

collaborative teaching: teaching as a team



The ideas and suggestions in this tip sheet connect with the Practice Principles of the **Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework**.

- Partnerships with professionals
- High expectations for every child
- Equity and diversity
- Integrated teaching and learning approaches
- Assessment for learning and development
- Reflective practice
- Partnership with families
- Respectful relationships and positive engagement

It is recommended that educators refer to the **VEYLDF** and the Practice Guides for further suggestions and ideas about continuous improvement. (See over for website details.)

Working together with other educators is an important feature of effective early childhood education and care. A collaborative approach, where professionals work together to teach young children and work with their families delivers better outcomes for everyone.

With the improved educator to child ratio of 1:11, many educators will now be working in teams of three or more. These changes may be initially challenging, as teams determine how to work together, but there also can be many benefits. A collaborative approach offers educators an opportunity to learn from and support each other and importantly share the daily workload.

These approaches are supported by the key ideas articulated in the frameworks and the National Quality Standard, that value diversity and expect everyone working with children to lead and contribute to the teaching and learning.

Working collaboratively is not about giving up your unique strengths and qualities. Rather it is about an attitude of collegiality where the team benefits from the skills and abilities that each individual brings to the team.

This way of working means that we become 'more than the sums of our parts'; in other words when we cooperate, our professional practices are enhanced beyond what we offer individually. Our cooperation makes us more able to focus on the competencies and skills of children, plan effectively to enhance learning and build relationships with their families to deliver high quality programs.

Unity is strength... when there is teamwork and collaboration, wonderful things can be achieved.

- Mattie Stepanek

Suggested strategies to support collaborative teaching:

Book regular times to meet together as a team.

This can be logistically difficult but will be necessary if the team is to work effectively in a collaborative approach. Book these in advance and make sure they happen.

Effective collaborative teaching teams get to know each other.

Whilst it is not expected that you become best friends, knowing a bit about each other's strengths and interests and if you are willing, the aspects of your work that you find challenging, will assist the team to work together more effectively.

Undertake a skills audit. As you get to know each other it might be helpful to complete a more formal audit of the team. Systematically ask each educator to record their particular *strengths* – e.g. setting up engaging spaces for children, *skills* – e.g. organising equipment and resources and *interests* – e.g. healthy eating, and make a note of how these skills could be utilised within the program.

Consider making time at the beginning of the year (or before you start working together) to think together as a team. At this meeting it would be helpful to talk about logistics (organising the space and responsibilities for example) but also to discuss your views on the less tangible, but equally important, components of the program.

- Begin this discussion with the service philosophy statement.
- Continue this discussion with the Practice Principles of the VEYLDF. Share your thoughts about how these ideas shape and inform your practice.
- Extend the discussion to your approaches to everyday practices such as supporting children to manage their own behaviour or supporting children with additional needs. This will be an important opportunity to understand the perspectives of others and talk through any discrepancies or differences and come to an agreement about how to proceed. This might take a while and be a learning experience – be patient.
- Talk about how each educator in the team contributes to the planning process – in particular collecting observations, documenting children's learning, completing assessments and implementing the program.

The following list might help you get this conversation started. Talk to each other about your understanding or perspective about these practices and the approach you would like to take.

- managing routines to maximise learning
- talking to families
- setting up spaces for children
- use of the shed/store rooms
- managing indoor/outdoor programs
- transition to school

- responding to children when they are upset or having difficulty
- arrival and departure of children
- helping children solve problems
- including children in decision making
- use of the planning cycle to inform a consistent approach
- assessment and the documentation of learning

Use a mind map approach to note the ideas emerging from the discussion.

Keep these documents and review them from time to time or when you need to clarify your approach.

Participate in Professional Learning together.

This can be challenging to organise but the rewards of thinking and learning together are great. It allows you to spend time together exploring new ideas and importantly how they might be implemented using a collaborative team teaching approach.

Develop a communication plan.

Effective communication is critical to collaborative teaching approaches. Develop a quick and easy to use method, a diary or journal, where you can make notes of ideas, concerns or questions that you would like to share with your colleagues. Encourage everyone to contribute and use this as the basis for discussion in a regular catch up meeting. For example, a weekly 15 minute 'standing up' meeting is a good idea (sitting down takes longer).

Decide how you will divide the work. Talk together about the tasks required throughout the program, daily, weekly and across a year, including planning, implementing and reflection and divide these responsibilities amongst the team.

Talk about your practice decisions. It is important that the team of educators working together discuss processes of assessment for each child, how learning will be scaffolded and strategies for developing relationships – this ensures teaching teams are consistent and effective.



Questions for reflective discussion

The VEYLDF practice principle invites educators to think about and challenge their taken for granted practices. Use the following questions to support discussion with your colleagues.

- Share your understanding of collaboration – why is this a feature of the VEYLDF?
- What is your understanding of a collaborative teaching approach?
- What are the benefits? What are the challenges?
- What could you do to address these challenges? What strategies might you develop?
- How can you maximise the benefits?
- How might you change your approaches to make effective team teaching possible?
- How would you describe this approach to others?

References & further reading

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (2009). Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework. DEECD and VCAA, Melbourne.

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/childhood/providers/edcare/veylframework.pdf>.

Department of Education, Employment, and Workplace Relations for the Council of Australian Governments (2009). Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia. Australian Government, Canberra. <https://docs.education.gov.au/node/2632>

Resources on the Practice Principles

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/edcare/Pages/profresource.aspx#link93>

Reflective Practice Education Resource

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/professionals/support/Pages/reflectivepractice.aspx>

ECA Code of Ethics

<http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/our-publications/eca-code-ethics/>