Effective Assessment
in the Early Years Foundation Stage

Jan Dubiel

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Chapter 1
Introduction – Reclaiming Assessment

This chapter will:

- Explore the nature and existing definitions of the term 'assessment'
- Identify and challenge mythologies associated with assessment
- Establish a balanced and accurate definition of assessment in Early Years pedagogical theory and practice
- Explore the notion of 'significance' and 'signifiers' in children's learning and development
- Clarify key terminology

When we work with children we connect ourselves to the future – through the inspiration, guidance and wisdom that we provide, and through the influence and impact we have on children's lives, their understanding and their perceptions of themselves and the world around them. Although this is a future that we may not necessarily see, it is one that we help to shape and one that we are ultimately responsible for (Postman 1982). After all, today's children are tomorrow's citizens, its leaders, thinkers, policy makers, innovators and entrepreneurs (Katz 2008). The world we will live in many years from now will be the one governed, organised and enriched by the children we have worked with.

This impact, and by association its responsibility, is even more significant when working with children aged birth to 5. Studies such as the Wikart/Perry Preschool study (Schweinhart et al. 2005) and the ongoing Effective Pre-School and Primary Education (EPPE) study (Sylva et al. 2010) demonstrate the critical influence that pre-school provision can have on outcomes and life chances for children well into their adulthood. Equally significant is the growing evidence (Sylva et al. 2010) that the *quality* of such provision is one of

the most powerful and influential variables, and that the outcomes for children – in all aspects of life – can be strongly determined by this. When this is coupled with neurological evidence that identifies this age range as the most significant in the growth and development of the brain (Shore 1997; Whitebread 2012) then the responsibility becomes an even more stark and weighty one. By the time children start formal schooling much of their sense of themselves is already formed, their understanding of the world around them starting to take definite shape. Neurologically, it is believed that up to 85% of their lifetime dendritical and synaptic connections – the physical basis on which learning is created – have already taken place. Far from the traditionalist view that school is the point at which learning starts, what happens then builds directly on what has already taken place (Shore 1997).

The role of the practitioner in every Early Years setting is by its nature a multi-faceted one (Rose and Rogers 2012). Multiple decisions are taken on a second-by-second basis to ensure that the most effective and life-enriching opportunities are available to children and that their learning and development continues to be supported, facilitated and extended. Conscious as practitioners are of the dramatic responsibility they bear, there is a continual awareness of the need to optimise each moment to most effectively enable and empower children as thinkers and learners. Learning is a constant process; neurological connections are continually being formed, adopted, reconfigured and pruned; the brain continually reshapes and 'sculpts' its knowledge, understanding and 'cognitive flexibility'. The practitioner's role is to shape and guide this learning so that it is useful, meaningful and applicable to the lives of the children they work with, knowing that birth to 5, the period covered by the terminology of 'Early Years', is the most rapidly intense and important period of growth.

Working mostly through their 'informed intuition', their experiences, wealth of expertise, knowledge and their highly refined, complex skills in translating and converting these into action, practitioners continually adapt their responses, ask questions, make assertions and provide challenge and support to the children they work with. This is how the fragmented tesserae of each interaction, each conversation, each suggestion, provocation and moment of direct teaching culminate in the skilful, well-equipped, inquisitive, confident and creative children that we, as practitioners, proudly usher into the next phase of their learning.

A key aspect of this process and a critical facet of the practitioner's role is that of assessment.

The purpose of this book is to focus specifically on this aspect by defining and exploring the critical role and purpose of assessment in effective Early Years pedagogy, examining the considerations and challenges that practitioners face in their day-to-day practice. It will combine an analysis of the

theoretical and philosophical aspects required to understand it with a practical overview of how this might translate itself into considerations for everyday practice. Finally, it will link directly to the current statutory assessment requirements through the English Early Years Foundation Stage framework and the specifics of the 'Two Year Old Progress Check', the EYFS Profile and the 'Baseline Assessment'

This book has been written for practitioners, headteachers, managers, trainers, policy makers and all those with an interest in ensuring that the experiences and opportunities that children have in the Early Years are the most meaningful and effective that they can be. Throughout the book I use the term 'successful' as the key aspiration and outcome for children. It is important to note that this refers to a broad definition of success that may include, but is not exclusively, what might be defined as 'academic'. Success in the sense that I use it refers to a broad and deep skill and knowledge set that could be referred to as 'life skills', and which incorporates aspects of cognitive, creative, emotional, social and personal as well as purely academic notions of success.

