In the second part of our series, we continue to explore how different educators and services document children’s learning and development, and what the National Quality Standard (NQS) means for their practices. In this case study, we visit a family day care service in south-east Tasmania.

**Case study No.2 | Kingborough Family Day Care**
Family Day Care service
Kingston, south-east Tasmania

‘If it’s taking up all your time, I’d be reflecting back on it—who are you doing it for?’

Tracey Roberts has worked at the Kingborough Family Day Care service for 17 years, starting as a full-time educator and now working for part of the week as the pedagogical leader for the scheme. Tracey provides professional guidance to a network of 32 educators in south-east Tasmania, covering a broad spread of territory and a diverse range of people.

When it comes to documenting children’s learning, Tracey has seen a few different policies and trends come and go. Once upon a time, before the Early Years Learning Framework and the National Quality Standard, her own practice involved creating beautiful portfolios for the children in her care, devoting hours of her weekends to the task. But one particular incident challenged her thinking about documentation.

‘I remember my daughter went to babysit for one of the families in my service,’ Tracey says, ‘and she saw my beautiful scrapbook on the incinerator! So I started to think, who am I doing the scrapbook for? If it’s for me and for the quality assurance system, it’s the wrong purpose. If it’s for the family to just throw away, it’s the wrong purpose.’

A few years later, Tracey’s views about documenting children’s learning are very clear: ‘Any documentation I have, it has to be quick and easy to see, not wordy, very simple, and it has to be meaningful to the parents.’ Tracey no longer produces portfolios, but she does collect some of the children’s artwork and photos, and she will make copies of the ‘really special’ pieces to send home to families.

‘With my documentation, I have promised myself that I will only do it in my work time, and I make sure I do it in my work time,’ Tracey says. In order to achieve this, she has developed a simple system that feeds into her planning cycle, without consuming valuable hours of her day. ‘I use a big A3 diary and I can’t carry that around with me all the time, so I use sticky notes a lot,’ she explains. ‘I see something, I write it down. And I don’t write twice—the sticky note is enough, and I pop it into my visual diary. It has to be a deep and meaningful observation, but I just keep it very simple.’

Tracey also likes to involve children in recording their own learning. With older children, she will usually ask permission to take a photo of them, and will then show them the picture and start a discussion about what she’s documented and why. ‘When I do write things, especially with the four-and-five-year-olds, they know I’m writing about them. I’ll actually read out what I’ve written about them that day,’ says Tracey.

Using the documentation for the benefit of the program is part of everyday practice in Tracey’s setting. ‘I see all my documentation as a cycle of planning,’ she says. ‘Each day I do a quick reflection of what worked, what didn’t work, where I want to head, what I might need...’
to change in my environment to meet the needs of certain children. To me, that’s ongoing and you’re probably doing that all day.’

According to Tracey, the practices of documenting children’s learning can only be successful if two conditions are met: first, the educator knows the child very well; and second, the educator recognises—and can describe—the learning they see. All of this can take time.

‘Sometimes, some children you don’t get to know straight away,’ Tracey explains. ‘It can be quite a journey. It depends how many times a week or how many hours you’ve got them. So with some children, you might get that clear picture quite quickly, with others it could take a few weeks.’

Recognising each child’s learning also depends on the educator taking a broad view of what constitutes learning. ‘I come across people who feel as if we need to teach children numbers and colours and how to write their name,’ says Tracey. ‘Yes, that’s learning, but my routines are important, too, my social interactions with these children and their social interactions with each other are important.’

‘To me, learning is there all the time. It’s the way you observe it and what you see, whether you recognise it as learning.’

Once Tracey has identified a moment of learning for a child, her next step is to describe it clearly, identifying all the important elements. ‘So the documentation should show how the child, in your care, has got from here to there. What little hurdles did they clear, what have they achieved, what have you achieved, what are their strengths and interests?’

‘They got from A to B—how did they travel there? That’s what your documentation would show,’ Tracey says.

Tracey’s final piece of advice to educators is to look carefully at their practices, and how those practices affect other aspects of their work—and personal life. ‘If it’s taking up all your time, I’d be reflecting back on it—who are you doing it for?’ she asks.

In the next article in this series, we visit a long day care centre in suburban Melbourne.