GUIDE TO KEEPING

CHILDREN'S EDUCATION RECORDS

Votre
gouvernement

Québec

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Introduction

Educational childcare providers are now required to keep an education record for each child to whom they deliver services, as prescribed in the *Educational Childcare Act*[1]. While observing children is a well-integrated practice in educational childcare establishments, the practice of writing a report on the status of each child's development is implemented in different ways in these establishments. This implies that some of them still have to implement the practice. This guide is therefore intended to support educator staff in childcare and daycare centres and home childcare providers (HCPs) during each step involved in keeping a child's education record: from observing each child to preparing a periodic portrait of his or her development and transmitting it to the parents.

The Child's Education Record

The education record provides a means of periodically collecting information on a child's development in each of the following domains (or areas): physical and motor, cognitive, language, and social and emotional.

> The education record is not a report card or diagnostic tool, nor is it used to measure a child's level of attainment of a learning objective.

It contains only the following documents and information:

- the child's name and date of birth;
- the name of the parent;
- the date on which the provision of childcare services began;
- the periodic portraits of the child's development;
- if applicable, the documents or information related to the special support given to the child and taken into account when preparing the periodic portrait[2].

A periodic portrait must be prepared for each child to whom the childcare provider has delivered services for at least 60 days. It is prepared twice a year, specifically, in November and May, by a person who delivers the educational program to the child (educator staff or HCPs). It is then transmitted to the parent(s) by no later than December 15 or June 15 of each year[3].

The aims of the child's education record

The education record provides educator staff and HCPs with a means of communicating with parents about their child's overall development. It covers the child's strengths, interests, skills acquired and those being developed, among other things. It also describes the child's efforts and any challenges he or she may have encountered when experimenting with or consolidating new skills or concepts, making reference to the educational actions taken to guide and support the child when in childcare.

The education record also supports educator staff and HCPs in the task of detecting any significant and persistent difficulties that a child may have. That said, it is not their responsibility to issue a diagnosis, which is a "reserved act" requiring specialized knowledge. They may, however, share their observations with the child's parents, who in turn can take steps to consult specialists if need be.

In addition, the education record facilitates the various transitions in a child's life, including the transition to school. Its content provides valuable information for the new establishment that will be welcoming the child. It provides a quick overview of the child's needs and ensures continuity in the educational actions taken.

The aims of the child's education record

1- Communicate information to parents about their child's development in each of the domains.

2- Support educator staff and HCPs in detecting any significant and persistent difficulties the child may encounter.

3- Facilitate the various transitions in the child's life, including the transition to school.

Keeping the child's education record: a shared responsibility

Keeping education records is a responsibility shared by educator staff, HCPs, and directors.

This process involves everyone and must be carried out for each child receiving services at the educational childcare facility.

The management team may, for example, include the topic of education records on meeting agendas. Meetings provide an interesting forum where, as a team, the educator staff can discuss the successful strategies used and difficulties experienced in keeping education records. They are also an opportune time for sharing observations and perceptions in order to form a common vision of the children's development, and are conducive to the pooling of knowledge, however varied, within a team.

In addition, meetings provide an opportunity for re-thinking certain organizational aspects with a view to facilitating child observation, compiling the information collected more effectively, or supporting the preparation of the periodic portrait.

For their part, HCPs can benefit from support from their home childcare coordinating office if they request it: this support can take the form, for example, of assistance in preparing the periodic portraits or of access to quality continuing education on child development or on observation. Informal groups involving a handful of HCPs can also be formed to discuss the different steps involved in keeping education records.

The educational program supports the keeping of the child's education record

The educational program *Accueillir la petite enfance* (in French only) is a consensus-based work tool for anyone working in an educational childcare establishment. The theoretical content and educational practices described in the program to support children's overall development guide educator staff and HCPs in their daily interventions.

Accueillir la petite enfance remains a reference of choice to support directors, educator staff, and HCPs in the task of keeping children's education records.

The educational intervention process

"The educational intervention process is the means by which educator staff and HCPs choose, plan, and carry out their educational activities based on their observations, and then evaluate and adjust them[4]." Implementing this process on a daily and ongoing basis enables the staff and HCPs to foster children's active learning by offering them experiences based on their areas of interest, levels of development, strengths, and needs[5].

