CHCECE013
Use information about children to inform practice

Learner guide
Edition 1

Training and Education Support
Industry Skills Unit
Meadowbank

Product Code: 5774
Acknowledgments

The TAFE NSW Training and Education Support Industry Skills Unit, Meadowbank would like to acknowledge the support and assistance of the following people in the production of this learner resource guide:

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**Further acknowledgments**
A considerable amount of the material in this learner resource has been developed from the following TAFENSW resource:

CHCPR303D Develop understanding of children’s interest and developmental needs - version 2 (2012)
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About this unit

This unit describes the skills and knowledge required to gather information about children through observation and other sources as a basis to inform program planning cycles and to share with children and their families.

This unit applies to educators who work with children in a range of education and care service settings.

Underpinning this unit is knowledge of the relevant National Quality Standard quality areas, standards and elements, sections of Education and Care Services National Law and Regulations, and aspects of the relevant learning framework, including:

- National Quality Standard – Quality Areas 1 & 6
- Education and Care Services National Regulation, Parts 4.1 & 4.7
- Approved Learning Framework – Early Years Learning Framework or My Time, Our Place
- Educators’ Guide to the Early Years Learning Framework

Additionally, whilst studying this unit you will need to access a range of other resources and documents, including:


*Early Childhood Australia* [www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au](http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au)


Details of, and/or links to all required resources are listed in the resources section at the rear of this Learner Resource. In some cases you will need to use a computer and the internet to access the required resources. Sometimes internet pages can be moved over time – if you have difficulty finding the required resources with the link provided, try a google search, and if that fails, ask your facilitator for assistance.
Section 1 - Developing an understanding of children: principles and guidelines

In this unit we will be introducing you to strategies in observation and documentation that lead to better understandings of the children in your care in children’s services. In this section we will look at some of the main principles and guidelines that professional early education and care workers use when observing and documenting children's interests and development, their temperaments and dispositions.

Working with young children requires you to develop many new skills. One of these new skills is learning to gather and document information about children. A talented and effective educator is someone who has a deep knowledge and understanding of each child in their care. They are familiar with many things about the child: their special interests, their likes and dislikes, their preference for play activities, their home and cultural background.

To really get to know the children in our care we must work towards having close and meaningful relationships with each of them. A very effective way to deepen our understanding of each child is to gather information about them by using observation and documentation methods. Many worthwhile things will flow from gathering and documenting information about children. We will get to know children better, we are likely to develop more positive relationships with them, and we should be able to plan for them more effectively.

Gandini and Goldhaber, remind us in their chapter, Two Reflections about Documentation, that when we are involved in the process of documenting we should be watching children closely and keenly, listening to them attentively and gathering information using a variety of observation tools. We should not be collecting data in a distant, detached and objective manner. We should approach this whole task with the willingness and openness to discover the surprising and the extraordinary in children's everyday routines, events and play (Gandini and Goldhaber, 2000, cited in Gandini and Edwards, 2001, p 125).

Throughout this unit, we will be encouraging you to use observation and documentation to discover the unique characteristics and potential of each child, as well as to learn more about the process of development that is unfolding as they grow and learn.

Let us begin with some definitions. In general, usage, observation can be defined as:

- watching someone or something attentively, especially for the purpose of research or study
- noting behaviours, symptoms or phenomena
- a remark or comment.
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**Documentation** is usually understood to mean:

- records or citations
- information, proof or evidence
- authentication.

*The Early Years Learning Framework* describes these processes collectively as ‘assessment for learning’, and identifies it as a key professional practice for early childhood educators, which

“...enables educators in partnerships with families, children and other professionals to;

- plan effectively for children's current and future learning
- communicate about children’s learning and progress
- determine the extent to which all children are progressing towards realising learning outcomes and if not, what might be impeding their progress
- identify children who may need additional support in order to achieve particular learning outcomes, providing that support or assisting families to access specialist help
- evaluate the effectiveness of learning opportunities, environments and experiences offered and the approaches taken to enable children's learning
- reflect on pedagogy that will suit this context and these children” p. 17

So, what do these words mean in education and care services? Although the methods and processes may vary from service type to service type, in general *observation* means to watch and listen attentively to children to learn more about them, and *documentation* is the process of recording this information. This recording can be done in a wide variety of ways, including written observation records, photos of children at play, audiotapes of children conversing, and the collection of children's paintings, drawings and writing samples. These records are then interpreted by educators and shared with the child, their family and colleagues, so that children can be better understood and provided for in the service.

