Chapter 2: Planning to Support Infant–Toddler Learning and Development

Opening

In planning to support learning and development during the birth-to-3 age period, **infant–toddler care educators** (care educators) focus on how **infants and toddlers** engage in interactions and play, both in their relationships with adults and peers and when they interact with objects and the **environment**. Infants and toddlers are trying to make sense of the world around them. They make connections in their brain more rapidly than at any other time in life about how people relate to each other and how things work (Gilmore et al., 2018; Ilyka et al., 2021). Many infants and toddlers are preverbal, and all of them communicate nonverbally. To be supportive of infants and toddlers, **caregivers** who develop relationships with them need to be observers of the children's nonverbal cues. Care educators who are mindful of the ways in which each infant or toddler experiences moments of interaction and play can make discoveries about the focus of a child's self-directed learning. In response, care educators can plan **possibilities** for further exploration that align with a child's learning and development.

Two major considerations make up planning to support infant and toddler learning and development. The first consideration is the context for planning. In infant and toddler **early learning and care settings**, care educators plan around three learning contexts: relationships and interactions, **routines**, and the environment and **materials**. Each of these contexts offers exciting possibilities for learning. The second consideration is how to engage in ongoing planning. Effective planning starts with partnering with an infant's or toddler's family. Through collaborating with each family, care educators deepen their understanding of each child's strengths, interests, needs, and lived experiences. Care educators discover ways to establish a secure relationship with each child and build on the strengths each child brings with them into the early learning and care setting.

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Care educators combine what they learn through **family partnerships** with a planning process cycle that includes the following steps: observing and documenting, studying and interpreting, developing plans, and implementing plans. Although reflection is not a step in the process, it is important at every step. Care educators reflect on their relationships with children and the meaning of children's play, exploration, and discovery throughout the planning process.

This chapter begins with a description of the three learning contexts for planning to support early learning and development. These three learning contexts are addressed in-depth in the following chapters. After introducing the learning contexts, this chapter considers the role of family partnerships in planning, followed by a discussion of the reflective planning cycle to support infants and toddlers as they engage in self-directed play, exploration, and discovery (California Department of Education, 2012).

Learning Contexts for Planning

As care educators plan to support early learning and development, they give in-depth attention to the contexts of relationships and interactions, routines, and the environment and materials. Each of these contexts is discussed in the next three chapters. While planning for each context, care educators also keep in mind how these three contexts work together in the daily experience of infants and toddlers.

Relationships and Interactions

This learning context focuses on the relationships infants and toddlers develop with their care educators and other children and their interactions within those relationships. Care educators interact with infants and toddlers nonverbally and verbally and engage in early socialization around expectations and rules. Their relationships develop through interactions that occur during routines, such as feeding or diapering; organized learning experiences, such as singing a song or doing a finger play; and being **responsive** to infants and toddlers when they express strong feelings, such as delight, sadness, anger, or frustration. Primary care relationships with infants and toddlers in small groups allow care educators to build responsive relationships and interact with children in ways that foster the children's exploration of ideas and experiences and expand their learning (California Department of Education, 2019).

Through verbal and nonverbal interaction, care educators act as guides, listeners, and "problem-posers" for infants and toddlers. Posing a problem is a type of **provocation** that care educators offer to children. Provocations invite children to explore a new possibility for extending their play.

Care educators also communicate messages about what is important, how to treat others, and ways of doing things that children absorb through interactions, observations, and emotional responses. In their interactions, care educators may communicate **biases** toward a cultural, racial, or ethnic group that they are not aware that they have (Blackson et al., 2022). In their efforts to provide supportive relationships and responsive interactions with every infant or toddler, care

educators reflect on their feelings and behaviors by themselves and with colleagues to become aware of their feelings about individual children and their responses to them. Care educators also engage in professional learning about providing culturally responsive care. The insights and understanding care educators gain through self-reflection and professional learning help them to be responsive to every child with whom they are developing a caring relationship.

An infant or toddler may show a preference for familiar patterns and customs, such as the language they experience daily with their family (Choi & Luo, 2023; Marno et al., 2016; Soley & Sebastián-Gallés, 2015). An important part of developing responsive relationships is using simple language and care patterns that can create continuity of experience for children and strengthen connections between their learning with their family and their learning with the care educator. Ongoing observation and reflection inform how responsive care educators interact with children and initiate learning experiences. For example, a care educator might imitate a young infant's coo, sing a family song, or do a finger play with one child or with a small group of children.

From the start of life, infants and toddlers often initiate interaction with the adults who nurture them. As infants and toddlers develop, they initiate increasingly complex verbal interactions and experiences such as playing a simple game, bringing a book to an adult, pointing to a family photo, or singing a song. Whether care educators or children initiate interactive play, the care educator's role is to observe children's responses with wonder and to notice and listen for their ideas or interests, which may come through gestures, other body movements, facial expressions, sounds, or words. By observing and listening, the care educator may then responsively engage in interaction with each child. This observation can inform the care educator about when to engage with children who are focused on their exploration and how to make a comment that relates to the child's play.

When interacting with an infant or toddler, a care educator watches for engagement cues. Children may invite a care educator to interact with them by looking up at the care educator, vocalizing, or pointing. Continuing to observe, the care educator can offer an affirming comment or question that connects with the child's communication. For example, a care educator observing a child who is stacking blocks and placing different shaped ones as the tower gets taller might respond when the child says, "Look!" by commenting, "You stacked so many blocks together. The tower you made is very tall." Describing what the child does promotes language development by connecting words to actions.

Sometimes the care educator may provide individual children with **scaffolds**, such as supportive language, ideas, or movements that draw a child into exploring a more complex idea, concept, or movement. For example, an **open-ended question** is a scaffold that may prompt a child to extend their idea and lead to new and more complex exploration or thinking. When a child repeatedly does the same thing to try to fit a puzzle piece, a care educator might ask, "What else might you do to fit that piece in a puzzle?" The following In-Practice Example illustrates how a care educator extends a child's interest in the reflection of light and color by responding to the children's self-initiated exploration.

In-Practice Example
Lucila, Aidan, and Qing's Explorations of Color and Light

During a moment of play in the art area, care educator Joette watches as 2-year-old Lucila picks up a wooden frame that encloses two sheets of blue plexiglass. Lucila puts her eyes up close to the plexiglass and peers through. She holds the frame out to Joette, gesturing for her to take it.

Joette responds, "You want me to see what you saw, don't you? I'd love to!" Joette looks through and exclaims, "I see everything blue! Here, your turn, Lucila." Lucila looks through the plexiglass in the wooden frame again. Aidan, another 2-year-old, walks up and reaches for a different frame, this one with yellow plexiglass inside. The two children laugh together as they move the frames back and forth in front of their eyes. Joette watches and then picks up a third frame, which has red plastic sheets. She holds it near the window, and a red patch appears on the floor. She gestures to the two toddlers and says, "Oh, look what's over here!" They rush to the red patch. Lucila steps onto the red patch and laughs with excitement. "It made red!" she says. "Yes!" says Joette, "Will yours make a color on the floor, too? You want to try?" Lucila holds her frame to the sun, sees a blue spot, and says, "Yes, I made blue!"

Joette notices that 2-year-old Qing is quietly observing. Qing is new to the early learning and care setting and is experiencing English for the first time. From talking with Qing's family, Joette knows that Qing experiences Mandarin at home and in their community. Joette has been especially focused on building a responsive relationship with Qing and has communicated with Qing's family to find ways to help Qing adjust to the new setting. Joette has already learned a few key words and phrases in Mandarin to use like "Good Morning" at arrival time, and "Thank You" or "Want some help?" during mealtime.

After noticing Qing's interest in the wooden frames with colored plexiglass earlier this week, Joette learned some colors in Mandarin. Starting the activity again, Joette holds a red plastic sheet near the window. When the red patch appears on the floor, Joette says in Mandarin, "红" (red). Qing comes over, smiles at Joette, and starts to laugh with the other children. Lucila tries to say "red" in Mandarin. Qing picks up a blue plastic sheet, holds it up, and says in Mandarin, "蓝" (blue). Joette repeats "蓝" while looking and gesturing encouragingly at Lucila and Aidan, who then join her in saying "蓝" (blue). Joette then offers Qing a high-five and says in a mix of Mandarin and English, "谢谢 Qing!" (Thank you, Qing!).

Reflections on the In-Practice Example

The care educator's reflection on this series of interactions might inspire some new ideas to provoke the children's thinking. As children begin to explore color and filtering of light, the care educator might decide to set up several transparent, colored objects in addition to the wood-framed transparencies (plastic bottles with colored water or semitransparent colored fabric) in the windowsill to invite children to explore further and discover the way light and color work together. Depending on how children respond, the care educator might also add some of the transparent, colored materials to the outside environment. The care educator could continue to use Mandarin words and phrases to connect with Qing and encourage play among the three children.

Routines

This context includes mealtimes, diaper changes, nap times, cleanup, drop-offs, and pickups. Intentional planning and support during these times invites infants and toddlers to participate in ways that deepen their relationship experiences and emotional security and offer possibilities for developing skills and concepts. Routines offer natural opportunities for children to apply emerging knowledge and skills. Care educators integrate engaging possibilities for learning into the everyday rituals of drop-offs, pickups, mealtimes, nap times, diaper changes, transitions, handwashing, setup, and cleanup, both indoors and outdoors. For example, a care educator might sing a soothing or calming song to a 5-month-old in the child's home language at the start of a diaper change.

When encouraged to participate, infants and toddlers usually take an active interest in daily routines. For example, when invited to choose between two outfits, a 10-month-old may look at one outfit and then the other several times before excitedly pointing at one of them. A crawling infant may happily climb the steps to the diapering table, as the care educator stands close to support the child if needed. Two-year-olds often enthusiastically use emerging skills during daily routines. For example, children enjoy putting cups on the table for a meal or clearing used dishes from the meal table. As the following In-Practice Example illustrates, daily routines offer opportunities for children to engage in learning and development in several domains.

