

VICTORIAN EARLY YEARS LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

PRACTICE PRINCIPLE GUIDE
INTEGRATED
TEACHING
AND LEARNING
APPROACHES





Practice Principles cultural knowledge story by Dr. Sue Lopez Atkinson (Yorta Yorta) and artwork by Annette Sax (Taungurung)

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ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide is one in a series of eight guides to the Practice Principles in the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework.

Use this guide to support individual critical reflection on your practice, for discussion with a mentor or critical friend and as a guide for discussion with colleagues.

The guide draws on the Evidence Paper for Practice Principle: Integrated Teaching and Learning Approaches written for the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development by the University of Melbourne. For detail about the evidence mentioned in this guide, and for more depth on this Practice Principle refer to the evidence paper at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/edcare/Pages/profresource.aspx>

PRACTICE PRINCIPLES – CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE STORY

- Bunjil the Eagle and Waa the Crow represent Aboriginal culture and *partnerships with families*.
- The water hole symbolises *reflective practice*.
- The gum leaves with their different patterns and colours represent *diversity*.
- The stones underneath the leaves represent *equity*. They reflect the additional support put in place in order for all children to achieve.
- The child and adults standing on 'Ochre mountain' symbolise the *high/equitable expectations* we hold for children and adults.
- The family standing on and looking out from 'Ochre mountain' reflects *assessment for learning and development*. Such assessments draw on children's and families' perspectives, knowledge, experiences and expectations.
- The child and adult figures also represent *partnerships with professionals*.
- The land symbol as mother earth represents the basis for *respectful relationships and responsive engagement*.
- The symbols for land, water and people signify *holistic and integrated* approaches based on connections to Clan and Country.

(Dr. Sue Lopez-Atkinson, Yorta Yorta)



WHAT IS INTEGRATED TEACHING AND LEARNING?

Early childhood professionals recognise that a gradual shift in emphasis occurs over the first eight years of a child's life, along a continuum from play to more structured learning in formal settings. Early childhood professionals apply strategies to support sustained and shared interactions with children through play to more focused learning.

Learning is an active process that must involve children's engagement. Play is essential for its ability to stimulate and integrate a wide range of children's intellectual, physical, social and creative abilities. Active engagement with, and attunement to children in their play extends and supports their learning. Shared, sustained conversations are also a powerful and important feature of active adult engagement.

Early childhood professionals use integrated teaching and learning approaches to:

- encourage all children from birth to explore, solve problems, communicate, think, create and construct ideas and understandings
- create environments that provide children with socially mediated learning opportunities with a range of adults and peers
- promote each child's capacity for establishing friendships and encourage children to learn from and with each other
- share strategies with families and other adults to support learning in the home and other settings
- make decisions about what concepts to introduce to children and when, what is important for them to know and understand, and how to go about building on children's existing knowledge
- use intentional teaching strategies that are always purposeful and may be pre-planned or spontaneous, to support achievement of considered and identified goals
- reflect carefully on whether, when and how to intervene in children's learning, making purposeful and deliberate choices about when to observe rather than participate
- teach children explicit subject matter (e.g. mathematical, literary, musical, scientific, artistic) and associated skills to deepen and extend children's knowledge, understanding and values
- create physical and social environments that expose children to learning experiences and physical activity, both indoors and outdoors in the natural world.

(VEYLDF, P. 15)

Figure 1: Integrated teaching and learning approaches (VEYDLF, p 15)



Integrated teaching and learning approaches combine guided play and learning, adult-led learning, and child-directed play and learning. Integrated teaching and learning involves the adult 'intentionally' engaging with the child in play. The diagram above shows these three elements woven together, or 'integrated', because in the most effective learning environments, all three of these things happen. These elements are described briefly below.

What is play?

Play is central to the concept of integrated teaching and learning. Through play, children learn to make sense of and construct ideas about the social and natural world – the people, places, objects and experiences they encounter every day.

There are many definitions and descriptions of play and a variety of theoretical perspectives inform understandings of play and the approaches of early childhood professionals. Play is often described as child-directed, active, with a minimum of rules. This description is based on the notion of play as an exploratory process rather than a focused activity to achieve a particular learning outcome.

A common misconception about play-based learning is that children choose what they will do and dictate the direction of the learning, with adults getting involved only when necessary – in other words that play is always child-directed. Current thinking however is that adults have a critically important role in children's play, even when the child directs it.

