

An early childhood intentional teaching model

September 2026



This practice resource was designed as part of a co-design research project to help teachers and educators in early childhood education and care (ECEC) services learn about intentional teaching and use it in their practice.

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About this early childhood intentional teaching model and supporting resources

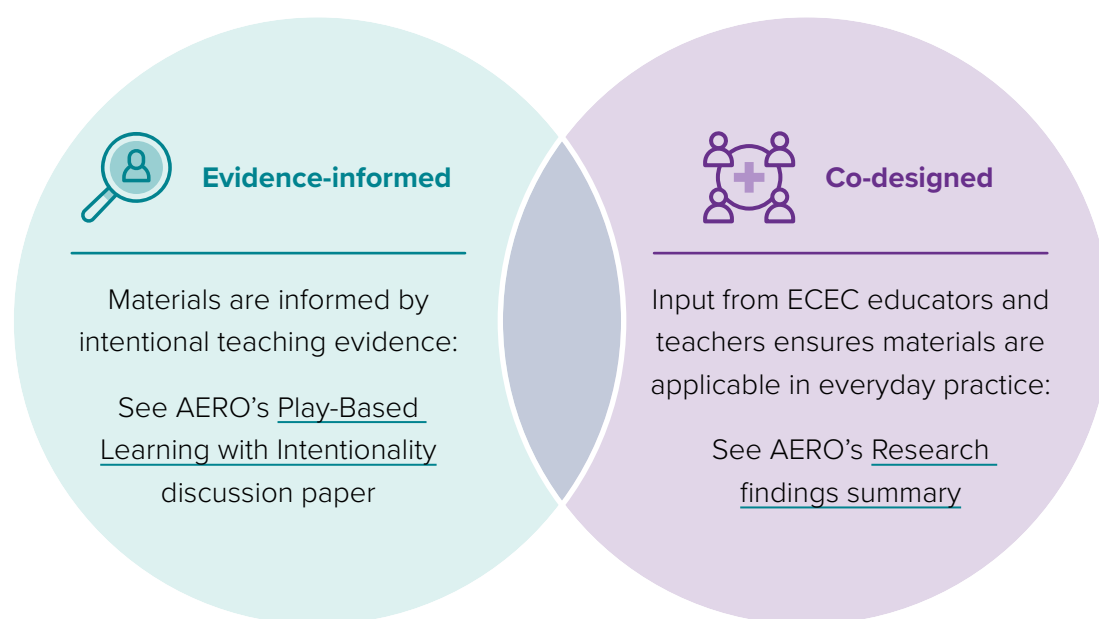
This practice resource was used in the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO)'s [2025 research](#) to develop and test an [early childhood intentional teaching model and supporting resources](#). For this research, we used an iterative design-based methodology, working alongside educators from 13 diverse ECEC services. It provides information on foundational knowledge, beliefs and practices that support play-based learning with intentionality.

This series of resources supports effective intentional teaching. It's designed to help early childhood teachers, educators and leaders understand:

- what intentional teaching is
- what it looks like in practice
- how to strengthen it in ECEC services.

This practice resource centres on the AERO intentional teaching model developed through the national codesign process with ECEC services (Figure 1). The model, and the final supporting resources collected here, emerged directly from that collaboration.

Figure 1: Evidence and experience informing the development of this early childhood intentional teaching model and practice resource



The intentional teaching model and supporting resources bring evidence-based approaches to effective intentional teaching together with the wisdom of educators and teachers to ensure both evidence informed rigor and usefulness in everyday practice.

You can find more information on the research underpinning the practice resource in AERO's discussion paper, [Play-Based Learning with Intentionality](#). Findings from AERO's co-design research to develop the materials can be found in AERO's [Co-Designing an Early Childhood Intentional Teaching Model and Resources research report](#) and [research summary paper](#).

Alignment with key standards and frameworks

The content in this resource was designed to align with the standards and frameworks that guide early childhood educators' and teachers' everyday practices. Table 1 summarises this alignment.