In-Practice Example
Mealtime With Knut, Bella, Luna, and Grayson

Four children in the 2- to 3-year-old age range are seated at a low table for lunch. Aziza, their **primary care educator**, sits with them at the table. To Aziza's right, on a low bench, is a bin that holds everything she needs for the meal. Aziza offers two bowls to Knut and says, "Here is one for you. Please pass the other one to Bella." Aziza passes out the other two bowls in the same way.

Aziza places a plate of quesadillas on the table and offers small plastic tongs to Grayson. "Would you like to serve yourself a quesadilla? Let's ask Luna if she would like you to serve her one, too, or if she wants to serve herself." Grayson grabs the tongs and, after a few tries, manages to pick up a quesadilla and drops it into his bowl. While Grayson serves himself, Aziza asks, "Luna, *¿Quieres una quesadilla? Grayson te puede servir. ¿O quieres servirte?*" (Luna, do you want a quesadilla? Grayson can serve you. Or do you want to serve yourself?). Luna points to the tongs, nodding in response. Aziza asks Grayson to pass the tongs to Luna. The children and care educator continue talking, figuring out who would like to be served a quesadilla and who would like to serve their own.

Aziza then takes out a bowl of apples and a cutting board. As she cuts the apples into slices, Aziza places them in a bowl with tongs and passes the bowl to Bella, who proceeds to put one apple slice in her bowl and then starts to reach for a second piece. The care educator says, "It looks like you are hungry for apples. Let's check with your friends to see if anyone else would like an apple too." As the other children express interest in the apples, Bella passes the bowl to Knut. "Thanks, Bella, for taking care of your friends."

After the children have served themselves, Aziza asks, "Is anyone thirsty? Shall we get out the water?" The children all say, "Yes!" Aziza gets out four cups and asks the children to help her pass them out. Then she fills a small pitcher halfway full of water and asks Knut, "Would you like to pour?" Knut wraps his hand around the handle of the pitcher and tips the cup over the glass. A little bit of water spills. Aziza comments, "You got some in your cup! Here is a little cloth you can use to wipe up the water on the table." Knut carefully wipes the table and then walks over to put the wet cloth into the basket near Aziza. When Luna spills some while she is pouring, Knut jumps up and says, "I'll get a cloth," and returns to the table to wipe again. Aziza comments, "Thank you, Knut, for helping Luna clean up." As the children finish eating, Aziza shows them the compost bucket on the table where they can put the food they did not eat.

As the children are leaving the table, Aziza asks, "Who would like to go with me to feed the food scraps to the worms in our worm bin? Bella, it's your turn to bring the bucket out." Aziza hooks the small compost bucket onto Bella's therapeutic walker, and they head outside. The others follow while the educator reminds everyone, "After this, we can wash our hands." The group excitedly moves to the worm bin, with Bella bringing the bucket.

Reflections on the In-Practice Example

During this mealtime, the care educator engaged children as active participants in the mealtime routine. She gave them time and space to practice developing physical skills such as passing the bowls, using the tongs to serve food, pouring water from the pitcher, and wiping the table. At the same time, the care educator used language to help the children build language skills. Through the care educator's suggestion to see if other children wanted an apple, they experienced **empathy** and caring for one another. By engaging children in their home language and welcoming children's use of a language they use in their community, the care educator promoted a **sense of belonging**. These examples are just some of the many learning possibilities this mealtime routine offered.

Environment and Materials

This context includes the design and use of the physical space and the selection of play materials that reflect children's and families' **cultures** and lived experiences to promote meaningful connections and add interest and complexity to the children's play. Providing a thoughtful selection of developmentally appropriate materials invites infants and toddlers to explore experiences that affirm and challenge their emerging skills, concepts, and ideas. Care educators plan safe indoor and outdoor physical environments in affirming and inclusive ways to promote play, curiosity, exploration, discovery, and learning. Intentionally designed play spaces for children are like a studio for an artist or a laboratory for a scientist. When the physical environment is planned with children's self-initiated learning in mind, they encounter places where they can freely explore what things are like and how things work.

To support children's self-directed play and learning, care educators create environments with related types of materials organized together to offer children choices for play. A predictable, well-organized inventory of developmentally appropriate and accessible materials offers possibilities for children to extend their active search for knowledge. Children can also apply and practice emerging skills and develop concepts while they play.

Infants and toddlers need a rich variety of developmentally appropriate materials, including open-ended, natural, found, and repurposed items that are visible and easily accessible. Baskets and other containers, including big boxes to build with and climb into, allow young children to pursue their love of collecting and moving things from one place to another. Another consideration is offering children materials they can use for mark-making, including paper of different sizes and textures, various items such as large crayons, markers, and tape. While these types of materials are mainly kept in one area so children can easily find them, both children and care educators may move them to other areas as children's play, exploration, and learning

unfolds. Art materials such as paint, brushes, clay, and glue can be visibly displayed, yet out of reach, so children can ask to use them with a care educator's help.

When organizing an environment for infants and toddlers, it is important for care educators to keep in mind that the children learn in an integrated way (Lally et al., 2009). Children's integrated learning can happen in any indoor or outdoor space. For example, two 2-year-old children are sitting outside in a big pile of leaves with their *tía* (aunt), who cares for them while their father is at work. They are smelling the leaves, tearing them, throwing them in the air, singing "*¡Qué llueva!*" and laughing as they throw more leaves in the air. These children are using their small and large muscles, creativity, sensory perceptual skills, language, and social–emotional skills. Children thrive in early learning and care environments that are organized to offer opportunities for active movement, inside and outside play, places to feel cozy and relax, and messy play. Areas in an environment can be used flexibly to allow for a variety of learning experiences.

One exciting part of creating environments for infants and toddlers is that the indoor environment can be taken outdoors, and the outdoor environment can be taken indoors. For example, a blanket on a grassy area in the shade can be a place where 4- or 5-month-olds explore objects and try to move their bodies in new ways. Both indoor and outdoor environments can offer multiple possibilities for children to extend their play, exploration, and **meaning making**.

As care educators plan possibilities for learning, they consider ways to make changes, augment, or add new items to the basic inventory of materials. Plans that focus on the environment can extend or add complexity to the children's play. Care educators also need to consider what additional supports or adjustments, such as accommodations, adaptations, and modifications, should be made to provide greater access for children with disabilities. As the care educators arrange the environment, they anticipate observing and learning more about the children and how they engage in new possibilities for play, exploration, and meaning making. The following In-Practice Example describes the play and exploration of two infants around 8 months of age in a new play space their care educator set up for them.

In-Practice Example
Junlai and Andrea Crawl and Explore

Junlai and Andrea, along with two other crawlers, are on a large blanket extended over the ground in the outdoor yard. In one corner, the care educators have placed several low, wide baskets, each holding a variety of objects. The care educators' intent is to create an area with developmentally appropriate materials and toys to grasp and discover. Junlai crawls to the edge of one of the baskets and pauses. He peers inside and sees a variety of hand-sized rings—some metal, some smooth wood. There are also two round baskets, identical except in color. One is blue, one is green. Junlai reaches into the basket and grabs one of the wooden rings. He waves it up and down, watching it move, and then rolls up onto his side and mouths the smooth edge. He turns his gaze back to the basket. He rolls back onto his stomach, drops the ring, and reaches for one of the other rings in the basket—the large metal canning-jar ring. He repeats a similar series of actions with this ring. He then turns his gaze to search for the first ring, and as he does so, he drops the one he has been **mouthing**. He crawls over to retrieve the first ring.

In the other corner of this outdoor play space, the care educators have set up an area for active movement. Andrea, who has been crawling for several weeks, crawls in the direction of a low cushion, placed near a low, hollow cube that is just the right size for crawling through. Andrea places one hand and then the other on the cushion and begins to pull up onto the soft surface. She inches her body forward in rhythmic bursts of movement and, little by little, climbs over the cushion. She leans to the side to look through the hollow cube and pats the bottom of it. She then returns to the soft cushion and climbs back down. She smiles, turns in a full circle, and moves up once again onto the cushion, this time from the opposite side.

Reflections on the In-Practice Example

This In-Practice Example shows two different kinds of outdoor play areas set up for infants who are about 8 months of age. In one corner, care educators have prepared an array of objects, carefully selected to offer distinct yet similar physical properties and features for infants to explore with their eyes, mouths, hands, and other parts of their bodies. Junlai reaches for and grasps an object and then brings it to his mouth. He uses his memory as he drops the second ring and searches for the first one that he had. In another corner, the care educators have created a space that provides a variety of low surfaces to challenge infants to crawl in new ways. Andrea practices her developing motor skills as she climbs up and down on the cushion. In choosing to go up the other side of the cushion, she might be exploring whether she can also climb up that side or anticipating (predicting) that she can also move up that side.

To take full advantage of learning possibilities offered by a well-organized environment, children need long periods of uninterrupted time for self-initiated play. Care educators facilitate infants' self-initiated learning by thoughtfully organizing materials and setting up play areas and then observing with wonder what the children do. Infants and toddlers thrive when they have opportunities to explore and manipulate materials in ways of their own choosing, without interruption. Such moments of active play and exploration allow care educators to observe children's play to discover what engages each infant's or toddler's interest. Care educators also note individual children's developmental progress. Such notes are often useful when care educators complete an observational assessment such as the California's Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP; California Department of Social Services & California Department of Education, 2025).[1] The following In-Practice Example illustrates the value to both infant and care educator of uninterrupted play in a thoughtfully created, well-organized environment.

1 Because the DRDP is widely used in California's early learning and care settings, reference is made to it throughout this chapter when formal assessment of children's learning and development is discussed. Other observational assessments could be used in the same ways that the DRDP is used, as described in this document.

