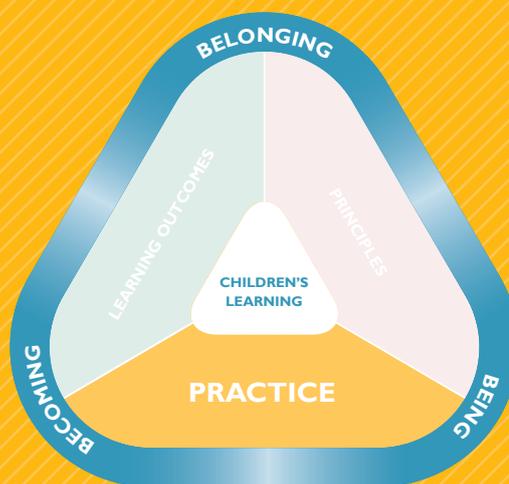


# PRACTICE



The principles of early childhood pedagogy underpin practice. Educators draw on a rich repertoire of pedagogical practices to promote children's learning by:

- adopting holistic approaches
- being responsive to children
- planning and implementing learning through play
- intentional teaching
- creating physical and social learning environments that have a positive impact on children's learning
- valuing the cultural and social contexts of children and their families
- providing for continuity in experiences and enabling children to have successful transition
- assessing and monitoring children's learning to inform provision and to support children in achieving learning outcomes.

## Holistic approaches

Holistic approaches to teaching and learning recognise the connectedness of mind, body and spirit<sup>4</sup>. When early childhood educators take a holistic approach they pay attention to children's physical, personal, social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing as well as cognitive aspects of learning. While educators may plan or assess with a focus on a particular outcome or component of learning, they see children's learning as integrated and interconnected. They recognise the connections

between children, families and communities and the importance of reciprocal relationships and partnerships for learning. They see learning as a social activity and value collaborative learning and community participation.

An integrated, holistic approach to teaching and learning also focuses on connections to the natural world. Educators foster children's capacity to understand and respect the natural environment and the interdependence between people, plants, animals and the land.

## Responsiveness to children

Educators are responsive to all children's strengths, abilities and interests. They value and build on children's strengths, skills and knowledge to ensure their motivation and engagement in learning. They respond to children's expertise, cultural traditions and ways of knowing, the multiple languages spoken by some children, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and the strategies used by children with additional needs to negotiate their every day lives.

### Scaffold:

the educators' decisions and actions that build on children's existing knowledge and skills to enhance their learning.

4 Siraj-Blatchford, I., & Sylva, K. (2004). Researching pedagogy in English pre-schools. *British Educational Research Journal*, 30(5), 712-730.

Educators are also responsive to children's ideas and play, which form an important basis for curriculum decision-making. In response to children's evolving ideas and interests, educators assess, anticipate and extend children's learning via open ended questioning, providing feedback, challenging their thinking and guiding their learning. They make use of spontaneous 'teachable moments' to scaffold children's learning.

Responsive learning relationships are strengthened as educators and children learn together and share decisions, respect and trust. Responsiveness enables educators to respectfully enter children's play and ongoing projects, stimulate their thinking and enrich their learning.

### Learning through play

Play provides opportunities for children to learn as they discover, create, improvise and imagine. When children play with other children they create social groups, test out ideas, challenge each other's thinking and build new understandings. Play provides a supportive environment where children can ask questions, solve problems and engage in critical thinking. Play can expand children's thinking and enhance their desire to know and to learn. In these ways play can promote positive dispositions towards learning. Children's immersion in their play illustrates how play enables them to simply enjoy *being*.