Table 1: Alignment with key ECEC standards and frameworks

Standard or framework	Alignment
The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (EYLF) V2.0	- Practice: Play-based learning and Intentionality - Educators are intentional in the roles they take in children's play and the way they intentionally plan the environment and curriculum experiences (p. 66) - Educators extend children's learning using intentional teaching strategies such as asking questions, explaining, modelling, speculating, inquiring and demonstrating to extend children's knowledge (p. 22)
National Quality Standard	- Element 1.2.2: Intentional teaching - Educators are deliberate, purposeful and thoughtful in their decisions and actions
Australian Professional Standards for Teachers	- Professional Practice – Standard 3 - Plan for and implement effective teaching and learning

About this practice resource

This practice resource provides an introduction to intentional teaching, including:

- what it means
- what it looks like across a day
- how to strengthen it in ECEC services.

It centres on the intentional teaching model, which is introduced and explained alongside the knowledge and beliefs that underpin intentional teaching.

It also contains practical tools for you to use, including:

- practice examples
- reflection questions
- resources for day-to-day practice.

The order of this practice resource is as follows:

- **a plain language definition of intentional teaching**: Defines intentional teaching using plain language, clarifies what it is and isn't, and offers initial reflection questions to help you consider existing beliefs and practices.
- **what the evidence says about why it matters**: Summarises what the research tells us about intentional teaching and highlights the critical role of the educators in maximising outcomes for all children.
- **what it is and what it isn't**: Common misconceptions are unpacked to help distinguish intentional teaching from other approaches and to challenge assumptions that may limit practice.
- **the intentional teaching model**: Illustrates the key components of effective intentional teaching. Explains each element, including the knowledge and beliefs that enable intentional teaching, what intentionality looks like in practice, and how intentions, strategies and reflective action work together to strengthen intentional teaching.
- **key foundational concepts that sit alongside the model**: These short, accessible summaries deepen understanding of key concepts that sit within or alongside the model:
 - the importance of responsive relationships
 - attunement
 - children's learning
 - play and learning
 - the adult role in learning
 - teaching, learning and assessment strategies
 - reflective action
 - culture of intentionality.
- **what intentional teaching looks like in action**: Presents a practical approach for developing learning intentions and selecting teaching strategies, with 6 practice examples drawn from ECEC settings. Practical tools include the **Guide to developing learning intentions**, the **Front of mind/back of mind summary sheet** and the **Knowledge, skills and dispositions teaching guide**.
- **a glossary of key terms**.

How to use this practice resource

Throughout this practice resource, sections and tools are linked to specific elements of the intentional teaching model. This is intended to help you see how the information and resources connect to the model. All of these resources were co-designed with Australian early childhood educators working across birth to 5 in diverse contexts and service types.

What intentional teaching is

Evidence shows that intentional teaching is often misunderstood or misinterpreted.

To address this, AERO has developed a plain language definition of intentional teaching that underpins the material in this practice resource.

This definition draws on the work of Ann Epstein, who first coined the term intentional teaching, and who describes the ‘intentional teacher’ as one who has ‘clearly defined learning objectives for children, employs instructional strategies likely to help children achieve the objectives and continually assesses progress and adjusts the strategies based on that assessment’.¹

It also draws on the more recent work of Mia Chen,² and her characterisation of intentional teaching as being made up of 2 parts – *intentionality and decision-making* – where ‘intentionality’ is the process of developing learning intentions and ‘decision-making’ is the active process whereby these intentions are enacted through the selection and use of suitable teaching strategies.

Throughout this practice resource, we emphasise the importance of understanding intentional teaching as a process – of developing intentions, strategies and reflective action on decisions to most effectively support and guide children’s learning and development.

AERO’s plain language definition of intentional teaching

Intentional teaching can include **pre-planned** and adult-led learning experiences, as well as **spontaneous opportunities** where educators respond to ‘teachable moments’ that align with their intentions. It may also mean making **deliberate decisions** about when to guide play and when to step back from and observe play experiences.

Effective intentional teaching is impacted by professional knowledge and beliefs, including knowledge of:

- the importance of **responsive relationships**, including relationships with and between children, with families, communities and supporting professionals
- **how children learn and develop** and **the role of the educator** in promoting children’s outcomes
- a range of **teaching, learning** and **assessment strategies** and understanding of how and when to use.

Effective intentional teaching involves **reflexivity** and **critical reflection**, both individually and collectively, on the beliefs and knowledge held about children as learners and the critical role of educators in **play-based learning**.