In-Practice Example
Supporting Jacob's Development Through Uninterrupted Play

Care educator Angelica watches as 9-month-old Jacob plays with a small basket that he has pulled from a collection of small baskets in a corner of the room. As Angelica observes Jacob's play, she is struck by how intently he is exploring this basket and how he seems to experiment with it. She continues to watch and then pulls out her notebook, which she keeps in her pocket. She writes the following:

Observation. Jacob, lying on his stomach, holds a round, plastic, open-weave basket. He waves it with a stiff arm. He drops it to the ground and watches as it lands upright and wobbles on its circular bottom. Jacob watches as the wobbling basket slows and then stops. With his open palm, he taps the edge of the basket with enough force to set the basket wobbling again. He watches as it settles to a stop. Again, he taps the edge, but this time much harder. The basket flips over. Jacob's eyes widen as he inspects the now upside-down basket lying perfectly still on the floor. Jacob slaps his hand onto the basket and moves it from side to side with his hand. As he does this, the basket makes a scraping sound against the floor. He smiles and laughs. He pushes the basket again and laughs as he makes the same scraping sound.

Conversation with the family. Later in the day, Angelica retrieves the anecdotal note she wrote about Jacob's play with the basket. She wants to share it with Jacob's father when he arrives to pick up Jacob at the end of the day. She invites Jacob's father to hear about Jacob's little experiment with physics—with how things move in space. After she shares her observation, Jacob's father shares a similar observation he made of Jacob at home. Jacob loves to pull the cans out of a low cupboard in the kitchen. He has discovered that when they fall over, he can roll them across the floor. Every time one starts rolling, he lets out a giggle. He also experiments with putting the cans straight up and tries pushing them in various ways. Angelica is delighted to hear the father's observation and wants to write a Learning Story to Jacob that includes both observations.

Reflections on the In-Practice Example

This In-Practice Example illustrates how Angelica's observation of Jacob's uninterrupted play in the environment led to documenting Jacob's exploration of how objects move and how he can cause different things to happen with them. The documentation captured Jacob's joy as he made discoveries. When Angelica later shares the anecdotal note with Jacob's father, he shares an observation of Jacob's play at home. This exchange of observations strengthens their mutual fascination in Jacob's play and joy as he makes discoveries. It opens the door for Angelica and Jacob's father to work together in finding ways to support Jacob's continued exploration and discovery at home and in the early learning and care setting.

Planning for Each Learning Context

Planning to support the learning and development of infants and toddlers focuses on planning possibilities in the learning contexts of relationships and interactions, routines, and environment and materials. As care educators begin to plan, they reflect on their developing relationship with each child, asking themselves how each child is using the relationship as a base for learning. They seek ways to become more responsive in their relationship with each child in their care. Care educators also reflect on the children's questions, the investigations children initiate, and the meaning children make as they play and make discoveries. Care educators observe and document children's developing relationships and engagement in play, exploration, and learning. Later, care educators share their observations and documentation with the children, their colleagues, and the children's family members and reflect together. Through ongoing reflection, care educators discover the meaning children reveal in their interactions, play, and exploration. The knowledge that care educators gain helps them plan new possibilities for children to consider in continuing to develop their relationships and their **sense of identity and belonging** or to explore an idea or skill. The new possibilities care educators offer often extend or add complexity to the children's interactions, play, and exploration. A detailed description of the reflective planning cycle appears later in this chapter.

Partnering With Families to Support Children's Learning and Development

As In-Practice Examples throughout this chapter illustrate, supporting early learning and development involves three partners:

- the infant or toddler, who actively pursues their own learning
- the infant's or toddler's family members, who provide fundamental relationship experiences for the child and are the first teachers that support the child's learning and development
- the care educator, who forms relationships with the infant and family, learns from them, and offers insight and ideas that bring the partnership together

Each child, family, and care educator has a unique perspective in creating learning experiences, and each relies on the other to implement the next steps effectively.

Infants' and toddlers' experiences with their families and in their communities are a powerful source of learning for them. Care educators nurture children's appetites for learning and meaning making by building on the knowledge children bring to the early learning and care setting. When care educators embed elements of the children's home and community in the early learning and care setting, the children encounter familiar concepts, language, and materials. This familiarity creates fertile ground

for meaning making and helps infants and toddlers explore the environment and materials with comfort and ease.

Just as important, connections between experience within the family and in the early learning and care setting support children emotionally and socially and nurture their sense of identity and belonging. This emotional support helps children feel secure and allows them to explore and experiment with new objects and take on and solve problems in a new setting. The key is to partner with each family to find out which objects, events, and experiences may be meaningful for each individual child. Discovering what may be personally meaningful for a child increases the chance of fully engaging that child in meaning making and learning.

When observing and reflecting on a child's experiences in an early learning and care setting, it is important for the care educator to hold in mind the child's whole lived experience. The meaning of what the care educator observes in the early learning and care setting is best understood through what they learn in partnership with the child's family.

Considerations When Supporting a Child Who Has Experienced Trauma

Trauma can result from the loss of or separation from a loved one; from intentional violence, such as physical abuse, sexual abuse, or domestic violence; or from natural disaster, accidents, or war. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN, 2010) reports that "young children also may experience traumatic stress in response to painful medical procedures or the sudden loss of a parent/caregiver" (p. 2). Research has also established that infants and toddlers may experience trauma when they perceive events that may threaten their safety or the safety of their family members and other caregivers (NCTSN, 2010).

The following In-Practice Example reveals the multiple considerations that help the care educator understand how a child who may be experiencing trauma is interacting in the setting, how the care educator might be supportive of the child and the family, and how the experience may affect the care educator personally (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start, National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement, 2020).

In-Practice Example
Junior Misses His Papa

Two-and-a-half-year-old Junior lives with his mother, Serena, and his father's sister, Aunt Dorie. Junior's father, Kai, has been incarcerated 40 miles away for the past 4 months, and Serena has had to take on extra hours at work, which means that Junior is spending longer hours in child care. Junior, his mom, and Aunt Dorie travel by bus to see his father once a month. Junior has been in Ms. Claudia's family child care home since he was 6 months old. He has been an active, energetic, and social toddler. He loves to climb and build tall stacks of blocks, using boxes and other found cardboard pieces that are in the learning environment that Ms. Claudia created.

In the past few months, Junior has been crying at drop-off and kicks at Ms. Claudia when she tries to hold him. When other children come close to Junior when he is building something, he pushes them away, shouting, "No, you go!" When Ms. Claudia communicates with Junior's mom about Junior being upset, Junior's mom says that he has been sad and crying at home and doesn't want her to leave the room. She says he has been waking in the night calling out for his papa. When Ms. Claudia asks her about the visits to see his papa, Junior's mom says he plays and then holds on to his father and cries when they have to leave. Ms. Claudia expresses how much Junior loves and misses his father. She asks if Junior's mom and Aunt Dorie can meet with her to discuss ways they can work together to support Junior. Serena agrees that this would be helpful and asks if she can invite her social worker to come to their meeting. Ms. Claudia agrees that this would be a good idea.

Junior's mom also mentions to Ms. Claudia that she is concerned about other families in the program knowing that Junior's papa is incarcerated. Ms. Claudia reassures her that this information is kept confidential. When they meet with the social worker, Junior's mom expresses her concern about Junior missing his father. She and Dorie share recent observations of Junior at home. Ms. Claudia says that she wants Junior to feel comfortable and secure with her again and to resume his active play with the other children. They all agree that Junior is expressing his sadness, confusion, anger, frustration, and worry through his behavior.

Together, they discuss strategies that they can use both in the family and at the family child care home to support Junior. Ms. Claudia asks Junior's mom and Dorie for ideas about ways to comfort Junior. Junior's mom and Dorie share that he likes to have his back rubbed and that he likes to be wrapped up in a blanket. Ms. Claudia and the social worker share that Junior might appreciate photos of his papa, Kai, including photos taken with his papa and him during their monthly visit, to help Junior relax and feel more connected with his papa. They ask if there is something that could comfort Junior. Aunt Dorie suggests one of Kai's favorite bandanas for Junior to keep with him at home and in child care.

Ms. Claudia also suggests that since Junior seems to want some alone time when he is building things, she can provide a protected space for him to do his construction work. The social worker mentions that Ms. Claudia could add some people figures and a small toy bus to this area for Junior. The social worker thinks Junior might play with these things to explore his feelings related to the bus trips to visit his papa.

The social worker asks Junior's mom and Aunt Dorie if they have any other ideas. Junior's mom shares that sometimes she makes up songs about Junior's papa and sings them to him when he is falling asleep. For example, "Papa loves his baby, Papa loves his baby, Papa loves his Junior, oh, so much." Junior always says, "Again." Ms. Claudia asks if Junior's mom thinks it would be helpful if she sang this song to Junior too.

Ms. Claudia asks Junior's mom and Aunt Dorie if there are special activities that Junior likes to do with his papa. Aunt Dorrie says Junior loves to play peek-a-boo using his papa's ball cap, and he and his papa love playing roll the ball to each other. Ms. Claudia shares ways she can talk to Junior about the games he likes to play with his papa. Ms. Claudia also suggests that she could invite Junior to draw or paint a picture that he could give to his papa the next time he visits him.

The social worker asks if it might be possible to make a recording of Junior's father talking or singing to him that they could share with Junior. She explains that this would allow Junior to be able to hear his papa's voice when he is missing him.

The social worker also suggests that when Junior is expressing his feelings, they can offer comfort and, when appropriate, possible names and reasons for the feelings. For example:

- "You look sad. I see you crying when you say good-bye to your mama."
- "Maybe you are missing your papa too."
- "Maybe you are sad when you say bye-bye to your papa too."
- "Would you like me to give you a hug, or should we look at your family book?"
- "When you feel better, we can go outside and climb on your favorite slide."