Mythologies and misunderstandings

Of all the areas of Early Years practice, it appears that it is the approach to and understanding of assessment that remains the most confused, maligned, misunderstood and misused (Tickell 2011). It is subject to the most extreme and resilient mythology – however ludicrous – and still often appears to operate on the basis of a 'folklore' model (Carr 2001) that serves the purpose of expedience and convenience rather than increasing our information base of how children demonstrate their significant knowledge and understanding. This tension is a critical one to resolve, as an effective and sensible approach to assessment is fundamental to meaningful and inclusive practice. It is also crucial to be aware of, and challenge head on, the dangers of over-complicating what is a critical yet intuitive (and sometimes counter-intuitive/'informed' intuition) aspect of successful and effective Early Years pedagogy and practice.

So the title of this chapter – 'Reclaiming Assessment' – is a deliberately and consciously provocative one, as it seeks to redefine and reconceptualise what the term means and how we perceive it, and this is ultimately what will impact most strongly on practice and provision in Early Years settings. Above all, effective assessment operates as the most potent lever for self-reflection, change and the development of practice (Carr 2001). The understanding of assessment, its perception, and even the use of the word itself are subject to such wilful misunderstanding and misuse that practitioners can be forgiven

for succumbing to its all-pervasive negativity and expanse of nefarious, unwieldy and unnecessary baggage.

The following examples are all taken directly from my own experiences as a Local Authority Consultant and Adviser.

Case study 1

A well-resourced Travel Agents Role Play has been set up in the classroom following a visit to a local branch with the theme 'Journeys'. The children use the area very effectively, taking on the roles of Travel Agent and customer with enthusiasm and authenticity. One child ushers a potential client into the office to discuss the kind of holiday that they would like. 'Where would you like to visit?' she asks, 'How would you like to travel there?', 'What food would you like to eat when you are there?' and so on. On a clipboard she begins to record this information, spelling common words accurately and making phonetically plausible attempts at others such as 'afrika' and 'chps'. She is very skilled at the role, very involved in the activity, and keen to complete the transaction. In the middle of this, the teacher calls her over to the table where she is 'assessing phonic knowledge'. The child is faced with a drawn picture of an apple tree containing a number of apples. Each apple has a single letter on. The teacher points to each of these and asks her what sound the letter makes. The child, anxious that the customer does not leave, completes this assessment activity as quickly as possible, continually turning round to make sure that the customer remains. When she is finally released to return she has only identified three of the letter sounds correctly.

Case study 2

Whilst we are discussing the development of children in the setting, the practitioner wearily reaches up to a shelf and takes down a large and generously stuffed A3 folder from a number of similar ones alongside it. Inside, a detailed 'Learning Portfolio' itemises the child's achievements through a plethora of notes and photographs. Much of the information is similar and simple – 'Charlie made a tower out of bricks', 'Charlie completed a jigsaw', 'Charlie likes being outside' and so on. During the ensuing discussion the practitioner states that she spends much of her evenings updating the Portfolio for each child with information and photographs from the day. She declares it to be the most time-consuming task, and whenever anything happens in the setting her first thought is 'how can I record that for the Portfolio?' When I ask her what happens to all this carefully stored information, she replies that sometimes parents might take it home at the end of the year, but she never looks at the Portfolio once the information has been added. 'Does the next practitioner or setting look at it?' I ask, and she laughs – 'No, they wouldn't have time to wade through all this information for every single child'.