Discussion starter

Before reading any further, jot down your definition of play.

How does play promote learning?

Adult-led learning occurs when adults introduce an experience, idea, concept, or topic for exploration and direct the learning by taking charge, giving instructions, setting rules, asking questions, and providing structure. Adult-led learning is about making judgments about what is worth children knowing by promoting 'worthwhile and challenging experiences and interactions that foster high-level thinking skills' (Early Years Learning Framework, DEEWR, 2009, p. 15). Children may have some control and input when adults lead the learning.

Case study

An educator spoke about an adult-led learning experience. She teaches children in the year before starting school about road safety. She believes it is important for the children's safety and wellbeing as they become more independent. She teaches some aspects of road safety using direct instruction during group time, showing pictures and small versions of road signs and discussing their meaning. She teaches rules for crossing the road with words and modelled actions as well as by practising safe road crossing in the centre. She encourages families to teach the same rules using the same words and routines. She also provides props such as vehicles, miniature road signs and traffic lights in the block and sand pit to encourage children to use and extend their knowledge. She also plans regular excursions with the assistance of the families, to allow children the opportunity to extend their learning that has developed over the project and encourage parent participation and engagement.

Child-directed play and learning occurs when children lead their learning through exploring, experimenting, investigating and being creative in ways that they initiate and control. The adult's role in child-directed play and learning may be to observe what the child knows and understands based on what they make, write, draw, say and do. The adult can use that information to plan for further learning.

Case study

A child brought in a basket of shells she had collected. She invited several other children to play with her in the sandpit building castles and decorating them with the shells. They found other natural materials such as small twigs and leaves, which they used also. The castle building became more and more elaborate as they generated new ideas for extending the castles and constructing stories about who lived in them. The children led the learning, which was provoked by the beautiful shells and a child's imagination. The educator listened, observed and identified learning occurring in the play including children's understandings about the size, shape and purpose of shells. She decided to build on these concepts by using books about shells with the children to talk about different shapes and sizes as they used different ways to categorise the centre's shell collection. She made links with previous learning about snails and their shells.

Guided play and learning occurs when adults are involved in children's play and learning, following children's interests and responding to spontaneous learning opportunities as they arise.

Case study

At a first-time parents' group, a maternal and child health nurse encourages the parents to 'tune into' their babies' ways of playing so that they respond rather than 'take over.' The parents might initiate play with soft balls, but as they tune into their child's way of playing they follow them. For example, one baby likes the ball to be rolled to him, another is fascinated, grabbing the ball, and another likes to hide it. Children become more motivated and engaged when parents respond to these individual ways of playing and exploring.

Adults' role in play and learning: intentional teaching

The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (EYLF, 2009) includes the practice of 'intentional teaching'. Intentional teaching or intentionality refers to professionals making decisions that are thoughtful, deliberate and purposeful as they broaden and deepen children's knowledge, skills and experience to take them beyond what they already know, can do and understand. Intentional teaching is essential for children's learning.

In integrated teaching and learning approaches, professionals make many decisions about their contribution to and roles in children's learning.

Through their involvement in guided play and learning and adult-led learning, professionals make decisions about what concepts to introduce to children, what it is important for them to know and understand, and how to go about building on children's existing knowledge. When professionals are intentional, they have well thought-out learning and development outcomes in mind and are able to explain both what they are doing and why.

THE ADULT'S ROLE IS TO BE INTENTIONAL ABOUT PLANNING FOR CHILDREN'S LEARNING BY MAKING DECISIONS ABOUT WHAT IS WORTH CHILDREN KNOWING AND UNDERSTANDING.

Discussion starter

How do you decide what is valuable for children to know and understand?

WHY IS INTEGRATED TEACHING AND LEARNING IMPORTANT?

Children are capable of learning on their own, but adults extend and increase that learning and stimulate new learning through their intentional involvement. So while play can be child-directed, adults' involvement can increase its value. In fact, research indicates that the least successful learning environments are those where children are regularly allowed to spend a lot of time in undirected free play. The integration of different approaches: child-directed play and learning, guided play and learning, and adult-directed learning are much more effective. Here's why:

LEARNING IS AN ACTIVE PROCESS THAT MUST INVOLVE CHILDREN'S ENGAGEMENT.