Early childhood educators take on many roles in play with children and use a range of strategies to support learning. They engage in sustained shared conversations with children to extend their thinking<sup>5</sup>. They provide a balance between child led, child initiated and educator supported

#### **Intentional teaching:**

involves educators being deliberate, purposeful and thoughtful in their decisions and action. Intentional teaching is the opposite of teaching by rote or continuing with traditions simply because things have 'always' been done that way.

learning. They create learning environments that encourage children to explore, solve problems, create and construct. Educators interact with babies and children to build attachment. They use routines and play experiences to do this. They also recognise spontaneous teachable moments as they occur, and use them to build on children's learning. Early childhood educators work with young children to promote and model positive ways to relate to others. They actively support the inclusion of all children in play, help children to recognise when play is unfair and offer constructive ways to build a caring, fair and inclusive learning community.

### Intentional teaching

Intentional teaching is deliberate, purposeful and thoughtful.

Educators who engage in intentional teaching recognise that learning occurs in social contexts and that interactions and conversations are vitally important for learning. They actively promote children's learning through worthwhile and challenging experiences and interactions that foster high-level thinking skills. They use strategies such as modelling and demonstrating, open questioning, speculating, explaining, engaging in shared thinking and problem solving to extend children's thinking and learning. Educators move flexibly in and out of different roles and draw on different strategies as the context changes. They plan opportunities for intentional teaching and knowledge-building. They document and monitor children's learning.

### Learning environments

Learning environments are welcoming spaces when they reflect and enrich the lives and identities of children and families participating in the setting and respond to their interests and needs. Environments that support learning are vibrant and flexible spaces that are responsive to the interests and abilities of each child. They cater for different learning capacities and learning styles and invite children and families to contribute ideas, interests and questions. Outdoor learning spaces are a feature of Australian learning environments. They offer a vast array of possibilities not available indoors. Play spaces in

5 Siraj-Blatchford, I., & Sylva, K. (2004). Researching pedagogy in English pre-schools. *British Educational Research Journal*, 30(5), 712-730.

natural environments include plants, trees, edible gardens, sand, rocks, mud, water and other elements from nature. These spaces invite open-ended interactions, spontaneity, risk-taking, exploration, discovery and connection with nature. They foster an appreciation of the natural environment, develop environmental awareness and provide a platform for ongoing environmental education.

Indoor and outdoor environments support all aspects of children's learning and invite conversations between children, early childhood educators, families and the broader community. They promote opportunities for sustained shared thinking and collaborative learning.

Materials enhance learning when they reflect what is natural and familiar and also introduce novelty to provoke interest and more complex and increasingly abstract thinking. For example, digital technologies can enable children to access global connections and resources, and encourage new ways of thinking. Environments and resources can also highlight our responsibilities for a sustainable future and promote children's understanding about their responsibility to care for the environment. They can foster hope, wonder and knowledge about the natural world.

Educators can encourage children and families to contribute ideas, interests and questions to the learning environment. They can support engagement by allowing time for meaningful interactions, by providing a range of opportunities for individual and shared experiences, and by finding opportunities for children to go into and contribute to their local community.

### Cultural competence

Educators who are culturally competent respect multiple cultural ways of knowing, seeing and living, celebrate the benefits of diversity and have an ability to understand and honour differences. This is evident in everyday practice when educators demonstrate an ongoing commitment to developing their own cultural competence in a two way process with families and communities.

Educators view culture and the context of family as central to children's sense of *being* and *belonging*, and to success in lifelong learning. Educators also seek to promote children's cultural competence.

Cultural competence is much more than awareness of cultural differences. It is the ability to understand, communicate with, and effectively interact with people across cultures. Cultural competence encompasses:

- being aware of one's own world view
- developing positive attitudes towards cultural differences
- gaining knowledge of different cultural practices and world views
- developing skills for communication and interaction across cultures.

### Continuity of learning and transitions

Children bring family and community ways of *being*, *belonging* and *becoming* to their early childhood settings. By building on these experiences educators help all children to feel secure, confident and included and to experience continuity in how to be and how to learn.

Transitions, including from home to early childhood settings, between settings, and from early childhood settings to school, offer opportunities and challenges. Different places and spaces have their own purposes, expectations and ways of doing things. Building on children's prior and current experiences helps them to feel secure, confident and connected to familiar people, places, events and understandings. Children, families and early childhood educators all contribute to successful transitions between settings.