Case study 3

A practitioner has devised a complex grid, one for each child that lists specific statements of development grouped into self-created developmental bands. The separate statements within these bands are highlighted in different colours to indicate the time of year that they were 'achieved' by the child. On an attached document the outcomes from these are summarised into 'scores of attainment' that relate to each group of statements, with each highlighted sentence counting as one 'point'. Calculations have been made in order ascertain the 'progress' children are making within a term and across the year. I am told that they need to 'move up from one band to another every three months' and that there is an average score that the group should 'achieve' at the end of every half term.

Each of these separate examples demonstrates different aspects of the overwhelming mythology and misunderstanding of the process and purpose, and even meaning, of the concept of 'assessment' – what it is, what it is for, why and how we need to do it, and the purpose of the information it generates.

The perception, widely held, is often that assessment is a stand-alone, detached activity, required in order to complete formats and records, used for monitoring and calculating children's 'measurable progress', clinically judging and quantifying children in inappropriate ways that ultimately serve the convenience of a formula for numerical data and statisticians rather than the children themselves. Nor does it appear that this information is derived from what practitioners know about children from their day-to-day contact, conversations and observations. When policy, pedagogical and strategic decisions are taken as a result of this, then the information becomes disproportionately important, consequential and influential. If this then becomes the basis of the requirement for accountability, the separation from everyday practice and knowledge becomes a distinct and accepted 'lacuna' between the integrity and accuracy of information and its form and status.

It is also often assumed that the process of assessment is synonymous with the manufacture of vast and copious records – post-its, photographs and detailed written observations that provide tangible 'evidence' for the judgements and assertions that practitioners then make about children's learning and development. This process – record keeping and documentation – is terminology often used interchangeably with the term 'assessment'; in fact it is imperative that practitioners are aware that these are fundamentally different, as we shall explore later.

Additionally, in many quarters and schools of thought, assessment is viewed as the 'testing' of children, requiring them to perform to an adult-defined task,

to 'pass' or 'fail' at this task or activity and then be subject to assumptions about their 'ability' and even 'intelligence' and potential as a result. For example, in one commercially available system, children are presented with a picture and asked to identify objects such as specific musical instruments or named water-based crafts. Their capability to be able to do or not do this contributes to a weighted score that then predicts the expectation for later attainment.

This deficit model that focuses on what children 'cannot do' or 'do not know' becomes the main driver, and when this is then linked to a set of 'targets' or expectations – however benignly intended – then the diverse nature and reality of children's development become lost in a sea of faceless numbers, charts and percentages that discard the reality of children as learners. Children are very astute and skilled in tuning in to what is important and soon pick up on the messages that these 'assessments' carry. There is much evidence to show how an early sense of failure can impact on a child's self-esteem and self-perception as a learner (Nutbrown and Carter 2012). Dweck (2006) identifies the concept of 'mindset' as instrumental in success and achievement and argues that this is strongly affected by the perception that the learner develops of their own ability and potential. There is an understandable reaction to this type of 'testing' approach when the focus for such an activity is very young children for whom the spectrum of what would be considered typical development is enormous, and the resulting assumptions – erroneously arrived at – can have such lasting consequences.

It is hardly then a surprise that even the word 'assessment' itself has been imbued with a negative connotation that reflects all of these things and appears in a consistently pejorative way in blogs, discussion forums and the letters pages of periodicals. There is often, amongst practitioners, an adverse reaction to the word itself and it is held responsible for detracting from the specifics of everyday practice and compromising and diverting activity away from supporting children.

Therefore, there exists a profound and widespread misunderstanding of what assessment actually is, what processes it entails, and what its purpose is.

Given this misunderstanding and perception of assessment, it is perhaps important to define it in calm, measured and professional way that enables us to understand its nature, process and purpose fully.

Defining assessment

The definition by Vicky Hutchin (1996: 7), 'The purpose of the assessment process is to make explicit children's achievements, celebrate their achievements with them, then help them to move forward to the next goal', outlines

clearly that as a starting point the nature of assessment is a process rather than an single event. This is a considerable distance away from one of the anecdotal examples described previously, where children are removed from the activities they are involved in to undertake an abstract unrelated task where they are then asked a set of questions. The clear implication of Hutchin's definition is that assessment is inextricably woven into day-to-day practice. It is a process that exists and sustains itself alongside, not in opposition to, children's activity. The process, as explored later and throughout this book, is a complex one that involves a different set of dynamics and strategies that inform and are informed by the decisions that practitioners take.