**How do we gather information?**

The process of gathering information about a child usually begins when families first make contact with a service. This may simply be to make enquiries or put their child’s name on a waiting list. We talk with family members and the child and gather some basic background information about this family, their views of
their child and their hopes for their child. As we have ongoing contact with the child and their family we can begin to gather more information.

Take a moment to think of all the possible ways we can gather information about children. Can you think of any more?

- talking with parents and other educators about the child
- enrolment interviews or parent conferences
- watching what children do
- becoming involved in children’s play
- conversing with children
- listening attentively to what children say
- taking photos or audio recordings of children at play
- collecting and analysing children’s work.

There are many ways of gathering information about children in services today and this unit will introduce you to some of them. One of the popular techniques currently used is digital media e.g. photo jottings and CD portfolios. A very traditional way of gathering information about children is by using formal observation methods. We will discuss a variety of current methods of gathering information about children for a fuller, more detailed picture of their interests and development.

There are a variety of formal techniques for recording observations. Some of these include:

- anecdotes, including small anecdotes (jottings)
- running records and
- chart forms such as checklists

There are a variety of popular informal techniques for gathering information about children:

- background information (gathered verbally or in a written survey or interview)
- sampling; language samples including word lists and work samples (drawings, paintings, collage, photos of sand constructions, block constructions or creative play)
- interpretive photo jottings

If you would like to know more, have a look in the following text at the contents list, and read about methods that you want to know more about:

**Why do we gather information about children?**

Gathering information about children allows us to learn many different things about each individual child.

- To discover the interests of the child and the areas of play they choose. This will allow us to plan experiences and make provisions that build on their interests and are both interesting, exciting and beneficial to the child.
- To chart the developmental progress of the child. This will allow us to plan out how we can best care for each child and to monitor their development.
- To identify the strengths/competencies of the child. This will allow us to find out what the child is particularly good at, so that we can assist their development to support their learning and potential.
- To note any emerging skills the child may have. The child may be ready to learn a new skill or concept with your assistance. We may need to offer extra attention and reassurance during times of stress in the child’s life. We may identify a developmental delay or difficulty that needs further professional assessment.
- To learn more about a particular problem or difficulty a child may have.
- To use as a basis for programming. This will allow us to plan programmes which meet the interests, strengths/competencies, and emerging skills of each individual child.
- To share this information with the child and family to help build a close relationship with them in understanding the child, and in collaborating to plan and provide the best experiences to help the child and family achieve their potentials.

There are also some other reasons we observe and document our observations, including:

- To recognise when play equipment needs to be changed or adapted and when to put out more equipment for the children.
- To recognise when children need help at a particular experience.
- To recognise when it is the right time to join in on children’s play.
- To evaluate the programs we are offering children
- To ensure the environment is appropriately set up in terms of a child’s senses (the sound and smell of the room & outdoors, the visual images, the textures for touch and the use of space and the general ‘feeling’ you get
when you walk in), and that it is supportive of the child's competencies emerging skills and interests.

What is considered good practice when gathering information about children?

In our everyday lives we constantly observe and pick up new information. We notice things in our environment, for example the people around us or the changes in the weather. We are observing all the time.

Complete this activity to test your memory and observation skills.

Activity 1.1

Recall all the things you observed during your last visit to the shops. Try to remember as much as you can.

[You may wish to write a list here]

How did you go? Were you surprised at the details you were able to remember, or were you surprised at the number of things you observed without even realising you were engaging in observation?