Later in the day, as Ms. Claudia reflects on the meeting with the family and the social worker, she feels positive about the ideas they have come up with to support Junior and thankful for their collaboration. She also realizes that this situation is bringing up some sadness for her from her own childhood. Knowing from professional learning on trauma-informed care that practicing self-awareness, addressing personal issues, and applying self-care techniques contribute to developing affirming, warm relationships with children, she decides to reach out to a mental health consultant for help with these feelings.

Reflections on In-Practice Example

This In-Practice Example of a 2 ½-year-old child who may be experiencing trauma from missing his father illustrates how a care educator comes to understand the child's behavior through careful observation and communication with the child's family. As this example illustrates, infants and toddlers often are unable to use words to communicate their reactions to stress or trauma, which may make a child's stress reaction less observable or apparent.

Trauma-Informed Care

The Center on the Developing Child identifies at least one stable caring and supportive relationship as essential for a young child who has experienced or is experiencing trauma. Early learning and care settings can create the possibility for a stable relationship with a care educator by implementing primary care and continuity of care (California Department of Education, 2019). Other practices cited by the Center on the Developing Child include helping children develop a sense of mastery and self-confidence, promoting the development of executive function and self-regulation skills, and creating a supportive climate for affirming faith and cultural traditions (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2015).

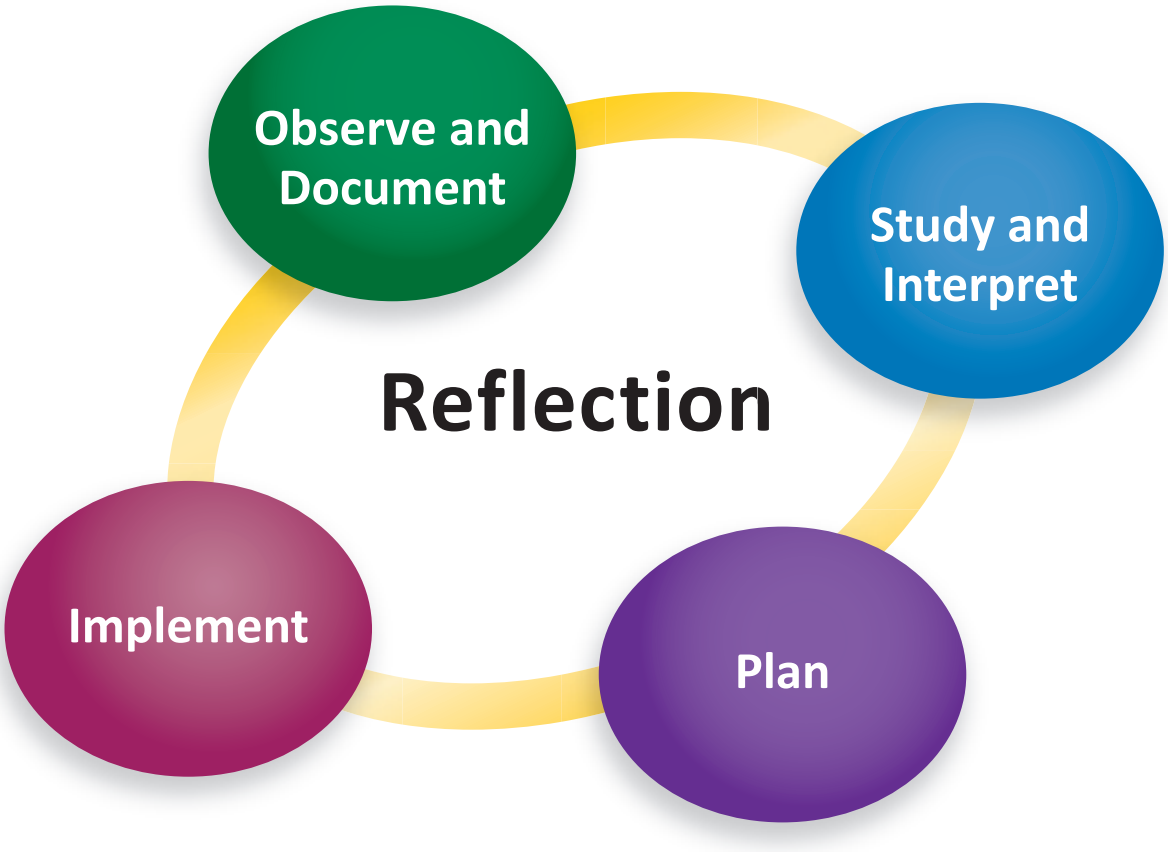
Early learning and care settings can assist young children who have experienced trauma through ensuring stable relationships with care educators, providing a safe environment with predictable routines, and supporting play as a way for children to explore their feelings (Lieberman, 2006). It is also important for care educators to work collaboratively with family members and consult with a mental health professional. Another major consideration for care educators is their own feelings and stress around caring for a child who has experienced or is experiencing trauma. Self-care and consultation with a mental health professional are two recommended practices to manage stress responses when caring for children who have experienced trauma.[2]

2 The National Child Traumatic Stress Network provides helpful resources on trauma-informed care at https://www.nctsn.org/trauma-informed-care and early childhood trauma for children birth to 6 years old at https://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/trauma-types/early-childhood-trauma.

The Reflective Planning Cycle to Support Learning and Development

The reflective planning cycle to support early learning and development includes the steps of observing and documenting; studying and interpreting, individually and with others; planning with others; and implementing a plan. At each step of the cycle, care educators are reflective. They reflect when

- observing children interact, play, and explore;
- documenting their observations;
- studying and interpreting documentation, individually and with others;
- planning learning experiences with others; and
- implementing plans for strengthening their relationship with each child or for extending or adding complexity to children's play and exploration.



Care educators find it particularly helpful to share documentation of children's learning with the children's family members. Sharing can be done through observation notes, photos, videos, and samples of children's creations. When families and care educators reflect together on documentation to interpret children's interactions, play, exploration, and learning, family members offer insights into the children's behavior and ideas, as well as share goals and priorities for their children at home and in the community. Families and care educators together discover and plan ways to connect the children's experiences in the early learning and care setting with their experiences at home and in the community.

Observing and Documenting

Planning to support the learning and development of infants and toddlers begins with care educators discovering, through careful observation and documentation, each child's self-directed learning. Observation is an essential skill in the care of infants and toddlers, and documentation allows care educators to hold in memory what they observe. When care educators mindfully observe and document, they find out how individual children make meaning and make discoveries within everyday moments of interactions, play, and routines.

When observing and documenting infants' and toddlers' interactions and play, care educators

- discover how individual children make meaning, that is, how a child expresses or shows feelings, how a child responds to others' feelings, how a child expresses ideas and pursues questions, and how a child responds to the impact of their actions on objects or other people, and
- gather evidence that pertains to each child's social and emotional development, approaches to learning, language development, cognitive development, and **perceptual** and **motor development**.

Observing and documenting for the purpose of understanding means carefully watching, listening, and recording individual children's behavior and learning with wonder, thoughtful intention, and reflection. When children are emotionally and physically safe, a care educator discovers small scientists at work—gathering information, asking questions, comparing, making and evaluating predictions through their actions, experimenting, and over time, building a wide range of concepts and skills.

Observing and Listening

By observing and listening to children with care and attention, we can discover a way of truly seeing and getting to know them. By doing so we also become able to respect them for who they are and what they would like to communicate to us. We know that to an attentive eye and ear, infants communicate a great deal about themselves long before they can speak. Already at this stage, observing and listening is a reciprocal experience, because in observing how the children learn, we learn.

—L. Gandini and J. Goldhaber, in *Bambini: The Italian Approach to Infant/Toddler Care*

The Observation and Documentation Process

Care educators use their knowledge and rely on all their senses as they observe and document, take notes, reflect on, and interpret children's behavior. They constantly ask themselves what the children's actions mean to better understand each child, to share observations with the children's families, and eventually to plan additional possibilities for learning. Just as important, care educators observe relationships in the early learning and care setting. Their observations reveal valuable information about the quality of relationships (e.g., child–care educator, child–child, care educator–care educator, child–family member, and care educator–family member relationships, as well as the care educator's relationship with the group of children).

As care educators observe, they document, gathering and holding evidence of children's exploration and interests for future use. A common form of documentation in early learning and care settings is a written note, often referred to as an *observation anecdote*. Other forms of documentation include photos, video recordings, and work samples (for children older than 24 months). Documentation serves a dual purpose:

- First, it holds memories of care educators' observations of children's learning—the children's expressions of feelings, ideas, concepts, and skills. Care educators can use anecdotal notes and other evidence to deepen their understanding of children's learning, development, and well-being and to support periodic standardized assessment of each child's progress.
- Second, documentation also guides care educators as they determine next steps in ongoing, day-to-day planning to provide responsive relationship experience and to extend and make more complex possibilities for learning.

Sometimes care educators make a mental note when they are caring for children or interacting with them. Later, they may write down what they observed earlier. Other care educators may routinely carry a notepad. When they see

something noteworthy, they jot down notes to be used in a more complete documentation later. They may also take a photo, or, if caring for older 2-year-olds, they may keep a sample of each child's work.

Documentation tools include notepads (both paper and electronic devices), audio- and video-recording devices, and cameras. To take photos, care educators often arrange to have a small camera or even a separate phone with a camera to avoid being distracted by their phone while caring for children. Care educators also include in their documentation items produced by older children such as drawings.

Documentation provides a valuable history of a child that is meaningful for care educators, the child, and the child's family. Learning Stories are one kind of documentation that captures a child's history (for more information on Learning Stories see the "Introduction" chapter). For example, based on documentation presented in the In-Practice Example for the environment and materials learning context, the Learning Story "Jacob Investigates Movement" describes how a child investigates movement by exploring possibilities with play materials in the environment.