Equally pertinent is the phrase 'making explicit their achievements', as this is the focal point of acknowledging children's current stage of development, understanding and knowledge. We have long recognised the diversity of children's development and its unpredictability and idiosyncrasy, as well as the different, unique and sometimes baffling yet exciting trajectories that children's learning takes and the outcomes and expressions that form as a result. Children's perceptions of the world and how they fuse their emerging understanding are, if nothing else, magically unpredictable and often contrary and counter to experienced adult assumptions. It could be argued that as children are 'unfettered by knowledge' their perceptions and conclusions will often be unique. Fundamental to being able to sustain and develop this, facilitating appropriate support and challenge, is the practitioner's robust and skilful understanding of 'where the child is' and what is significant and relevant to that point in time and development. Our use of the word 'achievement' rather than 'attainment' is highly significant here as this centres the practitioner's assessment activity and response on the individual needs and nature of the child. The existence of externally derived expectations, goals or targets is not relevant in this context as this focuses on the practitioner's wider and more important responsibility to the development and support of the individual child, at an individual point, with an individual potential trajectory that the practitioner can see opening up in front of them. Critically too, the definition identifies the purpose – moving the child, wherever they are on their own individual learning and development spectrum, on to the next stage, the next possibility, the next skill, knowledge or understanding that will empower and extend them as a learner.

Assessment has no intrinsic value; it cannot exist meaningfully as a self-standing detached entity. The process of assessment is only as useful as the purpose for which it is used, the ways in which it is used, and the effect it has on how practitioners reflect on their pedagogy and the unique learning path that individual children take. In the hectic mêlée of Early Years practice, time and prioritising actions become a critical aspect of effectiveness. Therefore,

practitioners need to consider very carefully how they ascribe time to make – and especially record – judgements about children's learning, and need to carefully consider the purpose of this, especially if it is not an integral part of their planning and development.

Mary Jane Drummond (1993) also provides us with a definition of assessment that poses three questions:

- What is there to see?
- How best can we understand what we see?
- How can we put our understanding to good use?

Again, the starting points are the reality of children, the nature of practitioner responsibility and an acknowledgement of what they bring as individuals through experiences to that moment in time. Similar approaches are also explored by Fisher (2008), Nutbrown (2001) and Carr (2001). The principle factor being that the starting point for assessment is not where we or anyone else thinks children should be but where they are, what they know, and how they understand it. Drummond's questions assert that practitioners take that initial information as it is, process it through their knowledge, expertise and specialism, and then utilise it to enhance and support those critically identified next steps of development and progression – what will later be explored as 'signifiers' and 'significances'.

Assessment could be further defined as 'the knowing and understanding of children' and it is a 'pedagogical behaviour' in that it is a constant feature of all our interactions with children, our thinking about them as learners, and the actions we take as a result. It weaves its way through all aspects of professional and intuitive activity and cognition, influencing practitioners' thinking and actions on a multitude of levels that the 'multi-faceted' role requires. During a typical day Early Years practitioners will take a multitude of continual decisions about how to act, to support, intervene and challenge children. The process of assessment, as an intrinsically pedagogical behaviour, critically provides the rationale for how this subsequently unfolds.

It has long been noted that the process exists, or should exist, comfortably alongside what practitioners already do (Kelly 1992). Throughout the day practitioners continually process the miasma of information that they are bombarded with, filtering out and differentiating between the significant, the routine, the known and the new. Every interaction, every conversation, every 'noticed behaviour' percolates into their knowledge and understanding of who children are, what they know and can do, and what they need next in order to continue progressing and developing.