Do you have a particular thing you notice more often than others? It could be cars, sports or fashion.
Human beings have the ability to be natural observers. However, in education and care services we require you to build upon these natural abilities to become professional observers.

Now let’s try observing and documenting some information from a photo about a child playing.

Activity 1.1 continued

In the space below write down what you see and what you think might be happening in the photo. Record this information in as much detail as you can.

Discuss your comments with your facilitator or colleagues if possible.
The words we use to describe children can reflect an optimistic or a negative view of children. For example you could say that "Jaxon doesn't join in with group time games" (a negative view), or you could say, "Jaxon likes to watch others during group time games, but is not yet ready to join in" (a more optimistic view).

Complete this activity to practise identifying statements from observations that are clear and positive records.

### Activity 1.3

Circle ‘yes’ or ‘no’ next to each statement showing whether the statement is a clear and positive record, avoiding unnecessary judgement, assumptions and negativity:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lilly (18 months) whinges constantly when her dad leaves her in the morning.</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoe (four years) is very sneaky as she pushes Joe over.</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yen (two years, six months) leaves his mother in the morning without hesitation. He waves and runs inside to join the other children.</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drew goes to sleep on her bed if she has her toy rabbit.</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casey always runs inside. She never listens and is very naughty.</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Recording specific and descriptive observations**

The more detail you can include about what you have observed, the more useful you will find the record when you look back on it and interpret it.

Have a look at the following examples of broad and specific observation records of the same situation:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Broad statement</th>
<th>Specific statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lili was happy as she played in the water trough.</td>
<td>Lili played at the water trough for ten minutes. She pushed the beaker down into the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>water until it was full, then held it up to eye level, and emptied it into the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>trough. She repeated this action a number of times with different sized containers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evan couldn’t cut the paper. Instead he tore and</td>
<td>Evan said he wanted to use smaller pieces of tissue paper in his collage. He tried</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ripped it.</td>
<td>to cut the paper using scissors but he was not able to control the flimsy paper.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>So he put the scissors down and carefully tore the pieces into the small pieces he</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>needed to complete the collage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George was sweet to the younger children.</td>
<td>Ben was sitting in the high chair playing with his spoon. He leant over and threw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the spoon on the floor. George went and picked it up for him. Ben grabbed the spoon,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>laughed and threw the spoon again. George picked it up and handed it back.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As you can see in the above examples, the specific statements offer you much more information about the child, their interests and their skills.

**Avoiding bias and stereotyping in observations**

We must ensure that the information we record is free from bias and stereotyping. Stereotypical attitudes and bias creep in to records when we allow our own personal prejudices to colour our views of children.

You will remember that you need to record exactly what you see. It is important that you do not record your own opinions or views or what you think is happening. You need to describe the behaviour without labelling the child.

Showing biased attitudes, using negative language or applying stereotypical descriptions will affect the clarity and usefulness of the observation. It is important for ethical reasons that all biased attitudes are avoided when observing and recording children’s behaviours.

Let’s look at the following examples of biased statements. Remember they are not accurate but are biased and reflect negative stereotypes.
‘That child is just like his brother, always hitting everyone. It must have something to do with their cultural background’.

‘Those parents are so lazy; they’ve never had a job since I’ve been at the centre’.

‘I don’t know why we have to take children with disabilities. The service should only be for children who are normal’.

Many people have biased and stereotyped attitudes towards different groups of people. These attitudes are often associated with different racial, cultural, religious, gender, abilities and socio-economic backgrounds.

As you progress through this course, you will learn more about common stereotypical attitudes people have. This will be explored more fully in other units. Sometimes it is hard for us to recognise our own biases. One of the first steps in ensuring our observations are not biased is acknowledging what our own biases are and ensuring that they do not influence our views of children. Here are some examples of how bias and stereotypical attitudes can affect the quality of an observation.

- The observer only records the child’s negative or difficult behaviour and does not record anything positive about the child.
- The observer records very detailed observations only on the children that they really like and less detailed observations of the children that they dislike.
- The observer applies a racist attitude to describe a child’s behaviour, for example ‘Marbelle only ever speaks Spanish, and she refuses to speak English’.

