

Calibration as Child-Knowledge Practice v2

Speaking Charlotte's Language · Revised practice note · 25 September 2026

Governing question

How does a child's lived reality become institutional knowledge - and what must remain visible for that knowledge to deserve confidence?

The route

What occurred → observation → representation → interpretation → record → later observer → consequential knowledge

What occurred belongs to the field. Observation is an observer's account of what they perceived. Interpretation is the meaning attributed to what was perceived or otherwise known.

A child's behaviour, expression, play, warmth, protest, uncertainty or distress does not arrive in an institution as self-interpreting truth. It is noticed, selected, described, retained, transferred, summarised and acted upon by situated adults.

Every receiver becomes an observer

A practitioner may observe an event. A report writer may observe the practitioner's account. A manager may observe the report. A panel may observe the manager's summary. Each receives what survived earlier transformations and adds another transformation of their own.

At consequential transitions ask:

- What exactly am I receiving?
- What am I adding?
- What am I removing?
- What may be driving my interpretation?
- What will the next observer believe they received?

Selection integrity

Selection occurs throughout the route: what becomes noticeable, asked, recorded, retained, summarised, presented, relied upon and remembered. Excellent reasoning cannot recover information that never reached the reasoning field.

At each significant transition ask what was selected, what was excluded and what materially changed. Compression is not automatically a failure. The test is whether something needed for responsible interpretation disappeared.

Concern and representation

Professional concern may outweigh an observation. It should not reshape the observation. The strength of concern should not determine the shape of the evidence used to express it.

Where materially necessary, preserve evidence, interpretation and action as distinguishable parts of the route. An interpretation does not become new evidence merely because it is repeated. An action does not independently validate the interpretation that contributed to it.

Institutional memory

Historical records influence later attention, expectation, credibility, questioning, selection and action. They are an active field condition, not passive storage. Historical knowledge therefore needs provenance, temporal status, evidential status and corrigibility.

Correction and trustworthiness

Correction must travel

A correction that does not travel is not a complete correction. A correction that travels but cannot alter the knowledge it corrects has not completed its epistemic function.

Correction does not require a person's preferred interpretation to be accepted. It requires sufficiently reliable corrective information to retain enough integrity and force to change consequential understanding where the evidence warrants it.

Institutions become stewards of consequential knowledge about human lives; they do not become owners of the realities that knowledge represents.

No record can contain a child.

An institution earns confidence in what it says it knows when source, observation, representation, interpretation, inference, uncertainty, history, contestability and correction remain visible enough to test. Sometimes the most trustworthy conclusion is: We do not presently know.

AI boundary

AI may help an adult slow down, separate categories, test wording, find missing context and prepare questions. It must not evaluate the child, assess attachment or risk, determine parental capacity, replace supervision, authorise conclusions or delay urgent duties.

AI is not here to tell me what a child means. AI is here to slow me down before I decide.