# Teacher resource: An integrated approach to gathering evidence of children’s learning

This teacher resource accompanies the professional learning session ‘An integrated approach to gathering evidence of children’s learning’. It may be used to support professional dialogue to facilitate deeper understanding within the preschool team or to supplement the corresponding professional learning.

## Purpose

To support educators to manage an integrated approach to gathering evidence of children’s learning through multiple sources. This is particularly important while children are experiencing long absences from the education setting and during an integrated approach to learning.

## Key Messages

Integrated approach refers to gathering evidence as assessment for learning in the early years, across the home learning environment and the education setting. Learners in the early years are identified as children from birth to eight. In the department this broadly includes children in preschools, early intervention, Kindergarten and Stage 1.

## Assessment and planning cycle

Assessment is the process of gathering and analysing information of children’s learning to inform an ongoing planning cycle which underpins pedagogical decisions made by teachers. The Early Years Learning Framework identifies assessment for learning as a pedagogical practice used to promote children’s learning and defines it as:

the 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 (Source: EYLF, DEEWR, 2009 p. 17).

The components of the planning cycle with a strong emphasis on assessment include reflecting and evaluating along with observing and collecting information. Therefore, these are the two components of the cycle that educators should keep in mind as they concentrate on gathering evidence as assessment for learning in the early years.

### Gathering evidence as assessment for learning

Assessment of children’s learning plays a key role in supporting educators to provide teaching and learning programs which are responsive to the strengths, needs and interests of young children. The Early Years Learning Framework lists several reasons why assessment is important. Assessment enables:

* effective planning
* communication about children’s learning and progress
* identifying children’s learning needs
* making learning visible to children, families, educators and other professionals
* evaluation of the effectiveness of the program or curriculum, and
* critical reflection and subsequent improvements in pedagogy (Source: EYLF, DEEWR, 2009, p. 17).

Having detailed knowledge of each child contributes significantly to plans for the curriculum or program and provides evidence about children’s progress. Educators may use different approaches to assessment including:

* assessment for learning also referred to as formative assessment, and
* assessment of learning also referred to as summative assessment.

### Formative assessment

‘The term **formative** describes assessment processes that are ongoing and occur throughout the learning process. They contribute to children’s learning by enhancing teaching.’ (Source: Educators belonging, being and becoming Resources CD, document 11, Assessing learning).

The NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) uses the term assessment for learning and defines it as:

teachers using evidence about students' knowledge, understanding and skills to inform their teaching. Sometimes referred to as ‘formative assessment', it usually occurs throughout the teaching and learning process to clarify student learning and understanding. (Source: NESA, [Assessment for, as and of learning](https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/k-10/understanding-the-curriculum/assessment/approaches)).

This approach to assessment:

* occurs continuously throughout the learning process rather than at the end
* enhances the teaching process as educators develop a deeper understanding of the children with whom they work, and
* is used to inform plans for ongoing learning.

Collaborating with children, families and caregivers to assess children’s learning enriches assessment and makes it more likely that assessments will be rich, meaningful and accurate. It also ensures:

* families are able to support their child’s learning more effectively and are empowered as advocates for their child
* educators learn more about each child particularly if they are engaging in learning remotely, and
* children gain an understanding of themselves as learners.

### Summative assessment

‘The term **summative**is used to describe assessment processes that typically occur at the end of a learning experience or activity and ‘sum up’ what has been learned.’ (Source: Educators belonging, being and becoming resources CD, document 11, Assessing learning).

The NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) refers to this as assessment of learning. It assists teachers in using evidence of learning to assess achievement against outcomes and usually occurs at defined key points, which may be at the end of a learning experience, school term or semester. (NESA, [Assessment for, as and of learning](https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/k-10/understanding-the-curriculum/assessment/approaches)).

Summative assessment brings together individual pieces of formative assessment and helps create an up-to-date profile of each child. They capture children's current knowledge, skills and understandings, noting challenges and areas of learning or behaviour of concern. These summaries are also useful when educators or families have concerns about children’s learning or development.

Summative assessments may be used to:

* support ongoing communication and sharing of insights and information in order to build an up-to-date shared picture of the child’s learning with colleagues, children and their families
* provide information to educators when the child is transitioning from one service to another, for example starting school.

The NSW Department of Education [Transition to School Statement](https://education.nsw.gov.au/content/dam/main-education/early-childhood-education/working-in-early-childhood-education/media/documents/T2S-Statement-interactive-form-2018.pdf) is a useful tool for documenting summative assessment as it helps provide a snapshot of each child's strengths, perspectives, and personality. It:

* links the Early Years Learning Framework to the Early Stage 1 Syllabus so that teachers can better understand each child's background, learning, and development
* is a useful tool to reflect on during mid-year summative assessment
* should be completed for each child at the end of their early learning journey to support continuity and a smooth transition to school. (NSW Department of Education, [Transition to School](https://education.nsw.gov.au/early-childhood-education/working-in-early-childhood-education/transition-to-school)).

## How do you know your teaching is on track?

The [Guide to the National Quality Framework – Section 3](https://www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf/about/guide) unpacks the assessment and planning cycle as a process which includes: observation, analysing learning, documentation, planning, implementation and reflection. Documentation of learning should occur at each stage of the cycle to ensure teaching is on track.

It is important to maintain a profile for each child to record their learning journey. This may include evidence collected by educators, the children and their family members and other professionals who work with individual children. Consider:

* exploring a range of styles and methods to determine what works best for your children, families, service and community
* concentrating on documentation that supports quality outcomes for children
* having a tracking system to ensure that each child’s learning is being assessed
* trying different methods to find what is realistic, achievable and relevant for yourselves, the children and their families
* being open to change as the dynamics of the group or team change
* keeping track of changes in a reflective journal and reviewing your documentation procedure to reflect changes.

### Methods for gathering evidence of children’s learning

In recognising the unique context of each service, there is no one-size-fits-all approach. Methods for documentation may include:

* observations and stories of children’s learning
* photographs with captions and annotations
* video or audio recordings
* anecdotes or running records
* annotated samples of projects and investigations
* individual and collaborative works across a P-2 setting
* notes from meetings or conversations with children, families, staff colleagues and other professionals
* collection of children’s feedback, ideas and suggestions including children’s own documentation on the program
* electronic records or information shared via apps.

## Questions to guide reflection

* How does documentation assist in planning effectively for children’s current and future learning?
* How do you decide what’s worth recording?
* How do you involve children and their families in assessing learning?
* How do you involve your colleagues and other professionals in assessing children’s learning?
* Does your documentation capture children’s understandings, dispositions, knowledge and skills?
* How does documentation inform the content of the curriculum and pedagogical practice?
* Do you have a system to regularly and systematically reflect on all evidence gathered such as: photos, jottings, anecdotal observations, samples of each child’s work, online feedback from children and families, information shared by other professionals?

## Resources

Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (2009)[Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia](https://docs.education.gov.au/documents/belonging-being-becoming-early-years-learning-framework-australia)

Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (2009) [Educators’ Guide to the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia](https://docs.education.gov.au/documents/educators-guide-early-years-learning-framework-australia)

NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) [Assessment for, as and of learning](https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/k-10/understanding-the-curriculum/assessment/approaches)

NSW Department of Education [Transition to School Statement (PDF 1.21MB)](https://education.nsw.gov.au/content/dam/main-education/early-childhood-education/working-in-early-childhood-education/media/documents/T2S-Statement-interactive-form-2018.pdf)

Australia Children’s Education & Care Quality Authority (2018) [Guide to the National Quality Framework](https://www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf/about/guide)