**Observing and the Code of Ethics**

The code of ethics was developed by the Early Childhood Australia (ECA). Professional ethics are a set of standards by which a particular group or community decides to regulate its behaviour. The ECA Code of Ethics offers you guidelines on how to make decisions or behave in difficult situations in children’s services. They’re particularly useful when there is not a clear process or procedure to follow, or where you are faced with a professional dilemma or conflict.

We suggest that you read the ECA code of ethics as a guideline for professional behaviour.

The Code of Ethics is only one industry document that supports the use of observations in early childhood. Other industry documents that support the use of observations are the Education and Care Services National Regulations, National Quality Standard documents and the Early Years Learning Framework: Belonging, Being & Becoming.

**Observing and National Quality Standard**

You have probably already started to learn all about National Quality Standard in some of your other units. Throughout this section, we will focus on National Quality Standard in relation to observation.

The Commonwealth Government in Australia introduced the National Quality Standard as part of the National Quality Framework announced in 2009. The National Quality Framework came into effect in January 2012, although some aspects of the Framework will be progressively implemented in the period up to 2020. The aim of National Quality Framework is to improve the quality of education and care for children and to ensure that the quality of education and care is consistent across Australia in all long day care centres, family day care, preschools and school age care services.

In long day care centres, pre-schools, FDC schemes and SAC services, providers have a legal obligation to be obtain service and provider approval, and be periodically assessed on service specific practices that relate to the National Quality Standard.


As you can see, the National Quality Standard fully supports the use of observation and documentation about children in education and care services. Observations are viewed as an integral part of the whole centre program.

What other industry documents support the use of observations in early childhood?

**Observing and the Education and Care Services National Regulations**

No matter where we work or in what organisation, there will always be rules and regulations to be followed. A government body may enforce some of these. You have probably already started to learn about the Education and Care Services National Regulations in some of your other units. Throughout this section, we will also be focusing on how the Education and Care Services National Regulations support the use of observations and documentation.
Complete this activity to learn more about the Education and Care Services National Regulations.

Activity 1.4

Using the *Education and Care Services National Regulations*, record what is required in relation to documenting child assessments in the space below. These assessments are sometimes referred to in services as observations or child developmental records. The easiest way to do this is to use the find tool to search the document for “child assessments”.

So, what do you know about the Education and Care Services National Regulations so far?

The Education and Care Services National Regulations are designed to uniformly control the operation of an early education and care program or service. They were developed to:

- Protect the safety, health, education and welfare of the children who enter a children’s program.
- Guard against the exploitation of children and families.
- Ensure that basic minimum standards necessary to supporting safe and healthy growth and development of children are met.
- Ensure that the programs are accountable to parents and children as well as the community and funding agencies.
Observing and the Early Years Learning Framework

One of the key practices listed in the EYLF is “assessment and monitoring of children’s learning to inform provision and to support children in learning outcomes” (EYLF, p.14).

Activity 1.5

Access a copy of Belonging, Being & Becoming: The Early Years Learning for Australia from the website below:


Read the section entitled “Assessment for Learning” on pp. 17-18, and summarise the EYLF definition of assessment for children’s learning.

Discuss your ideas with your facilitator or work colleague
Confidentiality and privacy

We need now to look at an important aspect of professionalism – confidentiality. What does confidentiality mean?

Confidentiality can be described as the ability to be trustworthy and reliable with information about others.

Have you ever trusted someone enough to share some personal information about yourself with them? Has that person ever broken this trust by telling someone else? How did you feel when this happened? Think about your feelings from that experience. Did it change or have an impact on the relationship with that person?

You may not have enjoyed thinking about this situation. It probably raised some negative memories for you. It’s discouraging to have your trust betrayed in any situation, especially when you rely on someone to maintain your confidentiality.