Central to this activity is the question 'What do I know about this child?' – and it is for this that the process of assessment provides an answer. Defined simply, assessment is practitioners knowing the children they work with, understanding their learning and being able to link this with the next steps in progression and development. Assessment is the dynamic process of translating 'what there is to see' into skilfully considered adult activity and support to enhance experiences and extend learning, thinking and knowing – 'putting the understanding to good use'. Within that, practitioners take additional decisions about what is appropriate, what is possible and what is meaningful for the child; effective pedagogy leads them to take account of interests, propensities, preferences and securities. Practitioners take all this information and carefully shape a response or a provocation or a 'teachable moment'. As adults we enter the child's world, knowing which possibilities are there, possibilities that might be invisible to the child but visible to the adult, as experience enables us to draw upon our wider and deeper knowledge of the world. These 'invisible moments of possibility' are formed from the knowledge we gain from 'assessing' children, finding out and translating the information that makes them who they are at that moment in time. Assessment – far from being a stand-alone, clinical, formulaic measurement – is a living, breathing dynamic, a facet of how we teach and empower learners. Within this we need to demonstrate the critical skills of 'tuning in' to that idiosyncratic development, seeing the possibility it presents and taking the decision on how best – if at all – to challenge and extend it. Particularly with experience, much of this happens on an intuitive level; often as an almost subconscious response to particular behaviour or actions.

Because of the nature of assessment, as with any behaviour that relies on intuition to such a great extent and is often subconscious in its delivery, practitioners will always need to be aware that it will invariably be a subjective exercise and that the decisions they take, specifically the assessments, will be as a result of the values they hold as educators and what they consider to be important, relevant, interesting, useful or significant. We choose to see what is important, what we value, and what is significant to *us* as the viewer.

Fundamentally, assessment is an overt yet implicit statement of values. I would argue that the process of assessment and the decisions we take as part of this are the most visable expression of what we value as educators. Pamela Moss notes that 'what isn't assessed tends to disappear from the curriculum' (quoted in Carr 2001: 180), and there is an irrefutable logic behind this. We assess, we notice – and we especially record – what we consider to be important. Conversely, if it isn't important enough to be assessed, to be noted, commented upon or processed cognitively in any way, then by definition there is no point in providing for it or teaching and facilitating it. So every time a practitioner makes a judgement a range of critical decisions have

already been made. These, often implicitly rather than explicitly apparent, are the values and beliefs on which the practitioner bases their practice, provision and pedagogy. The origins of this will vary from practitioner to practitioner and will be wholly subject to culture, setting ethos, personal experience, training, and even what is perceived to be expected of them. Everything viewed, heard or even assumed, falls through this 'prism of values' and is then considered whether or not it is important enough to be realised.

Assessment is never an objective activity, nor can it ever be value free.

This has implications for the process, and defines key considerations for practitioners undertaking assessments.

Evidently 'what' we choose to assess will be greatly influenced by this, and the content of provision – what might be termed as the 'curriculum', or the body of information and skills that we think children will need in order to be successful – will be defined by and define what become the foci of assessment. In narrow, inappropriately focused curricula, the assessments that derive from these focus on the specifics of what is considered most important and relevant. Equally, the nature of 'learning behaviours' – how children react and apply their knowledges, skills and understandings, the traits and propensities which define them as individuals and the nature of their learning – also become pertinent.

Equally important is 'how' we assess and the messages this gives to children about what we consider to be important in terms of the process of their learning and what we value. As previously stated, this impacts directly on children's understandings and how they process the clear and explicit messages from adults into their own definitions and understandings of what is important. The child in the Travel Agent case study was clearly aware that the practitioner valued mainly what was done in response to her questions, and although she did not commit to this as her involvement was with something far more interesting and significant, she fully accepted the 'summoning' by the practitioner as an important aspect of the relationship between them. Not only did this undermine the value of self-initiated activity and the wealth of information that it produces – clearly evident in the small vignette quoted previously – it also ultimately provided inaccurate and misleading information. The child obviously had a good grasp of the phonetic code and was applying it skilfully in her play. This was not apparent in the adult-led 'test-type assessment' that so pointlessly interrupted it.

So assessment relies heavily on the notion of 'significance' as this determines critical aspects of both the content and the process. It is worth being clear that this notion is a dual one and we might do well to adopt a 'split screen' (Claxton et al. 2011, quoted in Carr and Lee 2012) approach when considering it.