Learning Story: "Jacob Investigates Movement"

Dear Jacob,

Today, I watched you as you gathered information about what a basket is like and how it moves. When you approached the basket, you touched the edge, and it began to wobble. I watched the surprise and delight on your face, as if to say, "Wow! It wobbles back and forth! Oh, that was fun to watch! Can I make it happen again?" You then reached for the edge of the basket, and it wobbled again and again. You were like a scientist, exploring, observing, predicting, and testing your ideas over and over, discovering that you can make the basket move in some predictable ways. In one of your experiments, the basket flipped over, and you looked surprised as if to say, "Oh, I didn't expect that!" But now you had a new question to explore: "What happens when I push down on the edge of the basket now?" Your face and body movements expressed surprise, as if to say, "Hmm. That wasn't what I expected. I thought it would wobble back and forth like it did before, but it is still. I'll try that again. Hmm. A noise ... I like that! Let's see if I can make that again." When I shared this story with your dad, he told me about the experiments that you do at home with the cans from the cupboard. You take them out of the cupboard and notice that some roll and some don't. You seem to enjoy testing your theories of movement on the cans both when they are on their side and when they are standing up.

I learn so much by watching your experiments, Jacob. You are exploring so much about physics, gravity and friction, movement of different objects, and **cause and effect**. You are a keen observer and a dedicated scientist, able to make and test your predictions again and again, with just as much interest in the unexpected outcomes as those you expected. When the basket didn't wobble, you developed a new way to test your idea. I look forward to your continued exploration of the world around you and to celebrating your future discoveries!

Angelica

Each documentation method yields different information. By using multiple types of documentation tools rather than just a single tool, care educators can often gain a more complete picture of a child's learning and development. For example, video recordings do not necessarily capture complete information, because a significant action may occur outside the focus of the camera. For this reason, it may be helpful to make notes after recording a video example to create more complete documentation. With every type of documentation, care educators focus on collecting observational data that provide clear, vivid evidence of children's learning and development.

Observation and documentation occur throughout the day—during care routines; at drop-off and pickup times; during cleanup times and transitions; and while children spontaneously engage in play, exploration, and interactions. Observing and reflecting on each moment means being present with children and attending to their interactions with others and the environment. This mindful presence is different from participating in children's play or directing their play. Whether for 1 minute or 15, an attentive, mindful presence means watching and waiting to see what happens as infants and toddlers, for example, play, explore the environment, participate in routines, ask a question, or seek emotional support. By observing, wondering, and reflecting, care educators gain an increasingly complete picture of children's exploration and discovery.

Daily observations are combined with information from the child's family, for example, how their child slept the night before or the current focus of their child's play at home. Care educators who observe regularly and document a child's daily experiences are better able to offer responsive care in predictable relationships as well as offer engaging possibilities for extending learning to each child.

Being Responsive While Observing and Documenting

One of the challenges for care educators is providing sensitive, responsive care to infants and toddlers while observing and documenting their behavior, interactions, play, and exploration. Learning how to address this challenge takes practice and time. Above all, care educators make sure that the need to observe for reflective planning does not interfere with nurturing the children. The highest priority for care educators is to be responsive to the immediate feelings, interests, and needs of the children.

Care educators in large home-based or center-based settings can coordinate how they work together to observe and document children's behavior, interactions, and play. In large early learning and care settings, one care educator might observe and document while the other interacts with the children. They can take turns doing each activity. Whether working in a team or working alone, care educators set up their space to make documentation easy, such as placing cameras and note cards in the indoor and outdoor areas or in apron pockets so they can take photos or write notes quickly and easily.

Mindfully observing while still actively participating in a child's care may be described as participatory observation. When care educators observe and document, they actively provide predictable care, remaining emotionally and physically available to the children. They are responsive to children, interact with children, and give emotional comfort while observing. As they observe, they give full attention to what the children are doing. The care educators' mindful presence allows them to gather information about the infants or toddlers that helps with understanding the children's development and well-being and supporting the children's learning.

Mindfully observing while still actively participating in a child's care may be described as participatory observation.

The Responsive Process: Watch, Ask, Adapt

In the Program for Infant–Toddler Care (PITC) approach, responsive care educators are continually observing children. "Watch," or observation, is the first step of the PITC's three-step responsive process of "Watch, Ask, Adapt" (Lally, 2024). Observation allows care educators to read an infant's or toddler's cues to better understand the child and to meet their needs moment by moment. One of the core practices of the PITC is helping infants and toddlers to establish secure bases for exploration and learning. The moment-by-moment observing of children's messages and prompt, sensitive responses of the care educators strengthen their relationships with children and promote the development of secure attachments.

The PITC's Watch, Ask, Adapt process works hand in hand with planning possibilities for learning that include observation, documentation, and assessment. Care educators observe to read children's cues, interact responsively, and build relationships with infants. In this process, care educators also later document and reflect on their observations, which helps them to deepen their understanding of children's learning, development, and well-being and discover ways to support them.

The Responsive Process

Step One: **WATCH**
Begin by just watching, not rushing to do things for the child.
Watch for both nonverbal and verbal cues.

Step Two: **ASK**
Ask yourself: What message is the child sending?
What are the emotional, social, intellectual, and physical parts to the child's message?
Does the child want something from me at this moment? If so, ask the child nonverbally and verbally: "What are you communicating?"

Note that this Ask step is as much about reflectively wondering and asking oneself what the child's message means as it is about asking the child.

Step Three: **ADAPT**
Adapt your actions based on what you believe to be the child's interest, idea, question, request, or need.
Watch how the child responds to your actions. Modify your actions based on the child's response and watch, ask, and adapt again.

For example, in the Watch, Ask, and Adapt process, a care educator may say to themself or to the child, "I see you reaching for my hand and bringing it to your mouth. I wonder if you would like a chew toy to bite on. You don't seem interested in this one. Let's see if you'd like a little washcloth to bite." Or at another time, "When I said good morning, you turned away. I'll give you a little more time before I get close." Or during a diaper change, "You're reaching for your diaper. Would you like to help me unfasten it?"

Focus of Observation and Documentation

When observing and documenting, care educators note nonverbal and verbal aspects of the child's behavior and the situation, including the actions of nearby adults, other nearby children, aspects of the environment, and time of day. As care educators observe, they note what occupies infants' or toddlers' minds and bodies. Infants' or toddlers' gestures, gaze, sounds, and actions convey what interests them and what they are trying to figure out. Care educators document observations of infants' or toddlers' interactions with people and things that they find meaningful.

When observing, care educators may choose to focus on specific aspects of development or exploration, such as

- individual attributes and temperamental tendencies of each child,
- signs of competence and vulnerability of each child,
- nonverbal and verbal interactions each child has with other children and adults,
- ways in which the small group of children functions, and
- each child's explorations of materials and places in the environment.

The care educator focuses on the child's behavior, play, exploration, interests, and behavior, staying open to everything that occurs. For instance, a care educator may see that a child watches, reaches for, and eventually approaches shiny things, such as a hand-sized metal bell. When the child picks up the bell, the bell makes a noise—and the child quickly learns how to repeat the noise many times by shaking the bell. In exploring this object, the child has made a discovery about cause-and-effect relationships. The care educator then makes a mental note and holds in memory observations such as this one. Later documentation of the memory will help in planning how to assist the child with exploring further and making discoveries about similar types of objects.

During the same observation, the care educator may also notice and address barriers to learning. For example, the care educator may see that the child seems unable to hear the soft ring of the bell when there are loud sounds nearby, such as the crying of a baby or tumbling block towers. In addition, the care educator might notice that a child has heightened sensitivity to noises that prevents them from focusing on play and exploration. Information about such barriers is used in planning how to facilitate learning. In the case of loud sounds, the environment may need to be adapted to create some quieter spaces. Another type of barrier to learning may be related to trauma a child has experienced. When a child has experienced or is experiencing trauma, the principles of trauma-informed care provide critically important guidance for the family members and care educators who are caring for the child (Bartlett et al., 2016; Nicholson et al., 2023).

At another time, the care educator may observe that children have an emerging interest in looking at things together with the care educator (joint attention). When sharing books with the children, the care educator may notice that two of them spend a long time looking at each picture, while another child prefers to turn the pages quickly. Although all three children were interested in

books, the way they explored the books differed. The care educator continued to observe and document each child's interaction with books, noting how their interest and exploration progressed as each child developed over weeks and months.

During an observation, a care educator may also observe unexpected behaviors or actions that concern them, such as an infant pulling the hair of a nearby child or a child leaning over to bite the arm of another child. In addition to moving closer to the child to create safety in a gentle way, these moments are important for the care educator to observe carefully and ask themself, "What happened just before the biting?" "What is this child noticing, experiencing, feeling, curious about, or interested in?" "What might this child be expressing or testing?" "What might the child want or need from me?" It is also important for the care educator to be aware of their own feelings and responses while observing. To respond to both children in this type of situation with full, empathetic attention, a care educator may benefit from reflecting with a trained early childhood reflective mentor or consultant when available, by themself or with a supportive colleague, to understand their own feelings and to develop empathy and understanding for both children. For care educators who work alone, they might connect with other care educators and provide support for each other. Upon reflecting on their own feelings and those of both children, the care educator will be in a better position to respond to both children with calm, comfort, empathy, and support. Observation, documentation, and reflection on these kinds of interactions can provide valuable information to care educators about individual children's vulnerabilities and sensitivities as well as what activates a strong emotional response in them. This process also helps care educators better understand each child's strengths, each child's self-calming ability, how each child emotionally regulates themself, and environmental factors that affect each child.

Studying and Interpreting

As care educators study their observations and documentation and share and discuss them with others, ideas emerge for the next steps on how to extend or expand children's exploration, problem-solving, thinking, interactions, and language. Care educators also discover ways to support each child's well-being. Studying observations and documentation supports an ongoing assessment of each child's progress in learning and helps with understanding each child's emotional strengths and needs in their relationships with others.

When studying documentation, care educators need to reflect on their own responses to each child and determine whether they are giving more attention to some children and excluding others. The following question can guide the care educator's self-reflection: Are their interpretations of the same behavior different for different children depending on the children's race, ethnicity, or whether the children have a disability?