- Play and experiential learning are engaging for children, and children learn best when they are fully engaged.
- In play and experiential learning, children are engaged for longer, which promotes learning.
- Child-led and guided play and learning support children's sense of agency – of being active contributors to their learning and that of others.
- Observing and participating in child-directed play and learning allows professionals to identify children's strengths, abilities and interests, which they can build on by guiding or leading the learning.
- When adults are attuned to children through their involvement in child-led and guided play and learning, they are able to respond to individual children and make the most of learning opportunities as they arise (adult-led learning).
- Adults have an important role in developing children's understanding of concepts in literacy, numeracy and science. When adults lead learning, they extend children's learning beyond what they can know, do and understand on their own.

Case study

A family day care educator shared ideas about integrated teaching and learning in everyday experiences in her home. She said that using these for children's learning meant that she had to slow down, involve the children and reflect on how to maximise learning: 'Every day there are tasks like hanging out the washing and bringing it in, setting the table for lunch, cleaning up after and getting ready for rest and sleep. I encourage all the children to be actively involved. I try to let them do things 'their way' to a point. I talk with them about what we are doing. I pay attention to the learning that happens. The children learn about the sequence of everyday events, what you do first, next and so on and why. They laugh at me when I say, 'First we dry the clothes and then we wash them'! They learn new words and what they mean and they like the idea that they are helping me with 'real' jobs. I get the children to match the socks. Some of the children like to count how many pairs we have made. They understand the concept of 'pairs' as they notice other types of pairs such as a pair of shoes or a pair of eyes. We talk about the different ways these routines happen in their families. I don't have any problem linking this learning to the five Learning and Development Outcomes.'

Reflective questions

- How is this an example of integrated teaching and learning?
- Why does this type of learning engage children's interest?
- Can you make links between this everyday learning and the VEYLDF Learning and Development Outcomes?
- How else could the educator have extended children's learning?
- What else might children learn through meaningful participation in everyday routines or events?
- Can you think of everyday events that you or families could use for children's learning?
- How could you help families to understand everyday experiences as learning opportunities?

HOW DOES INTEGRATED TEACHING AND LEARNING LOOK IN PRACTICE?

The strategies described here can be applied both in early learning settings and to the ways families and other adults support and extend children's learning in the home and in the community. Professionals working directly with families can share these strategies with families to support learning in the home.

When early childhood professionals are intentional (purposeful, deliberate and thoughtful) about using integrated approaches to teaching and learning, they base their planning decisions on children's strengths, abilities and interests, and what they already know and can do. What follows are some tools and examples related to aspects of integrated teaching and learning approaches:

- engaging with children in play
- having conversations and interactions that support learning
- planning experiences to deepen and extend children's knowledge, understanding and skills
- differentiating learning opportunities for individual learners
- planning a balanced curriculum using all five Learning and Development Outcomes
- creating physical environments that promote learning.

Engaging with children in play

Children learn best when they are engaged. Play, projects, daily routines and real life examples are effective ways to engage children in learning.

Adults play a variety of roles in extending children's learning through play. These include:

- modelling or demonstrating, e.g. how children can join in the play or share ideas or equipment
- facilitating play by providing resources or materials to support play and designing environments that provide flexible, inclusive play spaces
- extending children's learning by asking open-ended questions, making suggestions, asking children to make predictions, or discussing how their ideas could be developed further
- responding to spontaneous learning opportunities, especially to develop children's understanding of literacy, numeracy and science concepts
- monitoring to ensure that every child is included and that the environment is safe, interesting and able to support every child's learning and development
- documenting and assessing to track how every child's learning across the Learning and Development Outcomes is being promoted through play
- reflecting on children's play and their role in promoting children's learning in play
- advocating for play-based learning by talking with children, families and other professionals about the value of play for learning.

Adults have to be involved in play at times if children are to learn about fairness and inclusion. They do more than direct children or remind them to 'be nice to each other'.

For example, adults can support children's learning about friendships and being fair and inclusive by modelling or helping children to use appropriate ways to join play and asking questions such as 'How do you think it feels if someone says 'you can't play with us'?' or 'What would be a fair thing to do?'

Reflective questions

- Make a list of all the ways you contribute to children's play.
- Are there times when it is appropriate for professionals to 'stand back and let children play'? Why or why not?
- What teaching strategies do you use to extend children's knowledge, understanding and skills in play contexts?