It is through the educational intervention process – more specifically, during the observation stage – that educators collect the information essential to preparing periodic portraits of the children. Educator staff and HCPs observe the children in action on a daily basis during play, routines, and transition times. They also obtain the information they need to prepare the periodic portraits by noting down the adapted, child-specific educational actions taken and during the reflection-feedback stage.

Diagram of the educational intervention process[6]
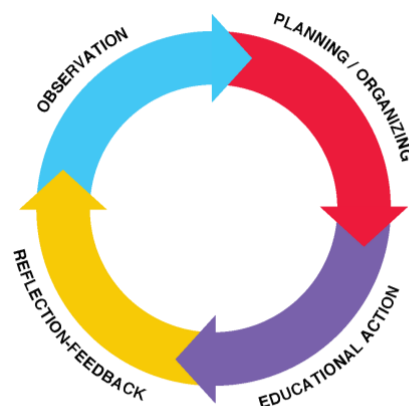
The basic principles

When preparing periodic portraits, the educator staff and HCPs draw on the basic principles of the educational program *Accueillir la petite enfance*. The comments they formulate for each child reflect his or her uniqueness and development in all domains (physical and motor, cognitive, language, social and emotional). The sharing of their observations and the background context also show that the child learns through play and is the main actor in his or her own development. Lastly, when parents request a follow-up meeting regarding their child's education record, the educator staff and HCP plan the meeting, taking the following basic principle into account: *a partnership between the educational childcare establishment and the parents is essential to the child's harmonious development.*

Each child is unique

While we can talk about probable developmental stages for most children, this does not apply to acquiring skills and learning new concepts, which can vary from one child to another. Sometimes we observe plateaus, strides forward, and even steps backward. All of these are part of normal child development.

The basic principles of the educational program[7]

1- A partnership between the educational childcare establishment and the parents is essential to a child's harmonious development.

2- Each child is unique.

3- Children are the main actors in their development.

4- Children learn through play.

5- Child development is an overall and integrated process.

A model of the child's education record

The *Educational Childcare Regulation* (C.Q.L.R. c. S-4.1.1, r. 2, referred to here as the "Regulation") lists certain requirements for the education record[8], but does not prescribe any particular format. This is also the case for periodic portraits. Childcare providers may opt to keep education records in electronic or paper format, as long as they meet the standards prescribed in the Regulation.

Moreover, childcare providers who so wish may use the model produced by the Ministère de la Famille[9], in electronic or paper format. It complies with the Regulation and contains the following sections:

- an identification section: the child's name and date of birth, the name of the parent or guardian, the date on which the provision of childcare services began;
- the periodic portraits of the child's development, which provide an overview of the status of the child's development in the physical, motor, language, cognitive, and social and emotional domains;
- a section making the connection with the special support given to the child, that is, the documents or information related to the special support offered and taken into account when preparing the portraits.

The proposed model also contains an optional section to be completed if any significant and persistent difficulties are noted during the period in question, or since the last periodic portrait.

The Periodic Portrait of the Child's Development

The periodic portrait is a document that provides an overall qualitative assessment of the child's development over the previous six months in each of the following domains: physical and motor, cognitive, language, and social and emotional. Each periodic portrait is filed in the child's education record, in the months of November and May.

The preliminary steps to preparing periodic portraits

Through observation, it is possible to get to know the child better, pay closer attention to him or her at any given time, and see where each child is in terms of his or her development. It also allows the observer to anticipate the skills that the child is close to mastering (zone of proximal development). This allows the educator staff or HCP to target appropriate educational actions, based on adjusted expectations of the child, and to offer the necessary guidance and support ("scaffolding").

Zone of proximal development and scaffolding

1- Zone of proximal development: the difference between what a child can do without help (his or her actual level of development) and what he or she can achieve with the help of an adult or peer; the next stage in his or her development[10].

2- Scaffolding: "Action of supporting and guiding the child's learning, notably through dialogue, taking into account his or her actual skills and those that he or she could acquire[11]." "It is mainly through scaffolding that the adult can lead the child through his or her zone of proximal development[12]."