Effective intentional teaching includes children’s intentionality. Children have intentions for their learning and seek to understand things that matter to them. Intentional educators tune in to children’s intentions for their learning and **make decisions** about how to support and **extend children’s thinking**.

What a learning intention is

A learning intention is an aim, objective, goal or intended outcome for children's learning and development.

Children's intentionality

The EYLF V2.0³ includes an emphasis on the importance of children's intentions and intentionality. This is undeniably important, but ultimately curriculum decision-making remains an educator and teacher's responsibility.

In relation to 'intentional teaching', intentional educators incorporate children's intentionality into their decision-making processes by drawing on children's ideas, interests, curiosities and funds of knowledge to inform their decisions.

Children have intentions for their learning and seek to deeply understand things that matter to them. Educators tune in to children's intentions for their learning and make decisions about how to support and extend children's thinking.

Reflection questions

The questions in this section are an invitation to examine existing understandings, beliefs and assumptions to support more critical engagement with the information in this practice resource. These questions can be used for individual reflection, or as the basis for a team discussion.

How do I:

- go about discovering children's intentions for their learning?
- do this effectively with infants and toddlers?
- balance my intentions with children's intentions for learning?
- respond to children's intentionality in my decision-making?

We know from the evidence that educators need to make decisions about developing intentions and then turn these intentions into actions to maximise children's opportunities for learning. To support this, educators need to draw from and use a range of learning and teaching strategies.

This process of thinking about learning, developing learning intentions and the active decision-making process where educators select and use learning and teaching strategies is enabled and impacted by a range of **foundational professional knowledge** and **beliefs**.

These knowledge and beliefs include your:

- professional knowledge about how children learn and develop
- beliefs about your role in play-based learning
- knowledge of the children you are working with
- knowledge of teaching, learning and assessment strategies and when and how to use them
- understanding of curriculum frameworks
- knowledge of curriculum content.

The content in this practice resource will support critical reflection on your foundational knowledge and beliefs.



Why intentional teaching matters – What the evidence says

There is strong research evidence that intentional teaching makes a significant difference to young children's learning. Research shows that play-based learning is enhanced when educators take intentional roles in children's play. From this perspective, play-based learning and intentional teaching complement each other. Such a view moves beyond traditional ideas of a dichotomy between free play and adult involvement and presents an expanded view of play as a spectrum of playful experiences.⁴

Intentional educators understand that certain content areas, learning outcomes and contexts may require specific teaching strategies.⁵ This knowledge enables them to make deliberate decisions about transitioning between and integrating child-led, guided and adult-initiated experiences to effectively achieve their learning intentions.^{6,7}