Different kinds of 'significance'

The significance for the child is based on new or confirmed behaviour and activity – something achieved for the first time or a consolidation of an understanding or mastery that was tentative though not yet secure. As practitioners who know the children they work with very well recognise, these can present themselves sometimes predictably in response, sometimes during unexpected moments of the day, and they will 'log', notice or filter this because it carries a particular significance for that child. Evidently this will be different for different children and only through the day-to-day knowledge, built up from the intense relationship between the child and adult, will this information be apparent and obvious.

The other side to this significance concerns the practitioner – their values, beliefs and their own perceptions of what is considered to be important. In addition to what is significant for the child, practitioners will also consider what is significant for their on-going learning and the steps, support and encouragement needed to continue facilitating their development. As adults, indeed as a community or society, we decide what children need to be successful, and the skills and knowledges required to be able to participate and contribute. This is often why the content of curricula, and their associated assessments, is so keenly fought, as this defines what society needs and values – the 'bodies of knowledge' we consider important enough to pass on to successive generations. During assessment we activate this significance as we steer and guide children towards the acquisition of the knowledge, skills and understanding we have decided – or have been told – are important and necessary. In current terminology this might refer to the specific 'Curriculum Outcomes' 'Domains of Learning' or 'Areas of Learning and Development' that describe precisely the nature and content of such bodies of knowledge, and set them in an important context and means by which learning and development can occur.

Therefore, with all this in mind, I would like to introduce the concept of 'signifiers' of learning to encompass and describe this dualistic, 'split screen' view of what children demonstrate and what we assess. A 'signifier' is a specific demonstration of a knowledge, skill or understanding that is significant either in terms of the child's individual development or the wider expectations of learning.

Assessment then is the gathering of information, the translation of children's thought and activity into (generally adult-defined) signifiers of learning. However, implicit in all of this, though often subject particularly to externally driven pressures, is the absolute necessity of such information being authentic and accurate. Assessment information has no use – it cannot 'be put to good use' (Drummond 1993) if it is not accurate, authentic, real and honest. If the practitioner's judgements are influenced by 'what should be' or an external

target or expectation, then its accuracy and integrity will become severely compromised. It then becomes irrelevant to any use that could be made of it. Moreover, the biggest single negative impact of an inaccurate assessment will be on the child themselves. If a child is judged to be achieving or attaining at a higher level or stage of development than they actually are, then the next practitioner will set challenges and have expectations for that child that are unlikely to be met. The negative impact of this on the child himself as a learner can sometimes be devastating. Conversely, if a child is assessed but is judged to be under the level or phase of development than is actually the case then challenges and expectations will be reduced accordingly and the child's opportunity to flourish and develop will be adversely affected.

The terminology of assessment

To conclude this introductory chapter, it is important to clarify through brief overviews the terminology regarding assessment processes and uses. Much of what has been written so far has illuminated the importance of perception and definition, and of challenging the mythology, folklore and assumption around the process of assessment. This is even more apparent and important around the area of language and the terminology used. More than anything else practitioners need to be clear about their own definitions and take ownership of recognised terms, in order to support their own beliefs and values and to enable them to impact effectively on their own interpretations of effective Early Years pedagogy.

Achievement is a development in understanding, skill or knowledge demonstrated by a child in relation to their own starting point. It is a fundamental principle of effective Early Years practice that children develop and achieve at a diverse range of rates and speeds. Because this is related to the individuality of the child themselves, wherever they may be on the learning and development spectrum, it is the most important aspect of the practitioner's role. The 'tuning in' to children's learning, and answering Drummond's question of 'what is there to see?', are wholly driven by the notion of individual achievement, as this will vary considerably from child to child.

Attainment refers to a fixed level of knowledge, skill or understanding. Attainment relates to a set of predetermined criteria which a child either is or is not able to demonstrate. Many approaches to assessment have attainment criteria at their core in order to make quantitative judgements about numbers of children attaining in specific areas, and much of the 'clinical' approach to assessment relies on this. Attainment does have a role in Early Years assessment but it must always be acknowledged that high attainment can still indicate low achievement and vice versa. Attainment is not always an effective indicator of progress or effective pedagogy.