Lastly, observation makes it possible to look critically at the educational actions taken to support each child's overall development. By taking the time to examine the information collected and identify the educational actions that work well and those that have proven less suitable for the context, the necessary adjustments can be made to meet the child's needs more effectively.

It is important to differentiate between observation and vigilance. Children are often watched from the perspective of vigilance, a daily practice on the part of educator staff and HCPs, who oversee the well-being and safety of the children in their group. Vigilance allows them to respond quickly to situations requiring immediate intervention[13].

Observation, on the other hand, is practised daily, continuously and at different times during the day. It may be planned or spontaneous. Planned observation is intentional and involves collecting information for a specific purpose following a process of reflection; it serves mainly to test hypotheses. Spontaneous observation, on the other hand, involves "spontaneously noting an unexpected action or behaviour, a new skill, etc., on a daily basis.[14]"

By observing a child daily, the observer is able to:

1- get to know him or her better;

2- identify his or her zone of proximal development;

3- determine where the child is in terms of his or her overall development;

4- identify any significant and persistent difficulties;

5- determine the educational actions appropriate for the child;

6- reflect objectively on the practices of the educator staff and HCPs, and make any necessary adjustments.

Planning the observation process

Planning the observation process allows the educator staff and HCP to focus their attention on specific elements. This attention must be sustained and methodical to help set priorities and ensure that each child has been observed in all areas of his or her development[15]. Sound planning also means that educator staff can **carry out this process simultaneously with other tasks** that have to be performed daily, **and in an ongoing and efficient manner.**

First, it is important to determine the objective of the observation process or the issue that needs clarification (for example, to focus on a specific area of development, a behaviour, or a problem, or to test a hypothesis)[16]. The following questions may also support sound planning.

"Who?" Determine which child will be observed and note it down, as this ensures that everyone in the group will be observed.

"What?" Determine the focus of the observation in light of the objective or initial issue: the child's actions, way of resolving problems, reactions to conflict, adaptive strategies, etc. It is important to observe the child on several occasions before forming an opinion about his or her strengths, progress, or daily challenges, as this allows any possible recurrences to be observed and documented. Several observation sessions make it possible to ascertain where the child is in terms of his or her development, which is constantly evolving.

"When?" Determine when and where the observation process will take place. Any time of day can be suitable for observation, whether planned or not. It is not necessary for specific conditions to be in place in order to observe[17].

Note-taking and formally documenting the observation data and information on the educational actions taken

When the objective of the observation process has been determined and the process itself has been planned, the educator staff or HCP chooses the tool(s) that will be used to document the observation data. The choice of tool is left to their discretion, depending on their needs and ways of working.

Tools for note-taking and formally documenting

A number of tools exist for organizing and formally documenting observations. They are designed to facilitate note-taking and to allow information to be both retrieved quickly and situated in time. Ideally, the tool chosen should include a space for noting down the date and context.

The following are some of the tools that can be used:

- a binder with a tab for each child and in which the worksheets can be completed one day at a time;
- small pocket notebook for jotting down notes on the spot, which makes note-taking easier when outside;
- computerized tools;
- anecdotal record;
- logbook;
- observation checklists that include a space for illustrating the nuances of an observed fact[18].

If the tool used lends itself to this, it can be filed in the child's education record for later consultation when presenting the periodic portrait.

Noting down the observation data

Noting down the observation data must be a simple, spontaneous operation. It is important to take short, brief notes, and to organize them chronologically to prevent the reader from getting lost in a deluge of information. Whenever possible, sharing observations with other co-workers who also work with the child helps reinforce (or not) the validity of the data.

Observation data should be written as statements of facts that are pertinent to the pre-determined observation objective. They should be specific enough that they can be used when preparing the periodic portrait. The details should be meaningful, but not bogged down in pointless description[19]. Notes on the context surrounding the observation data may also provide valuable information when it comes time to prepare the periodic portrait.

To be effective, the notes should contain three main elements:

- "Context: the contextual elements considered useful, such as the game being played, time of the day, peers present, material used, atmosphere in the group;
- Action(s): the child's action(s);
- Skill or concept being learned: what the child is in the process of learning in relation to the developmental domain(s) concerned[20]."