We have Privacy legislation that guides us in ensuring confidentiality in children’s services, particularly when keeping written records about children and their families. The relevant legislation is the Commonwealth Privacy Act 1988 – Privacy Amendments (Private Sector) Act 2012.

http://www.oaic.gov.au

This Act addresses the keeping of records in “health services”, meaning any service that records information about a person’s health and well being. Children’s services are considered a “health service” for the purposes of this Act, as we keep developmental, dietary, special needs, health, illness and accident records for all enrolled children. In NSW, public sector agencies are also required to comply with the Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998, which regulates the way in which personal information is managed. The Education and Care Services National Law and Regulations also have specific requirements in relation to confidentiality of records, and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states in article 16 that all children have the right to privacy.

In summary, this Privacy legislation requires us to take particular care that all records kept on a person (including photographs, video or audio recordings, reports, portfolios and conversations) are collected in a lawful and fair manner. We can do this by:

- Informing everyone concerned about what information is held and where they can access it, what the records will be used for and which laws and legislation require the organisation to collect it.
- Ensuring that all personal information is collected in a fair and unobtrusive way.
- Recording and storing all information so that it is not seen or altered by anyone who is not authorised to do so.

We need to remember that the records we collect and keep belong to the child and their family, even though they are stored at the centre. We must ask their
permission at enrolment to collect these records and explain their purpose. They can be viewed at any time by the child’s parents or guardians, and many services hold regular family interviews to share these records and discuss their contents. We cannot show these records to others (such as specialists, early intervention workers and even TAFE students) without first gaining the consent of the parents or guardians.

Privacy legislation and the professional practice of maintaining confidentiality also informs us about how to go about observing children and discussing children with others. Educators are in a position of trust and are responsible for protecting the rights of the child and family. Here are some guidelines for maintaining confidentiality and privacy in your everyday work with children:

- Records should never be left lying around the centre for people to pick up and read. Some centres use a code or symbol for each child on records and programmes so they can only be identified by their main educators.
- Children and families must not be discussed with people other than your co-educators. For example, it is not acceptable to share information about a child and their family with people outside the service.
- Avoid casual conversations (gossip) about children and families, even with your co-educators. For example, ‘Beverly’s mum has left Beverly’s dad for another man’ – how much of this information do the educators need to know? Which educators in particular need to know at all? Only pass on information that is relevant to caring for the child to the child’s main educators.
- Finally, don’t forget you should not discuss children and families in front of the children.

NOTE: While it is expected and important to develop close positive relationships with the families of your service to support the children in your care, you MUST maintain your professional standards and keep any personal knowledge you may have of the families confidential. Not doing so can lead to serious breaches in your code of conduct.

Before even thinking about observing a child in an early education and care centre or school, you must read the centre/school policies on observing in their setting. Find out what their rules are and make sure you abide by them. All Centres have different policies. Read through this sample of a centre policy for students who visit the service to do practical learning tasks like observing children in the centre.
Once you have read the policy for the centre, you must then gain written permission to observe a child from the parents. NEVER observe or photograph a child without this written and signed permission. It is illegal & does not comply with professional practice.

Each centre has a parental permission form that is usually signed at the enrolment interview. This has to be signed before staff can observe, take photos or document information about a child. Here is a sample of a form you could use for parental permission to observe & document a child if you were a student on work placement.
PERMISSION TO OBSERVE A CHILD

Dear _______________

My name is ____________ and I attend ___________ College of TAFE (Child Studies). I will soon be doing a 2 week work placement at your child’s centre ________________ (name of centre)

It is a requirement of my course (Certificate III in Children’s Services/The Diploma in Children’s Services), to document observations of a child, and then plan appropriate experiences for the child based on my observations.

I am requesting that your child ______________ be my focus child for observation during the period of the work placement.

All information I gather will be kept confidential and be used as a learning tool to aid my knowledge of the development of children.

Thanking you ____________ (student to sign)

I ______________ (parent name) give permission for ____________ (student name) to take observations, photos and plan experiences for my child ______________ (child’s name) over the period of their work placement.

Signed ____________ (Parent)

Date ___________________

For a flow chart detailing the steps to take in the process of observing a child, go to appendix 1.