

HIGH QUALITY

Features of high quality assessment

ECE resources

When developing high quality assessments, it is useful to think about assessment in terms of content and coverage, analysis, curriculum, learning priorities and links to Te Whāriki, accessibility and collegiality.

Content and coverage

In regard to content and coverage, high quality assessment practice:

- notices, recognises and responds to children's dispositions and working theories
- pays careful attention to the breadth and richness of children's learning dispositions and experiences
- describes the context to interpret how the learning has occurred through people, places and things
- demonstrates multidimensional learning linked to a range of Te Whāriki's strands and principles

By contrast, poor quality assessment practice:

- does not meaningfully show children's interests, abilities and skills, focusing on developmental milestones instead
- rarely refers to working theories or dispositions
- addresses few of the strands and principles of Te Whāriki (for example, by focusing only on wellbeing or belonging or relationships)

Analysis

When analysing observations of children's learning and interactions, high quality assessment practice:

- finds out what children know and what they can do, how they are progressing, what interests them, what new learning might be possible, and what additional support might be required
- considers how the environment and interactions contribute to learning, and what adjustments might be made to increase learning
- supports reflection on teachers' interactions with children, changes made and the outcomes of improvements
- invites families to participate in interpretation and planning from stories, and supports the child in self-assessment

By contrast, poor quality assessment practice:

- tends to highlight children's participation, confidence and competence, but not learning or change
- lacks higher-level analysis of learning over time and context to show progress and continuity, providing only a description of children's activities at a given time or place

- omits next steps, or gives brief or vague ideas such as doing more or similar activities, or identifies changes to activities and resources as future planning, rather than responding to what children are interested in or seeking to develop
- does not meaningfully involve children or families in the assessment process, and does not make connections to children's home-related interests, skills or knowledge; for example, it might include parents' and children's comments related to their enjoyment of activities rather than assessing learning or progress

Curriculum and links to Te Whāriki and learning priorities

In relation to curriculum and Te Whāriki, high quality assessment practice:

- helps teachers to get to know children really well in order to recognise activities and experiences likely to interest children and respond to their interests, strengths and cultural knowledge
- helps teachers engage children in interactions that support their learning and development, challenge their thinking and extend their abilities
- supports the design of a responsive curriculum, which connects different learning experiences that are meaningful to a child's family and community
- is underpinned by a good understanding of Te Whāriki and an alignment between the focus of assessment and the priorities and values articulated in the setting's philosophy

By contrast, poor quality assessment practice:

- does not provide evidence of teachers building on or extending children's learning (for example, even if teachers do use their assessment knowledge formatively, this isn't included in the written narrative)
- focuses feedback on behaviour rather than supporting learning strategies such as curiosity or experimentation
- makes few links to the setting's philosophy statements regarding valued learning, or identified priorities for children's learning in their context

Accessibility and collegiality

In order for assessment to be of value to children and their families as well as teachers, high quality assessment practice:

- makes assessment documentation accessible to children and families
- encourages children and families to use and contribute to assessment
- gives children a sense of agency and enhanced mana
- involves all teachers in contributing to stories, with a shared understanding of assessment and its purposes, processes and practices
- is backed by adequate support structures

By contrast, poor quality assessment practice:

- does not provide evidence of children's or families' use of, or involvement in, assessment

- is not useful in helping families or others identify learning or continuity in their child's learning over time
- demonstrates a lack of shared understanding of assessment among teachers, and idiosyncratic assessment practices across the team
- does not share assessments among teaching teams to seek further interpretations

Further reading

Education Review Office. (2007). Quality of assessment in early childhood education. Wellington, NZ: Author.

Sands, L. (2017). Learning stories: Tracking learning progress, making a difference in children's learning lives..... Retrieved from [https://www.elp.co.nz/files/Learning%20Stories-%20Are%20these%20powerfully%20reflecting%20the%20learning%20culture%20of%20your%20setting\(1\).pdf](https://www.elp.co.nz/files/Learning%20Stories-%20Are%20these%20powerfully%20reflecting%20the%20learning%20culture%20of%20your%20setting(1).pdf)

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Vicki is a teacher, mother, writer, and researcher. She recently completed her PhD using philosophy to explore creative approaches to understanding early childhood education. She is inspired by the wealth of educational research that is available and is passionate about making this available and useful for teachers.