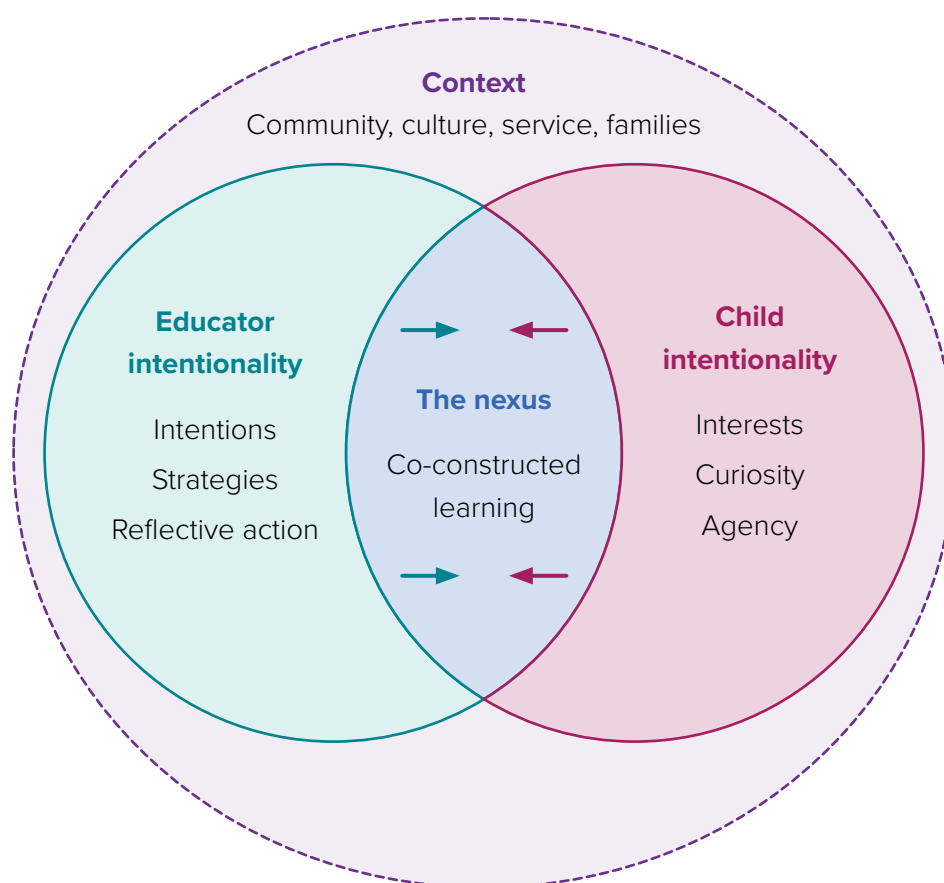
There is a significant association between educators' intentional support of children's play and outcomes for children.⁸ While play is vital, educator and teacher involvement and support are also crucial for children to develop conceptual understandings.⁹ This impact has been shown to be greatest for children who are experiencing educational and/or social disadvantage.^{10,11,12,13,14,15}

In relation to specific aspects of learning:

- Shared dialogue, high-quality adult–child interactions and rich conversational experiences are key for linguistic and cognitive development.¹⁶
- Toddlers' communication rates are higher when educator and teacher responsiveness is higher.¹⁷
- Intentional and explicit focus on mathematical concepts and practices effectively engage children in mathematical thinking.¹⁸
- Similarly, meaningful instruction in scientific and mathematical thinking is a strong predictor of future success.^{19,20,21}
- Everyday routines (such as mealtimes) can also provide important opportunities for rich exchange and the use of vocabulary in meaningful contexts, both of which are critical contributors to children's language growth.^{22,23}

Importantly, intentional educators also incorporate children's intentionality into their decision-making, drawing on children's interests, curiosities and diverse funds of knowledge to plan and implement play-based learning experiences. This requires educators to view children as capable, competent and agentic learners. This understanding is grounded in a deep knowledge of each child's learning and development, alongside intentional and relational pedagogies.^{24,25,26}

Intentional teaching, therefore, fosters a 'learning nexus', where the educator shifts from being a passive supporter or a provider of knowledge to an active collaborator and co-learner.²⁷ Doing so means being alongside children, joining in on experiences, taking a role in children's play or taking a step back to purposefully listen and observe children. Educators, and the children they work with, bring intentionality to learning. [Figure 2](#) shows what happens when those 2 things meet. Researchers have termed this the learning nexus.²⁸

Figure 2: The learning nexus

Source: Based on Legget and Ford (2013).²⁹

Intentional teaching isn't solely about what educators bring to the learning encounter. Children also bring their own intentionality, too. This includes their interests, curiosities and agency. When educators engage intentionally with children, they open a space where learning becomes a collaborative process and knowledge is co-constructed.

Figure 2 visualises this shared space. On one side is educator intentionality: intentions, strategies and reflective action. On the other is child intentionality: interests, curiosity and agency. Where the 2 meet, co-constructed learning happens.

Educator intentionality, child intentionality and the space where these both intersect, all sit within a larger circle representing context: the community, culture, service and families that shape everything that occurs within it.

Creating this learning nexus requires educators to make purposeful decisions about how to engage, attuning to the child, reflecting on the context and the learning intention, and choosing strategies that best fit the moment. It's about finding a balance between adult-guided and child-led, rather than defaulting to either.

Recognising this dual role moves understanding away from the misconception that intentional teaching is simply adult-directed, or that honouring children's agency means stepping back entirely.

For more information about the importance of intentional teaching, see AERO's discussion paper [Play-Based Learning with Intentionality](#).

Understanding this practice

These examples demonstrate what intentional teaching might look like in an ECEC service, and potential misconceptions.