Moreover, each observation point should be associated with the developmental domains to ensure that each child has been observed[21].

Suggestions for easier note-taking:

- Note down the observation data legibly and ensure that they are formulated clearly to prevent confusion[22].
- Date and organize the observation data in chronological order so that the child's progress can be monitored;
- Select the significant observations in terms of learning and development[23].
- Relate the observation data to the relevant developmental domain[24].
- Note down the relevant contextual elements[25].
- Prepare worksheets on each child, noting the issue(s) to be clarified and the developmental domains, so as to ensure that all domains are covered and all children are observed[26].

Analyzing and interpreting observations with a view to preparing the periodic portrait

Once the observation data have been collected, it is time to analyze those that will be retained and interpreted before starting to prepare the periodic portrait. Educator staff and HCPs require a sound knowledge of overall child development in order to analyze and interpret observation data accurately. At this stage, it is also important to remember that not all children are at the same level of development: each child is unique.

Analyzing

"Analyzing involves studying a set of observations to identify the component elements for the purpose of interpreting them[27]." "Sometimes it sheds light on the past history and consequences of a behaviour[28]."

A first analysis is done **at the very moment when** one assesses the relevance of noting down a child's action or not. Once the action has been documented and the context specified, it is wise to **ask oneself** exactly **what the child is in the process of learning or developing**. This step is also part of the initial analysis[29].

It is important to group together the relevant observation data and their context:

- according to a given timeframe (for the periodic portrait, over the past six months);
- by theme or category, to highlight consistencies and contrasts, similarities and differences[30];
- taking into account recurrent behaviours, but also those that are new in order to ascertain the child's developmental status.

This exercise will make it easier to select the data that are pertinent for interpretation purposes.

Interpreting

Interpreting the observations made means using the analysis to understand and explain the children's actual experiences. It also makes it possible to envisage what might support the children's learning and foster their well-being[31]. Interpreting can take the form of hypotheses or possible interventions.

Consulting various types of useful references on child development (reference books, developmental continuums, checklists, curriculums, etc.) can help educator staff and HCPs accurately interpret previously analyzed observation data[i]. It is important to ensure the validity of the references consulted.

Preparing the periodic portrait of a child's development

To prepare the periodic portrait, it is suggested that you write one or two brief qualitative comments to describe the child's development in each developmental domain. The quality of the comments should take priority over the number of words used. This is intended to be a synthesis exercise, which requires the ability to pick out the pertinent information to be transmitted and to establish links between the observation data so as to present an overview.

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[i]Click here to consult the document: Références relatives au développement des enfants

By way of information, the table below shows the developmental domains and their main components[32]:

Physical and motor domain	Cognitive domain	Language domain	Social and emotional domain
• Health and safety • Nutrition • Sleep • Hygiene • Sensory development • Body schema • Gross motor skills • Fine motor skills	• Attention • Memory • Symbolic thought • Categories and concepts • Reasoning • Mathematical awareness • Scientific awareness	• Prelinguistic language • Oral language • Reading and writing awareness • Graphic development	• Attachment • Temperament • Self-concept • Identity • Emotional skills • Social skills

The comments describe – for the six months prior to preparing the periodic portrait – the child's pathway at the childcare facility, his or her interests, achievements, progress, and any challenges encountered when experimenting with or consolidating new skills or new concepts. In fact, the comments should be based on the observations made over the previous six months and focus on the highlights during this period. They may also specify the educational actions taken to meet the child's needs.

The comments are written in a constructive, respectful tone in correct English. By using action verbs (e.g. he runs, he identifies, he points to), the comments focus attention on what the child has learned to do and how he or she does it[33]. In particular, they describe the child's strengths, achievements, and skills. They may, for example, be supported by specific anecdotes illustrating what the child has learned.

Important points to remember when preparing the portrait

The comments should document the child's pathway in each developmental domain, describing, in particular:

1- his or her progress;

2- his or her interests;

3- his or her achievements, strengths, and skills;

4- any challenges encountered when he or she has experimented with or consolidated new skills or new concepts, while citing his or her efforts and the support required to overcome them;

5- the educational actions taken or planned to assist the child and meet his or her needs.

