



Collaborative teaching: Teaching as a team

...work in partnership to improve the quality of children's learning experiences and advance children's learning and development. VEYLDF p16

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

The educator to child ratio of 1:11 can result in many educators working in teams of three or more. 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 diverse perspectives and expect everyone working with children to lead and contribute to the teaching and learning.

The ideas and suggestions in this tip sheet connect with the practice principles of the **Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework**

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

It is recommended that educators refer to the **VEYLDF** and the Practice Guides for further suggestions and ideas about continuous improvement.

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 capacity to work collaboratively makes us more able to focus on the competencies and skills of children and build relationships with their families to deliver high quality programs.

Suggested strategies to support collaborative teaching:

- **Book regular times to meet and reflect together as a team.** This can be logistically challenging but will be necessary if the team is to work effectively in a collaborative approach. Book these in advance, develop an agenda that prioritises reflective conversations rather than service operations, and make sure the meetings happen.
- **Discuss your ethical responsibilities to each other as professionals.** Alongside organisational workplace responsibilities, the ECA Code of Ethics clearly outlines our commitments to each other as fellow professionals. Take some time to reflect on what these commitments mean to you as a team.
- **Effective teaching teams get to know each other.** Learning about each other's strengths and interests as well as 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’s skills and knowledge. Systematically ask each educator to record their particular **strengths** – e.g. setting up engaging spaces for children that cultivate curiosity and imagination, **skills** – e.g. organising equipment and resources and **interests** – e.g. setting up healthy eating experiences, and make a note of how these skills could be used in 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 ideas and views on programming and teaching and learning strategies.
 - ▶ Begin this discussion with the service philosophy statement.
 - ▶ Continue this discussion drawing on your knowledge of the VEYLDF **Practice Principles**, with a focus on Reflective practice, Assessment for learning and development, Integrated teaching and learning approaches and Partnerships with professionals. Share your thoughts about how these ideas shape and inform your practice.
 - ▶ Extend the discussion to your approaches to everyday practices. For example, 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 differences and come to an

agreement about how to proceed. This might take a while and will be a learning experience – be patient.

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 with families
• Setting up spaces for children	• Using the shed/ storerooms
• Managing indoor/ outdoor programs	• Arrival and departure of children
• Responding to children when they are upset or having difficulty	• Including children in decision making
• Helping children solve problems	• Documenting assessment for children’s learning
• Using the planning cycle to inform a consistent approach	• Supporting children with additional needs.

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

Keep these documents and review 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 numerous. 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, such as 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.
- **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 among the team.
- **Talk about your practice decisions.**
It is important that the team of educators working together discuss approaches to curriculum decision making, processes of assessment for each child, how learning will be scaffolded and strategies for developing relationships – this ensures teaching teams are consistent and effective. When teams expand, there are more perspectives and new ideas about key elements of the program planning. Practices that may have been used for some time, for example end of year celebrations or practice around transitions, may need to be revised to take into consideration new and different perspectives. Time dedicated to discussing the learning intention around these events and how children will be involved will enable teams to agree on their shared approach.

Questions for reflective discussion:

The VEYLDF Practice Principle **Reflective Practice** invites educators to think about and challenge the practices they take for granted.

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 and further reading

Department of Education and Training and the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (2016). Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework. DET and VCAA, Melbourne.

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

Department of Education and Training (2019). 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

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/professionals/learning/Pages/veylfdproflearn.aspx>

Reflective Practice Education Resource

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/professionals/learning/Pages/veylfdproflearn.aspx#link26>

ECA Code of Ethics

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