What intentional teaching is

- Teaching with a clear purpose, where every choice you make supports children's learning, including how the environment is set up and the conversations you have throughout the day.
- Both planned and spontaneous, involving preplanned experiences, as well as in-the-moment responses to unexpected learning opportunities.
- A cycle of thinking and acting, where educators develop learning intentions, choose strategies, notice what children are doing, interpret their learning and adjust their approach.
- Knowing when to step back, including pausing, observing and giving children space to think and work things out.
- Built on warm, caring and attuned relationships, where deep knowledge of each child helps educators respond meaningfully to their individual learning pathways.
- Responsive to children's own intentions, recognising that children have their own ideas and goals and supporting what they're trying to do, not only what the educator plans.
- A shared team practice, strengthened by common language, collaborative planning and ongoing reflective conversations.
- Shaped by the environment, where decisions about room layout, materials, routines, transitions and outdoor spaces influence how children learn.
- Equally important outdoors, recognising that outdoor play offers rich opportunities for children's learning.
- A practice that supports fairness, helping all children learn well, including those who need extra support.



What intentional teaching isn't

- Limited to direct instruction or adult-led activities. It uses a wide range of strategies, including following children's ideas.
- Something that only happens in planned group times, as many learning opportunities occur in everyday routines and spontaneous moments.
- Confined to tables or indoor spaces. Outdoor environments offer just as many opportunities for rich learning.
- In conflict with play. Play is the main context where children learn and where educators can be most intentional.
- Not just what can be seen or written down. Many intentional decisions happen in the moment as educators think and respond.
- Rigid or scripted. Intentional teaching relies on purposeful, flexible decisions rather than fixed plans.
- Something only qualified teachers can do. All educators can use intentional strategies and encourage children's intentionality.
- About adults controlling children's learning. It recognises children as capable learners whose ideas and intentions matter.
- An extra task added to the workload. It's a way of thinking about everyday practice rather than an additional requirement.
- A one-size-fits-all approach, as effective strategies depend on the child, the moment and the context.

This early childhood intentional teaching model

The intentional teaching model ([Figure 3](#)) sits at the heart of this practice resource. It describes what:

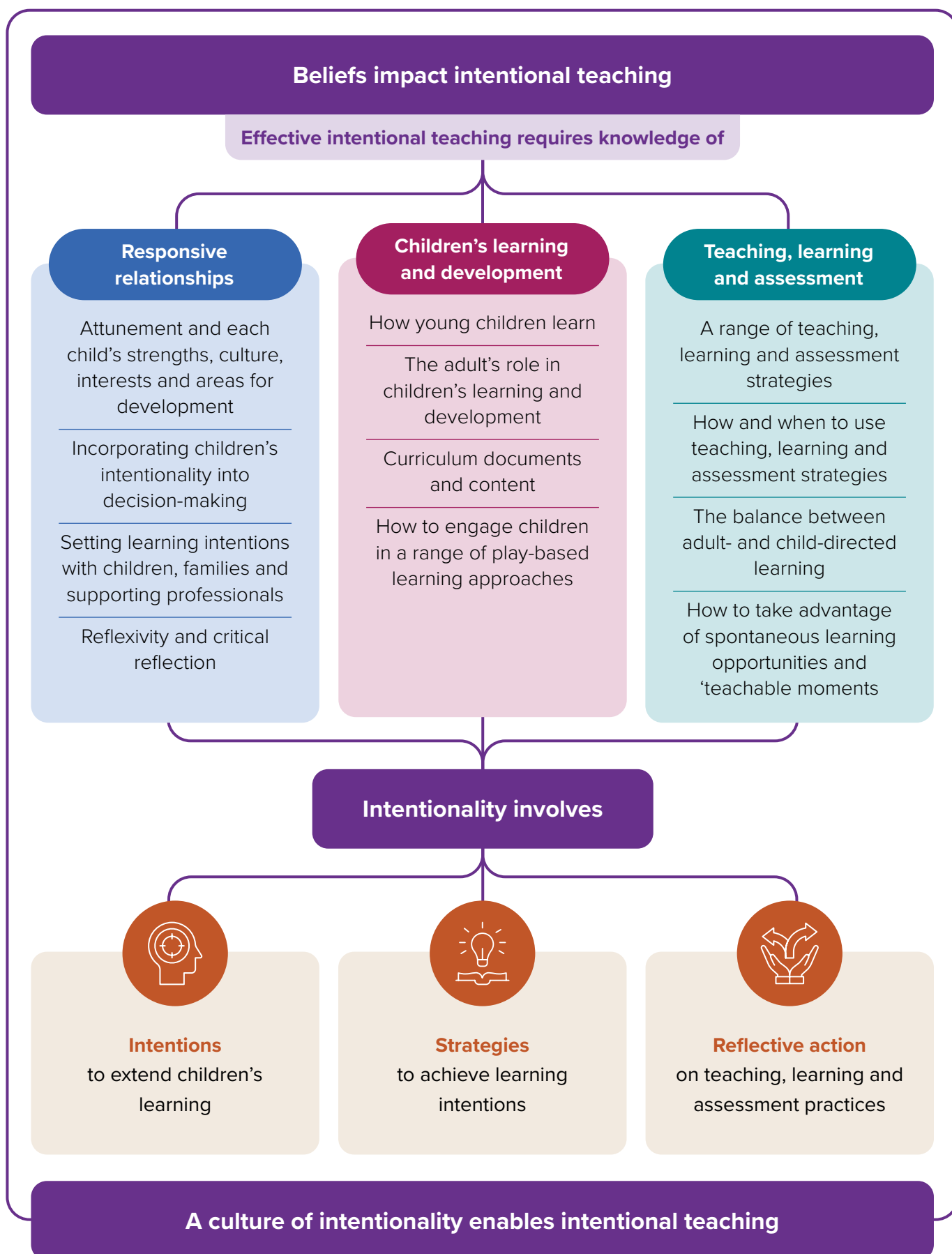
- needs to be in place for intentional teaching to happen
- intentionality involves
- sustains it over time.