As care educators reflectively study and interpret observations and documentation, they wonder and ask themselves questions that may include the following:

- What is each child noticing, sensing, feeling, experiencing, understanding?
- What is each child curious about? What meaning is each child making?
- What is each child exploring, or what questions is each child wondering about?
- How might the relationships between children and between each child and their care educator be described?
- How might the child's interests and meaning-making moments be expanded?
- What is each child's progress across all developmental domains? What domains might a child need support with?
- How are the care educators influencing each situation?
- What might a family member like to know about the child or the group?
- How does each child communicate? What kinds of situations and experiences lead to conversations and complex language?

Care educators study their observation notes and other documentation both individually and with colleagues and family members. It is important to take time to slow down, review, and think about each child **holistically**, including their play and exploration, lived experience, culture, language, meaning making, temperament, interests, strengths, and needs. Time for reflection helps educators deepen their understanding of each child and leads to ideas on how to continue to support that child's learning and development.

When studying anecdotal notes, photos, videos, and work samples of things children create, care educators piece together ways to portray the development of the infants and toddlers in their care. Care educators may compile this information in many ways, including the following:

- gaining insights by watching the same video-recorded interaction several times. This type of review may lead to piecing together video clips to create a sequence of key moments. The edited video material might illuminate how one learning experience connects with another. Notes about the child's behavior and the situation when the video is recorded can add meaning to a video recording.
- putting a set of photographs side by side to show a sequence of actions or learning experiences. This technique can shed light on a wide range of learning experiences (e.g., a child's understanding of routines or a child's fine motor development).
- comparing observation notes several weeks after completing an observational assessment of a child's learning and developmental progress. The observation notes may reveal why a child is making rapid progress in one developmental domain while continuing to practice at about the same skill level in another domain.
- reviewing different pieces of documentation (video recordings, notes, photographs, and so forth) to deepen their understanding of an individual child. For example, a care educator might record an audio sample of a **multilingual child's** language or record a video clip of a child using American Sign Language (ASL). If the care educator does not communicate using the child's language, they can listen to the audio clip or watch the video together with the child's family or a care educator who speaks the child's home language, who can translate the child's language. When collaborating with the family in this way, the care educator can learn to identify some of the key words that might help with communication later.
- using various forms of documentation to create a Learning Story, which is written for the child and includes observation notes, photos, the care educator's interpretation, and the family's perspective. The Learning Story may also connect an observation to past observations to show themes and the growth of the child.
- reviewing documentation with other care educators, the child, or family members to invite multiple interpretations of the documentation. These different reflections on the documentation can deepen a care educator's understanding of the child's learning and development.
- displaying or sharing sequences of photos for families to observe and discover children's ideas. Each family's interpretation of a sequence of photos can offer the care

educator insights into different ways of understanding a child's learning experience.

There are countless possibilities for increasing one's appreciation of early learning and development through the study and interpretation of anecdotal observations, photos, audio recordings, video recordings, and work samples of children's creations. Such documentation has the potential of serving multiple purposes:

- Notes, photos, and videos may be used to make visible a child's learning focus. A care educator may document over several days a child's interest in naming objects. The documentation may include notes on new words the child has recently learned, photos of the child's pointing behavior, and notes on the types of things that particularly interest the child.
- Photos of pretend play, block building, or experiences of children in the 2-year-old age range may be organized for display around the room. The children may look at the photos of their play and use ideas suggested by the photos to inspire continued exploration. Observing children's interaction with this documentation can also provide clues to care educators about the children's interpretation of their behavior, play, and exploration.
- Notes or audio samples to document language development might show a child using single words and moving toward using two-word phrases consistently.
- A team of a bilingual, Spanish-speaking care educator and a monolingual, English-speaking care educator might arrange for the Spanish-speaking care educator to takes notes on a child's expanding Spanish skills, while the monolingual, English-speaking care educator documents the child's English language and communication development.
- Sequenced photos or videos of a child exploring paper or creating a drawing or painting can offer a richer understanding of the child's questions, interests, and ways of exploring the materials. Children's reflections on their own creations offer insight into a child's thinking that one cannot gain from a child's end product alone.
- Care educators who work as a team may plan based on observation and documentation. They may reflect on documentation taken over several days that shows children's **cruising** behavior. In studying and discussing the documentation, the care educators may decide to add a new piece of equipment to the room to provide the children with an opportunity to explore their newly developing motor skills.
- Care educators may offer Learning Stories or simply combine photos with notes to create a book of each child's learning experiences to share with the child and their family. They can look at each child's book with family members to share the child's joy of learning.
- Notes, photos, and other items a care educator collects can be used as documentation for assessment. For example, a set of photos that show a child's exploration of how things fit and move in space may be used to support a rating on the "Spatial Relationships" measure of the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) or similar observational assessment.

Ongoing study and interpretation of observations and documentation continually give insights into each child's learning and development. The understanding a care educator gains is enriched through reflection with the child and the child's family. The knowledge a care educator and the family develop together can guide planning to offer new possibilities for the child to explore, both in the early learning and care setting and in the family's environment.

Using Knowledge of Learning and Development to Study and Interpret Documentation

The effort to create responsive, affirming, and inclusive learning contexts and plan possibilities for learning depends on an accurate understanding of learning and development. The *California Infant–Toddler Learning and Development Foundations* (ITLDF) were developed to support preparation for reflectively studying, analyzing, and interpreting children's learning and development and for planning how to support it (California Department of Social Services, 2025). Knowledge of the foundations gives care educators insights into the fundamental competencies and developmental needs of infants and toddlers. By observing children with the ITLDF in mind, care educators can see and understand so much

more of the learning and development that is happening. When care educators reflect on their observations and documentation, they can use the ITLDF to interpret what might be the focus of the infant's or toddler's behavior, play, and exploration. In this way, care educators apply what they know about early development and learning to the children's interactions and play. The following In-Practice Example of a child's play in the environment centers on Foundation 1.1 Cause and Effect in the Cognitive domain.

In-Practice Example
Observing as Kaysha Explores Cause and Effect

Observation. Kaysha, a 30-month-old child, holds an empty cup under a slow stream of water that flows from a hose. The hose rests on a rock pathway, where tiny plants have grown between the flat rocks. Kaysha pours the water she gathered in the cup onto the rocks and watches as it soaks into the plants and disappears. Her gaze shifts to a trickle of water that meanders down a sloped patch of dirt and darkens the dry dirt. She bends down to touch the wet dirt. She fills the cup again. This time, she pours the water over the dirt, watching the ground absorb it. She fills her cup again and pours the water onto the dirt. She repeats this action three more times. Each time the water pools on the surface of the dirt, she expresses a long, excited, "Yeah!" but becomes quiet when the water seeps into the dirt.

Documentation. The care educator documents this observation of Kaysha's play with a clear, descriptive anecdote. They make no assumptions about why Kaysha did what she did. For example, they do not assume that Kaysha was happy or frustrated. Nor do they analyze the learning within the play. Instead, the care educator's focus is on accurately capturing a vivid image of the play. With this observation available as a written anecdote—a brief story of what they observed—the care educator can return to it later to reflect on the documentation, using the Cause and Effect foundation to interpret the meaning of Kaysha's play and exploration.

Reflections on In-Practice Example

In this In-Practice Example, accurate documentation holds the memory of Kaysha's play that the care educator can later share and discuss with the family and other care educators. Without this documentation to support the care educator's observation, the memory of Kaysha's play might have been clouded by their beliefs about what is important and what is not. Some aspects might have been remembered, while others might have been forgotten.

Documentation gives a more complete, accurate picture of a child's engagement in interaction, play, exploration, and learning. It opens the door for the family and the care educator to discuss the documentation of the child's actions and use concepts from the ITLDF to identify and interpret the child's learning and development. In the case of Kaysha's discoveries with water, what emerged from such reflection and discussion was the following written interpretation of her observed play.

In-Practice Example
Reflecting on the Observation of Kaysha's Exploration

Care educator's follow-up interpretation. It seems like Kaysha might be thinking, "So what happens when I fill this empty cup with water and then pour it over the rocks?" And then she gets excited when she sees that the rocks change color. She appears to want to make it happen again and repeats her actions. It is like a little experiment.

Care educator reflects on documentation with the family. Kaysha's family describes how she likes to pour water into different cups when she is in the bath, so the care educator added to the documentation Kaysha's interest in exploring the ideas of empty and full and how the cup can be used to move the water from one place to another.

In the observation from the early learning and care setting, Kaysha also seems to be studying the water's interaction with the rocks, plants, and dirt. Maybe when she pours the water on the dirt, and the water disappears, she wonders about what's happening. It is as if she is saying to herself, "Where did the water go?" But then she seems to be looking at the dirt and how it now looks different—a shade darker in color. When she pours water on the dirt, it is as if she has moved on to a new experiment, namely, whether she can make the dirt change color, possibly the way she made the rock change color. She seems to get excited for a moment by the little pools of water she makes. But her excitement seems to fade when the pools disappear into the ground. Maybe in repeating her actions over and over, she is trying to make the pools not go away. Her actions get more rapid. Maybe she is thinking, "I'll try pouring lots of water really fast to see if I can make the little pools stay." It appears that Kaysha is discovering how water affects objects and changes them. She is also experimenting with amounts of water, transporting water, the transformation of water, and the force of water. Kaysha is also continually engaging in the cyclical scientific process of observation, predicting, testing, and analyzing results of her actions. She demonstrates a high level of interest, perseverance, and attention in her self-initiated investigation.

Care educator adds documentation to Kaysha's portfolio. Kaysha's care educator decided to put the observational anecdote in Kaysha's portfolio. They inserted it into a section where they had put earlier documentation of Kaysha's play and interactions. This documentation of Kaysha's exploration of water served as useful evidence in understanding the development of her approaches to learning and cognitive skills.