Having learning conversations and interactions that support learning

Respectful, responsive interactions are central to learning. They are important not only for children's socialisation, but also to help them learn about negotiation, collaboration, problem solving and listening to each other's perspectives. In other words, relationships are deeply connected to thinking and learning. The outcomes for children improve when professionals:

- listen carefully to children's comments, responses and questions, and respond to them, sometimes described as 'serve and return'
- use questions, prompts, reminders, close attention and encouragement in conversations with children
- pay attention to the quality of their interactions, going beyond token comments such as 'good boy' or 'well done'. For example, 'tell me about why you did it that way,' or 'what do you like about this?'
- combine words with pictures and actions
- are consistent in the ways they help children learn to manage their behaviour
- establish a positive atmosphere where everyone feels supported and valued
- establish warm relationships with children
- are sensitive to diversity and difference in their responses and interactions with children and families.

THE E5 INSTRUCTIONAL MODEL USED IN VICTORIA CONTAINS TOOLS TO SUPPORT TEACHERS AND SCHOOL LEADERS TO DEEPEN THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT CONSTITUTES HIGH QUALITY TEACHER PRACTICE IN THE CLASSROOM. IT PROVIDES A FRAMEWORK TO INFORM CONVERSATIONS AND INTERACTIONS AND GUIDE OBSERVATION, CRITIQUE AND REFLECTION ON CLASSROOM PRACTICE.

EDUCATORS 'INTENTIONALLY SCAFFOLD CHILDREN'S UNDERSTANDINGS' AND 'LISTEN CAREFULLY TO CHILDREN'S ATTEMPTS TO HYPOTHESE AND EXPAND ON THEIR THINKING THROUGH CONVERSATIONS AND QUESTIONING'.
(EYLF, P. 35)

Conversations with babies have the same features as those with older children – babies ‘talk’ using gestures, facial expressions, vocalisations or actions and adults listen carefully and respond, using a back-and-forth conversation pattern. The more adults show their interest in and enjoyment of babies’ communication efforts and the more they respond, the more babies will attempt to communicate. Intentional teaching of communication skills and dispositions occurs when adults:

- model language, such as asking a question with raised intonation
- show children they understand their communication attempts or cues with words and actions: ‘Yes, I’ll get the teddy for you’ in response to a baby pointing to the teddy on a shelf
- spontaneously use songs and rhymes
- use key words in children’s home language and encourage families to use the home language with their child
- combine actions or simple signs with words, especially for children who have conditions that affect communication – for example, helping a child with a visual impairment to touch the high chair as you say, ‘Here is your high chair Cassie, it’s time for lunch’
- encourage enjoyment of and experimentation with language – ask families about how their child communicates at home and share information about supporting the child as a communicator.

Shared sustained conversations that aim to extend conceptual understanding are important. Some techniques to try in shared sustained conversations:

- asking open-ended questions (what/why/how) and giving children time to respond
- reflecting in words to children what they are doing in action
- using questions and explanations and linking together different events to help children remember what they know and use it to understand new situations
- asking children to predict, hypothesise, question and problem solve.

‘SOMETIMES I ASK QUESTIONS I KNOW THE ANSWER TO LIKE, ‘WHAT COLOUR ARE YOUR NEW SHOES?’ THESE QUESTIONS DON’T REALLY SUPPORT DEEP THINKING.’

Case study

Over several days, an educator observed three children playing with a large wooden train set and small figurines which he had added to the block area to provoke the children's interest in block play. From his interpretation of the learning he observed, he planned to extend the children's learning about measurement terms by having a shared conversation with them.

The documented learning conversation:

Ben: I'm going to make a train track for the trains.

Alex: Yeah, let's make it.

Mai: I am making my train track.

Educator: Do you remember the tracks you made yesterday? Will they be the same length or longer today? (This question prompts the children's memory about previous experiences and models the use of measurement language.)

Ben: Longer. It's gonna be longer, isn't it Alex?

Mai: Mine was longer than yours.

Educator: How do you know your track was longer than Ben's, Mai? (This question helps to identify Mai's understanding of measurement and prompts her recall skills.)

Mai: Mine went past the mat. (Mai uses an 'informal' measurement concept: 'past the mat'.)

Ben: Our track will go past the mat.

Educator: Will there be enough tracks for two long train tracks? (This question gets the children to think more deeply about their plans for the track building and models the use of the numeracy terms 'enough' and 'long'.)