This model was developed through AERO's co-design process with ECEC services and reflects both the research evidence and what practitioners told us about how intentional teaching works. It's not a checklist or a sequence of steps. It's a way of thinking about the important elements that shape effective intentional teaching. Remember, the evidence tells us that our roles as educators are critical to maximising children's opportunities for learning.

The intentional teaching model has interconnected sections:

- **Beliefs** about teaching and learning and the role of educators in supporting this impacts intentional teaching – effective intentional teaching starts with understanding (and possibly challenging) those beliefs.
- Effective intentional teaching draws on **knowledge** of responsive relationships, children's learning and development and teaching, learning and assessment strategies.
- **Intentionality** is shaped through intentions, strategies and reflective action.
- Intentionality involves:
 - intentions to extend children's learning
 - strategies to achieve learning intentions
 - reflective action on teaching, learning and assessment practice.
- The anchor for effective intentional teaching is creating a **culture of intentionality**. When stakeholders work together to cultivate a culture of intentionality (with each other, children, families and other professionals) we can support and extend children's learning. Intentional teaching is enabled by a culture of intentionality.

[Table 2](#) provides brief definitions for each element of the intentional teaching model.

Figure 3: An early childhood intentional teaching model

AERO's Intentional Teaching Model has been informed by research and co-designed with Australian ECEC educators and teachers.