The comments should be:

1- formulated constructively and respectfully;

2- free of broad labels, value judgements, and stereotypes;

3- written in correct English;

4- formulated using action verbs;

5- presented with reference to observable facts (what can be seen or heard);

6- reflective of the facts.

If need be, the comments can be:

1- nuanced by citing contextual elements;

2- supported by anecdotes.

Avoiding biases

When preparing the portraits, a number of biases – be they value judgements, shortcuts, cognitive biases, stereotypes, or prejudices – can colour how the comments are formulated. Being aware of them generally helps prevent them. The comments must thus be written in a way that is free of broad labels that could be detrimental to the child. Lastly, "self-evaluation remains the most effective way of preventing the filters that can undermine the educator's objectivity[34]."

Additional information about the child's development (optional section)

The model education record proposed by the Ministère de la Famille contains an optional section to be completed when the analysis and interpretation of the observation data raise questions about one or more developmental domains, or when the child has been seen to have significant and persistent difficulties during the period in question or since the last periodic portrait. This section is designed to

support educator staff and HCPs in their detection role. The content of this section will also serve as a point of reference when transmitting the information to the parent.

It is important to remember that when a behaviour raises concerns or questions, the educator staff or HCP rely on observation to gain a better understanding of the situation. In what context was the behaviour observed? Is it recurrent? Has it persisted over time? The answers to these questions will enable them to come up with hypotheses and determine the interventions to put in place to meet the child's needs more effectively. It must also be remembered that behaviours that raise concern at one age may be perfectly acceptable at other ages. Each child is unique, and his or her development is influenced by his or her characteristics and the human and physical environment. In cases where, despite the interventions, the observations and analysis point to a significant and persistent difficulty, completing the optional section provides an opportunity to further detail the observations (interventions, links to the continuums, exchanges with the parents, use of a detection tool, next steps, etc.).

Developmental domains that raise questions
Based on the interpretation of observations and on the educational actions taken, the developmental domain or domains that raise questions should be specified.

Educational actions taken to support the child and results obtained
This section is used to describe the educational actions taken to meet the child's needs, as well as the results obtained. This information will facilitate communication with the parents and ensure follow-up of the situation as it evolves from one periodic portrait to the other.

Tools used to confirm the questions, if applicable (appendices)
When doubts remain despite the educational actions taken, reference tools on child development or detection tools can be used to clarify certain aspects and to support or refute the questions. In this case, the tool should be appended to the education record.

A non-exhaustive list of various tools available is provided in the Education Record section of the MFA website[35].

Thus, the education record makes it possible to direct the child to the health and social services network, if need be, and to ensure the continuation of services during transitions, such as the transition to school.

Summary of exchanges with the parents and courses of action to prioritize for the child
This section is used to summarize the exchanges with the parents about the question(s) raised or significant and persistent difficulties identified, as well as the priority courses of action agreed upon with them to meet the child's needs.

Regardless of the observations presented, it is essential to remember that it is up to the parent to determine whether or not he or she wishes to initiate a process with a professional in the health and social services network.

The Meeting with the Parent

A copy of the periodic portrait must be sent to the parents by no later than December 15 and June 15 of each year[36]. When the parents request it, the educator staff or HCP must make themselves available for a meeting[37]. The purpose is to discuss the child's education record, in particular, the periodic portrait. It is not a substitute for daily exchanges that provide pertinent additional information to support the child's development.

This meeting may also serve as a springboard for building a constructive and positive relationship between the educator staff, HCPs, and parents. It focusses the dialogue on the child and his or her development[38]. The partnership between the parents, educator staff, and the HCP is built over time based on shared responsibilities and decision-making, mutual trust, and respect[39]. In addition, adopting a democratic style of interacting with the parents, particularly by creating a positive atmosphere, leads them to feel respected and fosters their confidence in their parenting skills[40].

Practices to prioritize when meeting with the parents

The meeting provides an opportunity to open a dialogue between the parents and the educator staff or HCP. Building on the five principles of the family-centred approach promotes constructive exchanges focussed on the child and ensures consistency in the actions taken, and shows respect for the roles and values of each person involved.