Mai: Nope.

Alex: No. It won't work.

Educator: How could you solve that problem? (This question encourages the children to problem solve.)

This brief example of a shared conversation shows how asking thoughtful questions as part of a learning conversation can help children to think, recall, predict and to solve problems – all dimensions of being a confident learner. Modelling and using measurement terms adds a numeracy and literacy dimension to children's learning. Recording this conversation helps the educator to reflect later on the quality of his interactions in supporting and scaffolding children's learning.

CHILDREN NEED MANY OPPORTUNITIES TO GENERATE AND DISCUSS IDEAS, MAKE PLANS, BRAINSTORM SOLUTIONS TO PROBLEMS, REFLECT AND GIVE REASONS FOR THEIR CHOICES. THEY INVESTIGATE WHAT PRODUCTS AND SYSTEMS CAN DO AND HOW THEY WORK. INCREASINGLY THEY BEGIN TO USE INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES TO ASSIST THEIR THINKING AND TO REPRESENT WHAT THEY KNOW AND UNDERSTAND.

Planning experiences to deepen and extend children’s knowledge, understanding and skills

Learning that supports and builds on children’s skills and interests and links to their lives engages and motivates them. Professionals base plans on what children already know, do and say, and their strengths, interests and dispositions. They give serious consideration to the different ways they can deepen and extend children’s learning, planning with the Learning and Development Outcomes in mind.

Case study

Children in a Grade 1 class were asked to brainstorm topics they would like to explore as a group project. As a result of having visited a marine park recently five children identified sea creatures. The project approach allowed them to explore this topic of interest using different learning strategies including reading, drawing, writing, researching and talking together. Their teacher overheard some misunderstandings about what part of the sea particular creatures lived in – deep water, tidal pool, rock shelf for example. She decided to deepen their understanding by working with them to find further information about sea creatures’ habitats using a web-based encyclopaedia. While the project was initiated by the children, the teacher actively extended the children’s learning at different points through intentional actions. The children worked on the project for many weeks, and their enthusiasm led to family interest and support. The group produced a scientifically accurate account of a range of sea creatures’ lives using posters and a computer-based story about some sea creatures with sound effects and animation.

Some key features of the approach used in the example are

- The children chose the project topic, which meant their motivation to learn was high.
- The teacher documented and monitored the learning taking place and made deliberate decisions about when to take the lead to support and extend learning and when to allow the children to take the lead.
- Children used a range of strategies to support their learning: reading, searching for information online, discussing and documenting learning using different media (writing, drawing and computer-based).
- The project integrated many curriculum content areas (literacy, science, numeracy, information technology) as well as learning across the Learning and Development Outcomes.
- There was unhurried time, allowing for meaningful exploration of the topic.
- Family involvement was encouraged and added new ideas and practical support.
- Every child in the group contributed to the project’s success, even though their abilities were diverse, contributing led to every child learning.

EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFESSIONALS USE INTEGRATED TEACHING AND LEARNING APPROACHES TO TEACH CHILDREN EXPLICIT SUBJECT MATTER (E.G. MATHEMATICAL, LITERARY, MUSICAL, SCIENTIFIC, ARTISTIC) AND ASSOCIATED SKILLS TO DEEPEN AND EXTEND THEIR KNOWLEDGE, UNDERSTANDING AND VALUES.
(VEYLDF P. 15)

Case study

Educators identified that numeracy concepts connected with estimating and predicting (Learning and Development Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners) were relevant to the learning they observed in children's block play. Analysing documentation of block play revealed that some children could estimate the shape of the blocks they needed for a particular purpose, while others were at an earlier stage of learning, using a trial-and-error process. Their intentional teaching and learning strategies included:

- supporting children who were competent in estimating to transfer that learning to other contexts such as with water play ('How many cups of water does it take to fill the jug?') or with more difficult puzzles ('Which puzzle piece might fit here?')
- encouraging children to share or use their knowledge about estimations with peers
- having specific conversations to support children's learning about the usefulness of estimation and prediction strategies when they are playing
- adding new resources to the blocks to extend learning about estimation
- deliberately using the language of measurement with children
- gathering ideas with children for long term projects that support numeracy concepts connected with estimating and predicting. For example, measuring the height of other children and family members.

Ongoing projects can connect families to children's learning and support children to assess their own learning over periods of time.