Reflections on In-Practice Example

This In-Practice Example illustrates how a care educator and the child's family study documentation and determine that it provides a good description of a child's learning and development, they add it to the child's portfolio to keep evidence of the child's developmental progress. Using observation and documentation in this way helps care educators and families to broaden and deepen their understanding of each child's learning and development on a day-to-day basis.

Documentation makes it possible for care educators to keep an accurate record of each child's interests, feelings and behavior, relationships with others, approaches to learning, concept and skill development, and perceptual and motor development. It also allows them to gather evidence for periodic assessments and to plan for new possibilities for children to explore within their play.

Assessment Based on Observation and Documentation

Observing and documenting how children explore and play with newly introduced materials or ideas often makes it possible for care educators to assess children's developmental progress using an assessment instrument such as the DRDP. The following In-Practice Example illustrates how a care educator can use documentation focused on the environment and materials learning context to complete the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP).

In-Practice Example
Planning to Support Li's Learning and Development

Li is an 18-month-old toddler. Each day, she brings her care educator, Carol, a favorite book about farm animals. Li's mother had told Carol how much Li loved that particular book, and Carol placed a copy in the book interest area.

Carol begins to wonder how she might support Li's interest and build on it to add increasingly complex play encounters for Li and the other toddlers in the room. She and her care educator colleague discuss possible materials to add to the learning environment. They decide to take Li's favorite book, which has a photo of a farm animal on each page, make a color copy of each page, put the copies inside plastic covers, and attach self-sticking fabric to the back of each copy. They put these photos in a basket near a felt board, which is on the back of a shelf divider that separates quiet space from space for more active movement. The care educators place a play barn, with plastic farm animals, nearby. They collect farm-animal puppets and put them in a basket in this area, and they add a selection of other cardboard books about farms or farm animals. They also decide to add some materials for children to use creatively, such as blocks and pieces of cloth, with the idea that observing children using these materials with the animals may give them more information about how the children think about and relate to the animals.

Before the care educators finish adding materials, they discuss how these additional possibilities for play and explorations might help the children build some of the foundational competencies for this age. In reflecting on their documentation of children's play and exploration, the care educators discuss how the materials support language development; social and symbolic play; concepts such as number, space and size, **classification**, and matching; and interest in books, stories, and songs. The care educators thought that their ideas might offer a way to observe the 18-month-olds' emerging competencies that relate to some of the DRDP measures for which they wished to collect additional evidence.

Reflections on In-Practice Example

This In-Practice Example shows how care educators regularly add anecdotes, photos, or samples of things a child creates to their portfolio. These various types of documentation provide evidence for ongoing assessment of each infant's or toddler's developmental progress.

Care educators can share with a family their child's paper copy or digital portfolio to support the family's ongoing reflection and dialogue with the care educator about the child's interactions, feelings, interests, explorations, and growth. Though care educators may use the portfolio to complete formal assessments periodically, such as every 4 months or every 6 months, sharing an updated portfolio with the child's family regularly is important. In an example of how documentation might be shared with a family, the Learning Story "Etta on the Move!" describes how a 5-month-old child explores her developing movement skills when given uninterrupted time to move and play in the environment. This Learning Story also shows how documentation can be used to complete an assessment of a child's developmental progress in multiple domains.

Learning Story: "Etta on the Move!"

Dear Etta,

Your 5-month birthday is just around the corner, and you are energetically moving toward it. When you were around 3 months old, you learned how to roll yourself over from your back to your stomach. Once on your stomach you would push and kick your legs and push your head and chest off the floor using your hands. You would work like this for several minutes before you would get tired and begin to fuss. Your dada and I talked about what we should do when this happened. We decided that we would get down with you so we could see your face and talk to you and give you a little more time to work in that position. When it was clear that you were done being on your stomach, we would help you roll onto your back.

Sometimes you would kick and look around on your back, but soon you would plop over onto your stomach again. It was interesting to us as we watched you do it because it didn't seem like you wanted to be on your stomach, but you did want to work on the act of rolling. Your mama and dada, Lola and Lolo who visit you every week, and I have all been watching how your movements on your tummy are changing. Your Lola describes how your legs bend and stretch out with your feet digging into the blanket. Your Lolo notices that when you have your diaper off, you can move much more easily. Your dada saw you lift your body off the ground using just your hands and feet. I have noticed that a few times you have bent both knees and pushed your legs out so that you could inch forward, and your mama sent us a photo of you a couple of feet away from the blanket she had put you on, so clearly you are now "on the move."

Etta, it is so fun to watch the determination you bring to discovering how your body works and how you are almost continually exercising all parts of it. I can see the strength in your legs, arms, hands, and back and notice how you experiment with different ways of coordinating all of your movements. I also appreciate that you communicate to us when you are done working and need a break. I am going to

experiment with a couple of different surfaces, such as a firm mat, the wood floor, and a low carpet to see how each affects your comfort and your ability to move.

Your family and I are enjoying watching you discover the art of movement, just as we enjoy the smile that you generously share with us when we make eye contact with you.

Your care educator,
Issa

Here are some of the developmental skills that Etta is demonstrating from the Desired Results Developmental Profile:

Physical Development 2: Gross Locomotor Movement Skills: Etta is exploring her **gross motor skills** as she moves into and out of positions or creeps, crawls, or scoots on her bottom.

Social and Emotional Development 2: Social Awareness: Etta is responding to familiar faces by looking and smiling.

When completing assessments such as the DRDP, care educators combine observation and documentation with information from the family and other care educators to determine the child's progress in various developmental domains. Periodic assessments produce profiles of each child's developmental progress. These assessment profiles give the care educator and the family a general orientation for supporting their infant's or toddler's learning and development. Assessment information can also contribute to the care educator's and family's understanding of possible next steps in each child's exploration and meaning making.

Planning

As care educators reflect on documentation of infants' and toddlers' interactions, play, and exploration, they discover possibilities for continuing to build a warm, affirming relationship with each child and for sustaining, extending, and helping each child make their play more complex. Care educators review ideas for possible next steps in a child's efforts to make sense of things, investigate a question, or solve a problem. These steps might include being intentional in the ways care educators

- interact with the infant or toddler;
- encourage the infant's or toddler's participation in routines; or
- introduce changes in the environment and new materials, including opportunities for each child to practice and build emerging skills.

Care educators include in such plans ways to support the learning of individual children, consistently adapting the experiences to ensure full participation of every child in the setting. The following In-Practice Example illustrates how one care educator and her colleagues created a plan centered on the routines learning context.

In-Practice Example
Planning to Support Children's Use of Serving Utensils at Mealtime

Sylvia, a primary care educator caring for her small group of children around 15 months of age, has observed the children showing interest in reaching for the utensils that she uses to serve the meal. Sylvia decides it is time to invite her group of children to begin using serving utensils during meals. When she does so, she notices that the children struggle a bit but are genuinely interested in using these tools. Sylvia and her co-educators, Sandra and Tatyana, reflect on the children's strong interest but still emerging skills in using these tools. The care educators discuss ways to add simple tools to different areas in the environment to expand opportunities for the children to use them. They collect a variety of simple tongs, spoons with short handles, bowls, cups, and spatulas. They include adaptive serving utensils with bigger handles or with straps to attach to a child's hand. They place the new objects in several baskets and include containers with large pinecones, hand-sized felt balls, a variety of plastic lids, and palm-sized wood pieces to offer children things to practice with using the serving utensils. They also plan to continue to offer the children a chance to serve themselves using the same variety of utensils during meals that they have been using to practice. The care educators plan to observe how the children's skills develop and make any needed adjustments.

Reflections on In-Practice Example

As this In-Practice Example describes, the care educators reflect on documentation and plan possible next steps in each child's learning. As they reflect, they wonder about how each child might play with the new objects and what each child is likely to be curious about over the next days or weeks.

Planning With a Sense of Wonder

When reflecting on documentation, care educators often think ahead and predict what might happen next. For example, if a care educator has documented with a photo and a note that a child has begun to stand up while holding onto something, the next step for that child's motor development is likely to be cruising, or moving from place to place while standing and holding on to something for support. With this thought in mind, the care educator can review the environment for supports on which the child might pull up to a standing position and begin to cruise. This review may lead to adding supports and arranging equipment and furnishings in the environment for the new cruiser.

As the following In-Practice Example around planning for the environment and materials learning context illustrates, sometimes care educators find themselves wondering or trying to figure out a child's interest when the child is doing surprising or unexpected things.

In-Practice Example
Planning to Support Emma's Exploration of Objects

A care educator notices that Emma is spending a lot of time pulling the leaves off the plants in the yard. Inside, the care educator observes that Emma tears the paper off the table and dumps baskets of blocks. After sharing the observation with a colleague, the two care educators wonder if Emma was exploring how things can change by taking things apart or reversing things like dumping. The care educators consider possible questions that Emma may be exploring: What's inside of things? Do things look different when they are apart? Can things go back together? The care educators wonder if they might offer things that Emma could take apart as well as things she could put back together or reattach. When reflecting on some possible materials to offer Emma, the care educators think about paper of different sizes and textures and various nontoxic plants, including mint and other fragrant leaves. The care educators also ask themselves how Emma might engage with blocks that stick together and come apart and what the child might do with tape.

Reflections on In-Practice Example

This In-Practice Example illustrates how care educators might consider several possibilities when planning. As they discuss each one, they decide on their next plan for supporting a child's continuing exploration.

Care educators who use reflective planning over time become more attentive and responsive to each child's ongoing development. They become more attuned to changes in each child's behavior and how the child is or is not using the relationship with the care educator as a secure base for continued exploration. As they plan possibilities for adding complexity to learning, care educators continually adjust the emotional support they give to each child to help them engage in play and exploration with other children. While focusing on individual children, care educators keep in mind the learning of the group of children. The next step in the In-Practice Example of Kaysha's interest in exploring water shows how study of one child's learning focus may extend to other children.

