Australian Education Research Organisation

Introduction

Play-based learning and intentionality

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This introduction is complemented by a set of 8 practice resources to support teachers and educators in early childhood education and care (ECEC) to improve their intentionality in play-based learning.

Before using any of the practice resources, read the following introduction to understand the importance of intentionality in play-based learning in quality, evidence-based ECEC practice with cultural responsiveness at its heart.

The Play-based learning and intentionality practice resources identify evidence-based practices aligned with the 8 Principles of the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF V2.0). These resources can stand alone, or can be used with:

- Early childhood learning trajectories to improve your understanding of how children learn and develop in key domains, including how each of these domains contributes to the integrated Learning Outcomes in the EYLF V2.0.
- Tried and Tested guides to identify additional evidence-based practices to use in ECEC services to support children's learning and development.
- Assessment for learning practice resources to identify evidence-based assessment practices aligned with the 8 Principles of the EYLF V2.0.

These practice resources align to the National Quality Standard (NQS), particularly in Quality Areas 1 (Educational program and practice), 5 (Relationships with children) and 6 (Collaborative partnerships with families and communities).

Play-based learning and intentionality

Play-based learning and intentionality is one of the Practices identified in the EYLF V2.0. It also addresses elements of the NQS, including Element 1.2.1 (Intentional teaching) and 1.2.2 (Responsive teaching and scaffolding).

The EYLF V2.0 (p. 8) notes that:

> Play-based learning capitalises on children's natural inclination to be curious, explore and learn. Children actively construct their own understandings that contribute to their own learning. In play experiences children integrate their emotions, thinking and motivation that assists to strengthen brain functioning. They exercise their agency, intentionality, capacity to initiate and lead learning, and their right to participate in decisions that affect them, including about their learning.

Intentionality in play-based learning involves participating thoughtfully and purposefully in play in a way that extends each child's thinking and learning. It involves balancing 3 key ideas:

- **Play is child-led** and driven by their ideas, interests, abilities and curiosity. Play is an important way for young children to build new understandings and make sense of their worlds and is the foundation for quality ECEC that fosters children's learning, development and wellbeing.
- **Intentionality involves thoughtful guidance by teachers and educators** to extend each child's learning, development and wellbeing during play while also fostering their agency and independence. It means tuning in and responding to children's ideas and interests to support ongoing learning and development in a way that is meaningful to them. This involves viewing children as active participants and decision-makers and requires teachers and educators to understand, respect and work with each child's unique qualities and capabilities.
- **Children bring their own intentions to play** by actively deciding who they will play with, what resources they will use and how the play will unfold. This also includes testing out ideas and challenging each other's thinking.

Teachers and educators can act with intentionality during child-led play, as well as in everyday events and routines. This involves being purposeful across all aspects of the curriculum, including planned and unplanned experiences, routines, interactions, and elements of the learning environment such as the room setup and resources. This commitment to intentionality should be reflected in the service's philosophy.

Cultural responsiveness

Cultural responsiveness is at the heart of play-based learning and intentionality. This requires teachers and educators to be critically reflexive about their own identities, culture, histories and biases. They can then consider how this impacts the development of relationships with, and understanding of, the children and families at their service and within the communities in which they live and work. It is this capability that helps to create welcoming and culturally safe environments.

Critical reflection supports this process and includes in-depth thinking about practice and its impact. It involves teachers and educators becoming more aware of their strengths and preferences, as well as areas where they can further build their knowledge, skills and confidence. Reflexivity further extends on critical reflection to promote and foster culturally responsive practice.

Reflexive practice invites teachers and educators to engage deeply and honestly in conversations with themselves and others. This process provides opportunities to examine and unpack personal beliefs, attitudes, biases and ways of thinking with a view to engaging with people in a culturally safe manner. This understanding is deeply connected to ***knowing*** (the knowledge we hold and our understanding of how we gained this knowledge), ***being*** (our self-knowledge and practices) and ***doing*** (the actions that we put into place).

These practice resources identify strategies you can use to improve your intentionality in play-based learning and align it with the EYLF V2.0 Principles. In this way, these resources support practices that are both culturally responsive and informed by relevant research.

View the 8 practice resources in the play-based learning and intentionality series using the links below.

- **Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships**
- **Equity, inclusion and high expectations**
- **Partnerships**
- **Sustainability**
- **Respect for diversity**
- **Critical reflection and ongoing professional learning**
- **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives**
- **Collaborative leadership and teamwork**

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