The EYLF states that educators need to plan intentionally 'with each child and the Outcomes in mind'. For example, analysis of documentation might indicate that some children are beginning to 'use symbols in their play to represent and make meaning' as they pretend that small blocks are coins in the shop they created (Learning and Development Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators). Reading the Frameworks can help to guide your decisions about what experiences could consolidate or extend learning specific literacy and numeracy concepts.

Case study

In an outer Melbourne community, a speech pathologist and classroom teacher working together identified that more than half the children in the class had limited understandings of how stories work or how to tell a story, which are important for more formal literacy learning. The local children's services responded to these findings by critically reflecting on current practices with a view to improving their literacy teaching and learning practices. They re-read the VEYLDF and the EYLF sections on Learning and Development Outcome 5 as part of this reflection process. They added to current practices of having daily story sharing experiences and encouraging families to borrow books and to share stories. They planned to support children's learning about narrative and the sequence of stories more deliberately by:

- using every day routines to talk about the sequence of events involved in experiences such as getting dressed, getting ready for lunch or cooking
- pointing out the ways stories in books have a beginning, middle and end through comments and questions such as 'What happened at the end of the story?'; 'I really like the start of this book where the boy...'; 'What part of the book did you like the most?'
- providing puzzles, books and posters with sequences such as plant or animal life cycles and having conversations with the children about the sequence involved – for example, the life cycle of a frog from the egg stage to the frog
- using puppets to encourage children to tell stories to each other
- encouraging and supporting children's use of narrative in home corner or dramatic play and creating and acting out characters and storylines using topics the children have created in dramatic play
- sharing their ideas and strategies with families and encouraging them to use every day experiences to talk about the order or sequence of events.

Educators adopted integrated approaches to teaching and learning as they planned diverse experiences in collaboration with families to improve children's learning as effective communicators. They avoided large group experiences and provide many opportunities for children to be in small groups that encourage conversations. Experiences that build on children's interests and take advantage of teaching opportunities as they arise provide best for children's learning needs.

Differentiating learning opportunities for individual learners

'Differentiating learning opportunities' means providing opportunities and environments that respond to each child's unique strengths, abilities, interests, and their cultural, language and family background.

The following quote from the VEYLDF is a reminder that each child is a unique individual:

"The rate of children's individual progress is not always the same, nor is progress always easy or straightforward. For some children and families, maintaining and improving learning and development involves considerable struggle and much perseverance." (VEYLDF, p.17)

Reflective questions

- Can you identify examples of how some children face considerable struggles as learners and examples of how they persevere as learners?
- What strategies do you use to support these children to experience success as learners?
- What strategies do you use to encourage families to help their children to experience success as learners?
- Are your contributions different depending on the children – their ages, interests and abilities? If so, why is this?

Case study

A coordinator explained how she and her colleagues adjusted their practices to ensure that a child with verbal communication difficulties could participate fully in the program and have his ideas listened and responded to. She arranged for several educators to attend assisted communication professional learning seminars in order to support their effective and responsive communication with the child. The children also learnt some sign language, which helped to support friendships with the child and his inclusion in play. The educators provided photos related to routines, resources or materials available to the children, and the child was able to use them to communicate his choices. By acknowledging and responding to his communication efforts, the educators modelled respect for diversity to the other children. They noticed that this child was particularly interested in robust physical play and was skilled in any games involving climbing or jumping. This strength and interest was seen as a way to promote the child's sense of leadership and his capacity to help other children who were less confident in the outdoor environment. Educators purposefully planned opportunities for this child to lead in active play. They also decided that active dancing experiences would build on his physical skills and broaden his learning as well as the other children's learning.

Reflective questions

- What examples of differentiating the program are evident in this example?
- How did the educators use the child's strengths and interests to progress his learning?
- How did the educators promote other children's learning?

A differentiated curriculum aims to link children's experiences in the home, family and community with those in the early childhood setting. These links support the development of a strong sense of identity as well as learning about the world, and demonstrate a respectful approach to children.

Case study

A supported playgroup facilitator wanted to encourage families to share books and other printed material with their children. She was challenged by knowing that she had at least two parents who attended who could not read. One parent had told her, but the other had said nothing. The facilitator decided to use picture books with no text for several weeks at the playgroup during story time. She talked about the books with the children, asked questions and encouraged them to share ideas about the narratives.