In partnership with families, early childhood educators ensure that children have an active role in preparing for transitions. They assist children to understand the traditions, routines and practices of the settings to which they are moving and to feel comfortable with the process of change.

Early childhood educators also help children to negotiate changes in their status or identities, especially when they begin full-time school. As children make transitions to new settings (including school) educators from early childhood settings and schools commit to sharing information about each child's knowledge and skills so learning can build on foundations of earlier learning. Educators work collaboratively with each child's new educator and other professionals to ensure a successful transition.

## Assessment for learning

Assessment for children's learning refers to the process of gathering and analysing information as evidence about what children know, can do and understand. It is part of an ongoing cycle that includes planning, documenting and evaluating children's learning.

It is important because it enables educators in partnership with families, children and other professionals to:

- plan effectively for children's current and future learning
- communicate about children's learning and progress
- determine the extent to which all children are progressing toward realising learning outcomes and if not, what might be impeding their progress
- identify children who may need additional support in order to achieve particular learning outcomes, providing that support or assisting families to access specialist help
- evaluate the effectiveness of learning opportunities, environments and experiences offered and the approaches taken to enable children's learning
- reflect on pedagogy that will suit this context and these children.

Educators use a variety of strategies to collect, document, organise, synthesise and interpret the information that they gather to assess children's learning. They search for appropriate ways to collect rich and meaningful information that depicts children's learning in context, describes their progress and identifies their strengths, skills and understandings. More recent approaches to assessment also examine the learning strategies that children use and reflect ways in which learning is co-constructed through interactions between the educator and each child. Used effectively, these approaches to assessment become powerful ways to make the process of learning visible to children and their families, educators and other professionals.

The five Learning Outcomes in this Framework, as outlined later, provide early childhood educators with key reference points against which children's

progress can be identified, documented and communicated to families, other early childhood professionals and educators in schools. Over time educators can reflect on how children have developed, how they have engaged with increasingly complex ideas and participated in increasingly sophisticated learning experiences.

Ongoing assessment processes that include a diverse array of methods capture and validate the different pathways that children take toward achieving these outcomes. Such processes do not focus exclusively on the endpoints of children's learning; they give equal consideration to the 'distance-travelled' by individual children and recognise and celebrate not only the giant leaps that children take in their learning but the small steps as well.

All children demonstrate their learning in different ways. Approaches to assessment that are culturally and linguistically relevant and responsive to the physical and intellectual capabilities of each child will acknowledge each child's abilities and strengths, and allow them to demonstrate competence.

Including children, families and other professionals in the development and implementation of relevant and appropriate assessment processes allows for new understandings to emerge that are not possible if educators rely solely on their own strategies and perspectives. Developing inclusive assessment practices with children and their families demonstrates respect for diversity, helps educators make better sense of what they have observed and supports learning for both children and adults.

Assessment, when undertaken in collaboration with families, can assist families to support children's learning and empower them to act on behalf of their children beyond the early childhood setting. When children are included in the assessment process they can develop an understanding of themselves as learners and an understanding of how they learn best.

When educators reflect on their role in children's learning and assessment they reflect on their own views and understandings of early childhood theory, research and practice to focus on:

- the experiences and environments they provide and how that links to the intended learning outcomes

- the extent to which they know and value the culturally specific knowledge about children and learning that is embedded within the community in which they are working
- each child's learning in the context of their families, drawing family perspectives, understandings, experiences and expectations
- the learning opportunities which build on what children already know and what they bring to the early childhood setting
- evidence that the learning experiences offered are inclusive of all children and culturally appropriate
- not making assumptions about children's learning or setting lower expectations for some children because of unacknowledged biases
- incorporating pedagogical practices that reflect knowledge of diverse perspectives and contribute to children's wellbeing and successful learning
- whether there are sufficiently challenging experiences for all children
- the evidence that demonstrates children are learning
- how they can expand the range of ways they assess to make assessment richer and more useful.