood sector. The article evoked some interesting comments.

One reader commented:

'I think that the camera can get in the way of our participation with the children. I have seen schools where the team leader tells the teachers and assistants that they have to document 7 children each week on Tapestry online journal or on Seesaw.'

Another reader wrote:

'I have come to the view that the shift in language from observation to documentation has shifted the focus from the process of observing and knowing children to the end product of documenting.'

Have a read and see what you think.

Documenting children's learning

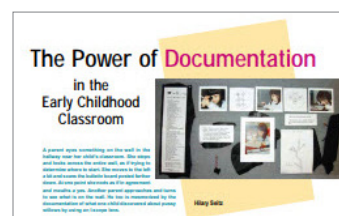
Find case studies and ideas for better processes in the [Documenting children's learning](#) collection of links. There are video interviews with educators who talk about how they approach the National Quality Standard requirements for documentation. Creative Play Early Learning Centre in Victoria reflects on how educators became enthusiastic over time after initial resistance. Tracey Roberts, a pedagogical leader from Kingborough Family Day Care in Tasmania, offers insights and advice on successful practice of documenting children's learning.



Educator shows some of the ways that this service records and reflects on what children are doing.

The power of documentation in the early childhood classroom

A US-published document, [The power of documentation](#), explores the reasons for documenting learning and the stages of the documenter. It also provides input about artefacts and evidence.



Resources (cont'd)

Documentation – what's the point?

In another [article](#) in *The Spoke*, Anne Stonehouse writes:

*'Many documented observations of children appear to be more about what they **have done** than about evidence of **what they have learned or are learning**. This seems to be true even when the accounts are mistakenly called **'learning stories'**. It's much easier to see, hear and record what children are **doing** than what they are **learning**.'*

She asks: 'If we want to focus more on learning than doing, what will help us make the shift?'

Pedagogical documentation

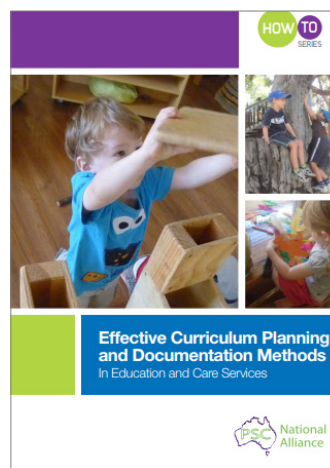
A set of PowerPoint slides by Susan Stacey, [Pedagogical documentation](#), explores what we might document, how we might use documentation in inquiry-based practices, who the documentation is for and forms of documentation. It would be a good discussion starter for a staff meeting.

What do we document?

- Interesting or puzzling events during play
- Projects: short or long term
- The process of learning (series of small or large panels)
- Small, significant moments
- Developmental milestones
- Our questions ... what do we wonder?

Effective curriculum planning and documentation methods in education and care services

The resource [Effective curriculum planning and documentation methods](#) offers ideas and guidance to assist educators in developing their curriculum and documentation practices in relation to educational programs. Activities after each topic assist thinking about current practices and consideration of new approaches to creating meaningful curriculum and assessment for children, with manageable documentation.



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Queensland kindergarten learning guidelines: Making learning visible

This [resource](#) discusses the various purposes of documentation and provides some examples.

Documenting learning: Writing the perfect learning story

This [blog entry](#) by a New Zealand educator will provoke discussion about the purpose of learning stories and what is most valuable about this mode of documenting learning.