She made these books available for borrowing. By doing this she was modelling using books without reading them, without calling attention to parents' literacy levels. Both parents borrowed the books.

The example above reminds us that each family is unique. Intentional teaching involves knowing the child in the context of the family and adjusting practices to fit each family. Differentiating the program or curriculum means using different teaching strategies and resources to help every child learn.

Some children require more intervention from professionals than others. Professionals encourage children's learning by identifying their strengths, learning styles and interests and planning experiences based on them.

Case study

An early childhood intervention (ECIS) professional visited a family home to provide support for a four-year-old boy with Down syndrome and his family.

The mother shared her observations of the child at breakfast time. She had noticed that the child observed his siblings getting their own breakfast and was keen to try and do the same. She reported this was very messy and in the general busyness of breakfast time it was easier for her to do everything for him.

Together the ECIS professional and mother planned an approach to build on his desire to feed himself and participate in daily routines. They provided him with bath play activities that involved pouring water from a plastic jug to a cup and bowl to help him practice his milk pouring skills. They drew a line on his cup so he knew when to stop pouring. They also trialled the use of a modified spoon so he could scoop food into his mouth more accurately, reducing the need for adult hands-on guidance as his skills increased.

As he built his confidence and capacity, his mother encouraged him to transfer these skills to his breakfast routine alongside his siblings.

The mother later told the ECIS professional she was surprised how much her son had learned when they really focussed attention on helping him do the things he enjoyed. She has also started to plan shared cooking activities and thought she would start by getting him to help her make his favourite dessert.

Reflective questions

- Which Learning and Development Outcomes are being supported in this example?
- In addition to the self-care skills the child is learning, what science concepts is the child also beginning to learn in this example?

Planning a balanced curriculum using all five Learning and Development Outcomes

Effective professionals provide a balanced curriculum – that is, they plan for a wide range of curriculum or content areas including literacy, numeracy, expressive arts, technology, science, physical education, health, environmental and social studies. The learning and development Outcomes incorporate these different curriculum areas in a holistic way rather than as separate content areas. Children’s dramatic or social play typically involves holistic learning that links to all five learning and development Outcomes.

EFFECTIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD PRACTICES USE INTEGRATED TEACHING AND LEARNING APPROACHES TO SUPPORT SUSTAINED AND SHARED INTERACTIONS WITH CHILDREN. (VEYLDF P.14)

Case study

Two children playing in the home corner are setting the table for ‘lunch.’ They match the number of cups with the number of placemats and do the same for the plates (one-to-one correspondence, a maths concept). They talk about how to resolve the problem that there are more children than placemats and decide to use some material for the extra placemats (communication, cooperation and problem solving skills).

From infancy children learn about all the curriculum areas through their play. When babies play with a toy and see how their actions cause something to happen, they are beginning to learn early science concepts of cause and effect.

Case study

An educator says to 14-month-old Ellie ‘It’s time for lunch. Time to wash your hands.’ She waits for Ellie to stop what she is doing and walk to the sink. The educator says, ‘Let’s put our hands under the tap and put some soap on them.’ She does this herself as she talks Ellie through the routine. Ellie at one point says ‘Cold’ and the educator says, ‘Yes, the water is cold.’ She shows Ellie how to rub her hands together. Ellie does this for a long time, seeming to enjoy the stream of water. When she’s finished the educator turns off the tap and says, ‘Now find your towel and dry your hands’ and Ellie follows these instructions.

The child struggles and finally succeeds in seating herself at the table. She uses a spoon and pushes the pieces of pasta to the side of the bowl, eventually using her fingers to get the food onto the spoon. She laughs as a child opposite her taps her spoon on the table and joins in. The educator says ‘Who wants some water?’ and acknowledges Ellie’s enthusiastic look by saying ‘Ellie, you look like you’d like some water. You’re using your spoon – that’s hard work. You’re doing a great job’. She brings over a spoon with a larger handle as she noticed the one Ellie is using is hard to grasp.

Reflective questions

- How does this example depict integrated teaching and learning?
- What concepts is Ellie beginning to learn about through this interaction?
- What could the educator do next to extend the concepts that Ellie is beginning to learn?