Formative assessment is sometimes termed 'assessment for learning' and is the primary function of the assessment process. The translation of children's thinking and activity 'forms' the practitioner's view and understanding of their development, and this in turn enables them to take appropriate and measured decisions about how best to continue supporting and developing the child's learning and thinking. The necessity of formative assessment enables the practitioner to develop a clear and authentic view of children's learning, and a real understanding of their current level of development and the next step in their learning (Fisher 2008).

Summative assessment is the summary of achievement and/or attainment and is characterised by defining a specific point in time when either achievements and/or attainments culminate. Summative assessments are derived from the ongoing assessment process and feed necessarily into the process of formative assessment. Although the distinction between formative and summative assessment is a necessary one, it is not always helpful to differentiate between these – all assessments need to be formative in nature, with the summative aspect a 'momentary imprint' of the information.

A 'signifier' of learning, or a 'significance', is an action, demonstrated thought, concept, understanding or skill that is considered significant for the individual child's achievement or the wider developmental expectation or possibility. It might also refer to the mastery or understanding of a particular aspect of a defined curriculum.

Evidence is the information that a practitioner accesses to clarify an assessment, either formative or summative. This is the knowledge that the practitioner has, through various streams, in order to be secure and confident about an assertion or judgement for the child. The majority of evidence will derive from the daily ongoing interaction and will be part of the practitioner's perception and understanding of the child as an individual learner. It is important that practitioners do not confuse the notion of evidence with records and documentation. It is quite possible to have evidence of what is known about a child without the need for it to be tangibly recorded.

Recording and documenting is the process of creating tangible archives and examples of children's attainment and achievements as the result of assessments undertaken by practitioners. There is frequent debate and misunderstanding about the purpose of this, its necessity and its role in the wider assessment process itself. The challenges and issues around records and documents often pertain to the notion of evidence and accountability, though it is also important that practitioners do not confuse assessment – looking at the ongoing pedagogical behaviour – with records and documentation – the tangible manifestation of aspects of this. Practitioners, as professionals who know and understand the children they work with, will take individual decisions about the role, necessity and types of records they keep. It is also important

to state that records serve assessment – 'the knowing and understanding of children' – and cannot act as a substitute for it.

Accountability is the means by which practitioners and settings justify and demonstrate the impact that their practice, provision and pedagogy have on the children they work with. While practitioners will be 'internally accountable' through their knowledge and expertise, they are often faced with a measure of 'external accountability' that can sometimes undermine and compromise this.

Progress is the journey children take towards greater mastery, knowledge and understanding (Bredekamp and Copple 1997). All children acquire additional skills and knowledge, become more proficient, develop expertise and refine and enhance themselves as learners. It is contestable whether or not this is 'measureable' in any authentic and realistic way or whether the 'signifiers' and significances of children's learning lend themselves to easy representation. Although it is quite possible and reasonable to describe and articulate the 'progress' that all children make, this should not be compromised by applying a simplistic formula for ease of expression.

Outcomes are the aspirations we have for children and the 'known world' that we induct children into. They are value driven and culturally defined. All educational philosophies have outcomes at their core whether or not these are explicitly defined. The notions of 'progress' and 'accountability' generally rest on the defined or implicit outcomes that practitioners and settings have for children.

Data is information that can be described in any way. This is not to be confused with 'numerical data' which is a specifically numerical expression of information.

Reflective task

Explore your own individual beliefs and understanding of the word 'assessment'. Where do these originate from? What are the contexts that you most use these in? Discuss this as a team in your setting, bringing together your individual beliefs and understandings. What are the differences and points of consensus?

Further reading

Bruce, T., Louise, S. and McCall, G. (2015) *Observing Young Children*. London: SAGE.
Carr, M. (2001) *Assessment in Early Childhood Settings*. London: Paul Chapman.
Drummond, M.J. (1993) *Learning to See: Assessment through Observation*. York, ME: Stenhouse.
Glazzard, J., Chadwick, D., Webster, A. and Percival, J. (2010) *Assessment for Learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage*. London: SAGE.