

George gets to where he wants to be

We have observed that George (twelve months old) has a long concentration span. He will continue trying out a new skill he has developed over and over. If he is having difficulty with a toy, he will persevere until he succeeds, taking just a few goes or days or months to achieve his goals.

George's parents, Fiona and Chris, also notice this perseverance. The attached message was written by Fiona in George's home-centre notebook and illustrates their recognition of George's strong desire to walk, how he "didn't give up", and how achieving his goals has changed George's experiences.

George has had a wonderful summer break. Just before Xmas, he started to walk and never looked back. He tried, and tried, and tried, and didn't give up. Walking has given him a new angle on life that has been really exciting for him. Lots of games of chasing and hide and seek around the house. His interactions with other people – especially children – have been wonderful to watch. George loves to be with other children.

Another example of George's perseverance was evident when he was trying to crawl up the slide. From the time George started crawling at eight months old and he discovered the slide, he attempted to crawl up it. After nearly five months of persevering, it finally paid off when he crawled all the way up the slide.

When I told Fiona the story of George climbing the slide, she said that during the weekend, George and his family had visited a family who had a slide. George had managed to crawl up the slide there.



Two days after George climbed the slide at the centre, he climbed into the swing on his own. As with the slide, George got into the swing independently after months of attempts. He would regularly walk over to the swing and put half his body on it, rocking back and forth, either because he liked the movement or to indicate to the teachers that he wanted a swing. The swings at the centre are low to the ground, but it takes a certain amount of co-ordination and balance to climb into this moving object. Gradually, George overcame the difficulties and managed this tricky task.

As we watched this event unfold, we soon realised he could probably conquer the challenge by himself, so we deliberately kept our distance and observed George, not wanting to interfere.

George displays this task persistence and long concentration span in several different aspects of his play. Examples are when he is playing with blocks or when he dismantles a suction toy off the window, putting the toy together again before putting it back on the window and repeating this several times.

What's happening here?

This assessment describes George climbing a slide and then into a swing on his own at the early childhood centre.

It took months of attempts for George to complete these self-chosen and “tricky” tasks.

What aspects of empowerment does this assessment exemplify?

This is an example of an assessment that follows from a child setting his own goals. The teachers describe two goals: George's desire to crawl up the slide and to climb into one of the early childhood centre's swings. These were difficult tasks for George and, in both cases, took several months of perseverance and practice. The assessment looks back in time and provides information about the strategies that George mastered in order to climb into a moving swing.

The criteria for achievement were embedded in the self-chosen tasks: getting to the top of the slide and getting into the swing facing the right way around. This is an example of feedback provided by the material or the activity. George does not need praise from an adult to tell him that he has achieved a goal.

How might this documented assessment contribute to developing empowerment?

The teachers' annotations provide evidence for the family and other teachers of George's perseverance over a range of self-chosen tasks. In the annotations, the teachers link three enterprises (walking, crawling up the slide, and climbing into the swing) to illustrate what they see as George's long concentration span.

They add other examples of George setting his own goals and persevering (playing with blocks and dismantling and putting back together a suction toy). This perseverance is a teachers' goal, highlighted here in the context of George's own goals. The teachers' criteria for perseverance are clear.

This exemplar includes comments from George's mother, who adds another perspective to the story. Together, the three perspectives articulated in this record demonstrate the view that setting and pursuing one's own goals are a valued aspect of learning.

Photos with commentaries make this story accessible for George to revisit during his time at the centre. It looks back over time, provides information about how long this achievement has taken, and includes some detail about earlier attempts, illustrating for George and the community what perseverance means in the context of George's own goals.

What might this tell us about informal noticing, recognising, and responding in this place?

The teachers gave George the opportunity (time, space, and accessible equipment) to master his own goals. They may well have had some safety concerns about crawling up slides but decided to accommodate George's focus.

They commented: “As we watched this event [getting into the swing] unfold, we soon realised he could probably conquer the challenge by himself, so we deliberately kept our distance and observed George, not wanting to interfere.” The teachers knew George well; they decided that this challenge was at the right level of difficulty for him and that he could solve the problem himself.

One of the teachers told George's mother the story about him climbing up the slide. During this conversation, the mother added more information.