In-Practice Example
Continued Planning to Support Kaysha's and Her Peers' Exploration of Objects

While discussing observations of Kaysha's exploration of water, the care educators began to wonder whether other children around Kaysha's age might be interested in filling and pouring containers of water as well as curious about where it goes when poured on different surfaces. The care educators brainstormed ideas on how to include experiences with pouring water in the sand or dirt area and on the cement surfaces in the yard. They considered adding paint brushes to buckets of water to see if this could broaden children's exploration of water on different surfaces. The care educators noted that such experiences might offer opportunities for presenting problems that might engage the children's emerging interest in cause and effect. These experiences might also promote children's exploration of the ways different surfaces influence how water moves. The care educators also wondered whether they would observe how the children might work together in such play. The care educators reflected on both familiar and new vocabulary that might become a part of the children's exploration of water.

Reflections on In-Practice Example

With a focus on interactions and the environment and materials, this In-Practice Example suggests possibilities for extending and adding complexity to children's learning across several domains. The care educators wonder about how the possibilities they introduced might spark learning related to cognitive development, social and emotional development, and language development. Ideas might emerge for next steps to engage each child's learning and development in the learning contexts of relationships and interactions, routines, and environments and materials.

Strategies for Planning to Support Learning

Sometimes a care educator creates a plan of possibilities with many of their brainstormed ideas. In planning to extend a learning experience, the care educator reduces the list of ideas to one or two that relate directly to the interests and abilities of a child or a small group of children. Once a plan for the next step in supporting a child's learning and development is set, the care educator introduces the new possibility in a way that allows the child to make choices and interact freely and creatively with the experience, material, or change in the environment.

A new learning experience may include a scaffold to support a child's continued exploration of a concept or skill. The support a care educator provides to a child or small group of children helps them learn new concepts or skills. Scaffolding may include giving developmentally appropriate guidance, encouragement, or **modeling**. The support is provided in a way that allows the child or children to actively engage in the learning experience. The help is gradually reduced as the child or children become able to apply a concept or practice a skill on their own.

Some care educators refer to a planned learning experience that builds on an idea or skill a child is exploring as a provocation. For example, a care educator might have observed that the children are interested in repeatedly filling a small box with plastic balls and dumping out the balls. The next day the care educator offers a provocation outside by placing different sized buckets in the sandbox and other buckets near a water spigot that the children use. The care educator wonders if the children will fill up the buckets with sand or water and dump them out or do something else with the buckets.

Plans can be brief and flexible, because the general principle of responsiveness to the infant's or toddler's interests and needs guides what the care educator does next. The implementation of a plan may produce an unexpected or surprising result. A surprise, in turn, may lead to new insights: a chance to fine-tune understanding of the child's exploration and meaning making.

Planning With Families

The care educator often plans to extend or support a child's exploration or meaning making based on reflection with the child's family. Planning presents an opportunity for strengthening relationships between care educators and families and for fostering family engagement in the children's care. Throughout the planning phase, care educators can communicate and collaborate with family members. In large home-based and center-based settings, partnering can extend to fellow care educators. In all settings, changes in routines may be a particularly important focus of communication with family members and colleagues.

Including family members when planning builds the partnership, acknowledges the family's role as the child's primary teacher, and provides them with opportunities to communicate about their child. Family members may also be interested in watching for changes in their child's behavior that result from adaptations made in the setting. Communicating about plans can be a powerful way for educators and families to come together to share the amazing experience of observing and supporting children's learning and development.

Implementing a Plan

Once a plan is written, care educators implement it. While implementing a plan, care educators continue to observe, document, and reflect. The planning cycle continues as care educators watch to discover how children respond and show evidence of their learning and development during the experience.

Planned adaptations to interactions, routines, and the environment and materials need to keep relationships at the center of their experiences. They also need to show respect for the competencies that infants and toddlers bring to each interaction or routine. To work well, implementation should adapt to the infant's or toddler's changing interests and needs during each day. In this way, the support will be responsive to what the infants and toddlers bring to each new situation and to what they seek from it. An effective approach to implementation

- orients the care educator to the dual role of observer and facilitator of learning;
- allows the care educator to read the cues of each infant or toddler and interact responsively;
- addresses the whole learning experience of each child; and
- accounts for developmental levels but also allows for individual variations in temperament, culture and language, lived experience, and amount of support such as scaffolds, approach, and pace.

The care educator's approach to implementation is complemented by providing

- a safe and interesting place for learning;
- a sense of belonging to all children;
- a variety of materials, particularly **open-ended materials**, that are safe and developmentally appropriate for the individual interests and needs of each infant or toddler;
- organization of learning and care in small groups;
- adherence to policies that support continuity of relationships with the care educator or care educators;
- materials, routines, and interactions that reflect children's home languages and cultures; and
- strong two-way connections with the child's family.

Offering a provocation to a child or small group of children with a mindset of curiosity and wonder helps the care educator focus on how the child or children respond to the offering rather than on the care educator's expectations around the experience. Staying open to children using the materials in unexpected ways, including exploration and learning that were not a part of the plan, helps care educators to focus on children's interests, ideas, and questions.

Reflecting on Implementation

After implementing a plan, care educators reflect on their observations and documentation to assess the plan's impact. Their reflection may give them additional ideas for supporting the children's learning. At the same time, they assess individual children's learning and developmental progress. For example, care educators might reflect on the following questions:

- Are children responding as we had predicted, or were there surprises?
- What do the children's responses reveal? How might the children's interests or intentions be described? What questions, theories, concepts, and ideas are the children exploring in their play?
- Are children showing evidence of progress on any of the measures of an observational assessment such as the DRDP?
- How did my observation and assessment methods document the child's strengths and approaches to learning?
- How can I adjust my approach to better support each child's development?
- What else might I learn about or what additional resources might be helpful?

The following In-Practice Example describes how the care educators Sandra, Sylvia, and Tatyana reflected on their observation and documentation of an idea they implemented to introduce simple tools in the environment.

In-Practice Example
Reflecting After Implementation With a Small Group of 16-Month-Olds

At their next planning meeting, Sandra, Sylvia, and Tatyana gathered to share the observational notes each had written in response to adding the new utensils. Sylvia noticed 17-month-old Germaine moving the large spoon inside one of the tall, hollow cylinders with felt balls in it. He did it as if he were mixing something. Sylvia decided to put this observation in Germaine's portfolio, in the sections on **imitation**, symbolic play, and **fine motor skills**.

The care educators wondered about ways to include Leah, a 16-month-old child who uses a feeding tube. They met with Leah's family to explore the following question: Are there ways to incorporate Leah's ways of taking meals? Working with Leah's parents, the care educators decided to find two cloth dolls and sew a self-sticking fabric patch onto the dolls' stomachs so that the children could attach the pretend feeding tube and syringe. They purposely used two dolls so that Leah's friends could also explore and connect with Leah.

The care educators also wondered about ways to include kitchen utensils made of materials other than plastic, such as bamboo or metal, to expand the children's experience with the physical properties of these materials. The care educators decided to post near the sign-in area a brief photo document of the children's utensil play to invite the children's families to bring in safe utensils for the play. As part of the request, they asked families to bring in utensils that are typically used in their homes.

Reflections on In-Practice Example

This In-Practice Example introduces how each day, care educators introduce or implement possibilities for extending children's learning and development. As this example illustrates, their plan includes introduction of materials in the environment that encourage different kinds of skills development, social understanding, and connections with children's experiences in their homes.

Each child's unique experiences, thoughts, feelings, interests, and needs influence the way implementation occurs. How each infant or toddler responds to a care educator's provocations is unpredictable. Once a provocation or possibility is introduced, the care educator observes what each child does and is responsive to individual children's ideas and ongoing engagement in learning. The children often encounter new problems, ask questions, or investigate an idea that occurs to them in the moment. Through ongoing observation and reflection, a care educator can discover ways to continue supporting the children as they take their play and exploration in a new, unanticipated direction.

Key to Successful Implementation: Resources to Support the Planning Process

Implementation depends on all steps in the reflective planning process being well-supported. Care educators need support, time, and equipment to observe and collect and organize documentation. Observation takes place within a system of primary care and often during a moment of care (e.g., when diapering, feeding a young infant, or comforting an upset child). Ongoing observation, documentation, and reflection help care educators get to know each child and can bring wonder, discovery, and joy to a care educator's day. Care educators who work by themselves in in-home care settings can join networks to share their experience with other care educators. In large early learning and care settings, care educators who team together often organize their work schedules to allow one or the other to spend some time collecting and reviewing documentation. With increased emphasis on learning from observation and documentation, administrators of large early learning and care settings allocate time in care educators' work schedules for the purpose of observing and documenting, studying and interpreting documentation, assessing development, planning for individual children's learning, and implementing plans. Administrators also support care educators with equipment to record observations and make learning and development visible. Organizations and networks that support in-home care educators can help them use and sometimes acquire equipment to observe and document children's interactions, play, exploration, and meaning making.

Closing

When well-supported, care educators can develop sensitive, responsive relationships with infants and toddlers. They can also develop respectful relationships with families and partner with them to create continuity between the children's experiences with their families and those in the early learning and care setting. Care educators' work becomes rewarding when they embrace each child as an individual with their own temperament, culture and languages, lived experience, strengths, interests, and vulnerabilities. With the whole child in mind, care educators respond to each child's need for warm, affirming, predictable relationships that provide a secure base for play and exploration. Care educators observe, document, and reflect on how each child interacts with people and things in the contexts of relationships and interactions, routines, and the environment and materials. They meet infants and toddlers where they are emotionally and developmentally, helping them through difficult moments and nurturing their curiosity and sense of wonder. Through reflection and study, care educators discover what the children are trying to make sense of and create possibilities for children to pursue their interests, ideas, and questions more deeply, with excitement and joy.