EPPE study

The Effective Provision of Preschool Education (EPPE) study in the UK found that the most effective early learning environments demonstrated the importance of intentional teaching. In the effective settings there was:

- a balance across a range of curriculum areas rather than an excessive focus on creative or physical development experiences
- a deliberate effort to plan, scaffold and progress children's learning in mathematics, literacy and science
- use of small group experiences, games and other play-based approaches to promote children's sustained, active engagement as learners
- understanding of the need to plan experiences that build on children's interests
- use of a range of strategies to sustain children's interest and to promote meaningful learning – strategies such as questions, prompts, reminders, close attention and encouragement
- no evidence of children wandering around aimlessly or flitting from one activity to another.

Researchers describe successful learning environments as those that provide an 'enriched curriculum' that both follows and leads children's interests and responds to individual differences. Early childhood professionals pay attention to developing dispositions that support learning, including concentration, confidence, persistence, curiosity, independence and resilience. They engage in meaningful interactions with children's learning as they participate in diverse experiences including play, projects, practical and written tasks. Research findings also show that just adding more play or more activities does not achieve improved outcomes. It is the quality of the play and other learning experiences combined with what professionals understand and do that makes the difference.

IT IS THE QUALITY OF THE PLAY AND OTHER LEARNING EXPERIENCES COMBINED WITH WHAT PROFESSIONALS UNDERSTAND AND DO THAT MAKES THE DIFFERENCE.

Discussion starter

Think about what the term 'dispositions for learning' means to you. Compare it with the definition on p. 35 of the VEYLDF.

Think about the dispositions for learning listed above: concentration, confidence, persistence, curiosity, independence and resilience. Are there other dispositions that you believe help children to learn and to see themselves as learners? Do these apply to children of all ages? Why or why not?

What are practical ways that you promote these dispositions in children through integrated teaching and learning? For example, do the routines support children's capacity to be confident or independent?

How do learning dispositions link with the VEYLDF Learning and Development Outcomes?

Creating physical environments that promote learning

Creating learning environments where children feel safe to take risks with learning, cope with challenges and solve problems for themselves or with help from others is an important element of integrated approaches. Children will learn effectively when they have many opportunities to engage with others in active, hands-on experiences with a range of practical, open-ended, diverse and interesting materials and resources.

Case study

A maternal and child health nurse reflected on the time that children and families spent in the waiting room at her centre and realised that while she has areas for mothers to relax and breastfeed she needed to make an area for children where they could learn. With the assistance of the community toy library, librarian and the local early learning centre she set up a dress-up corner with hats, gloves and shoes, and a table and chair for wooden toys and books. This child-friendly corner allows children to explore. The nurse is able to share her observations of the child playing and can communicate each child's learning skills to the parent and discuss how they can support their child's learning at home.

Discussion starter

Think about the range of materials and resources that support learning in your setting. Are they:

- **practical and authentic:** things that children see adults use that they would like to learn how to use and that would help them as learners – real things rather than pretend or toy ones?
- **open-ended:** materials and resources that can be used in many different ways, that encourage creative uses for different purposes and that can be used by children of different ages and with different abilities?
- **reflective of diversity:** linked to families' lives and cultural backgrounds and able to be used by diverse learners?
- **interesting:** objects that provoke children's interest and curiosity?
- **natural:** objects from nature, objects found and not bought?
- **beautiful:** nurturing children's aesthetic sense through opportunities to experience beauty in its many forms?
- **engaging:** inviting children to do something, get involved and engaging all the senses?
- **inclusive** of a range of information and communication technologies?

What are the gaps in the materials and resources you provide to support, provoke and extend children's learning?

What could you do to fill these gaps? Who might help?

Are there places in the community where you might source different materials or resources?

Action plan

Reflect on the strategies discussed in this guide. Use the table to identify actions you will take as a result of your reflection. There are some examples provided to prompt your thinking.

KEY IDEA	CURRENT PRACTICE	CHANGING PRACTICE
Engaging with children in play	We are often too busy keeping an eye on all the experiences we provide to really engage in children's play.	We will reduce the number of experiences that are provided each day so that we can spend more time interacting with children rather than supervising activities.
Having learning conversations and interactions that support learning	Not sure that we really listen to what children say about what they know and understand, or respond in ways that support them to think deeply.	We will take it in turns regularly to observe/ listen to each other over a few hours and then give feedback on the quality of our learning conversations.
Planning experiences to deepen and extend children's knowledge, understanding and skills		
Differentiating learning opportunities for individual learners		
Planning a balanced curriculum using all the five Learning and Development Outcomes		
Creating physical environments that promote learning		

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