> ## Five principles of the family-centred approach to support communication about the education record[41]
>
> 1- **Recognize each person's knowledge and expertise:** Pool your own skills and knowledge with that of the parents, for the child's best interest.
>
> 2- **Promote two-way communication:** Offer means of communication that encourage exchanges and engage all parties.
>
> 3- **Share power and decision making:** Coordinate educational actions and attitudes with the parents, as this makes them more coherent and pertinent for the child, while allowing the parents, educator staff, and HCP to develop their skills.
>
> 4- **Recognize and respect diversity:** Respect and value different types of families with their values and customs, as this constitutes an asset for our educational childcare facilities.
>
> 5- **Create natural support networks:** Create links between parents of children at the childcare facility, inform them of community resources, and create occasions conducive to meetings among parents.

Prior to the meeting, it could be suggested that the parents read the education record to come better prepared for discussion. The content of the record should be the main focus of the meeting. The

exchanges should concern mainly the status of the child's development in each of the domains. Based on the content of the periodic portrait, the skills acquired and those being developed should be presented, along with the child's strengths and interests. Mention should be made of the child's efforts, and of any challenges he or she has encountered when experimenting with or consolidating new skills or new concepts, making reference also to the educational actions taken to guide and support the child during his or her time at the childcare facility. It may also be worthwhile to present the parents with a few key elements highlighting what their child has learned (photos, achievements, anecdotes).

It is wise to pay close attention to the choice of words used, particularly when it is a question of talking about any significant and persistent difficulties encountered by the child. Positive communication makes the message easier to accept and paves the way to constructive dialogue.

Talking with the parents about what the child is experiencing in the home, the interventions prioritized and household rules makes it possible to collect valuable information in order to target the most productive educational actions that will support the child's development.

Do not hesitate to take notes during the meeting, whether they involve new information about the child, the family context, the parents' questions, shared strategies envisaged, etc.

Points to remember:

1- Recognize the parents' expertise.

2- Show a sincere interest in the parents.

3- Adopt a judgement-free attitude.

4- Welcome the parents' questions.

5- Make sure that the parents thoroughly understand the information given.

6- Be attentive to the parents' reactions.

7- Allow the parents to express themselves, give their opinions, and share their concerns.

Transmitting the education record to a third party

Parents are free to do what they wish with the education record and all its content, depending on their needs. Before transmitting the education record to a third party, or making a copy of it, the educational childcare establishment must first obtain the parents' authorization. However, when a child changes groups within the same childcare facility, the parents' authorization is not required to transmit the record; it is transmitted directly to the educator in charge of the child[42]. When the childcare services end, the original of the education record is given to the parents[43].

Lastly, the educational childcare provider is required to keep a copy of the education record and proof that it has been transmitted, for a period of one year following the child's departure[44]. At the end of this period, the childcare provider must destroy the copy of the education record.

Conclusion

Keeping an education record for each child attending an educational childcare facility in Quebec is part of a process of continuously improving the quality of educational services.

The child's education record is used to communicate information to the parents about their child's development in each of the domains, to support educator staff and HCPs in detecting difficulties, and to facilitate the various transitions in a child's life, including the transition to school. By observing children on a daily basis, educator staff and HCPs can collect information that is pertinent when preparing each child's periodic portrait.

Lastly, transmitting the child's education record to the parents and meeting with them (if the latter request it) are important steps that must not be overlooked when it comes to the child's education record. They reflect the importance placed on fostering a partnership between the family and the educational childcare establishment.

Questions related to your practices

1- What can you put in place in your facility to facilitate the task of keeping each child's education record?

2- What tool can you use to document your observation data easily?

3- How do you envisage organizing the work to facilitate observation of the children and note-taking?

4- What strategies are you going to adopt to analyze and interpret your observation data in order to facilitate the task of preparing the periodic reports?

5- When communicating with parents about their child's education record, what can you do to foster a partnership with them?

There is no single answer to these questions. Each educational childcare establishment will have its own way of working, in keeping with its own procedures, values and distinctive nature.

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