Table 2: Definitions for each model element

Model element	Definition
Intentional teaching	Intentional teaching is teaching with a purpose to maximise outcomes for all children. It involves both educator and child intentionality. Intentional teaching is easily misunderstood – understanding what it is also means understanding what it isn't.
Effective intentional teaching is impacted by knowledge and beliefs	Beliefs impact intentional teaching. Effective intentional teaching requires professional knowledge. The 3 professional knowledge components of intentional teaching are: responsive relationships, teaching and learning strategies, and children's learning and development.
Responsive relationships	Responsive relationships are foundational to effective intentional teaching and underpin quality in ECEC. Warm, caring, supportive relationships ensure children feel safe, secure and included and optimise conditions for learning. An important part of early childhood practice is how you foster relationships with and between children, with families and with your colleagues.
Attunement and each child's strengths, culture, interests and areas for development	Attunement describes our ability to understand others and to use this understanding to be responsive. When you're attuned to children, you make better decisions about how to support their learning.
Incorporating children's intentionality into decision-making	Educators incorporate children's intentionality into their decision-making processes by drawing on children's ideas, interests, curiosities and funds of knowledge to inform their decisions.
Developing learning intentions with children, families and supporting professionals	When you see children as competent and capable learners, your approach to intentional teaching is strengthened. Developing shared intentions that include family perspectives and input from other professionals also promotes children's learning.
Reflexivity	Reflexivity and critical reflection underpin our intentionality. Effective educators examine how their knowledge, beliefs and attitudes impact on children. When we continually reflect on the decisions we make, this maximises learning for all children.
Children's learning and development	Children learn best through play. Intentional teaching is underpinned by our professional knowledge and beliefs. This includes a nuanced understanding of play and the adult's roles in fostering children's learning and development.
How young children learn	Children learn best through play. Play is not one thing – it includes a range of behaviours and activities. Seeing play as a continuum allows us to conceptualise intentionality within play-based learning.
The adult's role in children's learning and development	Quality adult–child interactions positively impact children's outcomes – particularly children experiencing disadvantage. When we purposefully move in and out of play – depending on the child, context and type of learning that's happening – we support children's learning.

Model element	Definition
Curriculum documents and content	Professional knowledge includes understanding relevant curriculum documents. Without knowledge of curriculum and pedagogy, child development and your context, your work is less effective.
How to engage children in a range of play-based learning approaches	Effective educators take on different roles and use different strategies in play, joining in, guiding or observing, and offering environments to provoke exploration, enjoyment and collaboration.
Teaching, learning and assessment	In intentional teaching, we understand the nature of learning for young children, the importance of play-based learning and our role in supporting children through a range of teaching, learning and assessment strategies.
A range of teaching, learning and assessment strategies	Intentional teaching requires us to have knowledge of and integrate a repertoire of evidence-based practices to extend learning and provide opportunities for language and social development.
How and when to use teaching, learning and assessment strategies	We're most effective when we draw on a range of strategies, depending on the learning intention, child and context. Different learning types lend themselves to different strategies.
The balance between adult- and child-directed learning	Finding a balance between child- and adult-directed learning depends on the situation. Knowing how much to be involved requires observation and careful consideration of the child, learning intentions and context.
How to take advantage of spontaneous learning opportunities and 'teachable moments'	Remaining flexible is part of the challenge and joy of working with young children. Considering 'What's <i>most important</i> in this moment?' allows us to know when to stick to your original intention and when to take advantage of spontaneous learning and teachable moments.
Intentionality involves	Professional knowledge enables and is enabled by intentionality. Intentionality is the process of thinking about and developing learning intentions, selecting strategies to achieve these intentions and actively reflecting on these actions.
Intentions to extend children's learning	Intentions are what you hope children will learn. Developing clear intentions will help identify specific learning you're aiming for and plan learning experiences and how you and your colleagues will support them. Learning intentions bring focus and clarity to children's learning.
Strategies to achieve learning intentions	Once you've identified your learning intentions, plan the best way to achieve them. Consider: What type of learning is this? What teaching strategies are most appropriate? Attunement with children, consideration of your environment and resources support this process.
Reflective action on teaching, learning and assessment practices	Reflective action highlights the dynamic way you reflect on your intentionality, and children's intentionality, in planned and spontaneous moments and supports making this process explicit. Box 1 provides more information about reflective action.

Model element	Definition
A culture of intentionality enables intentional teaching	Intentional teaching is collaborative. Shared understandings and consistent approaches to intentional teaching deepens professional knowledge across teams and embeds ongoing intentionality in everyday practice. A collaborative and responsive culture supports children's learning and engagement. A culture of intentionality refers to a shared commitment by all stakeholders, enabled and sustained by educational leaders, to purposeful practice and quality outcomes for all children as well as the conditions that foster ongoing intentionality and a focus on learning. Box 2 provides more information about building a culture of intentionality.

Box 1: Reflective action

Reflective action as a concept highlights the dynamic way educators reflect on their intentionality, and children's intentionality, in planned and spontaneous moments and supports making this process explicit.

Reflective action includes insights drawn from noticing and reflecting on spontaneous and planned opportunities to extend children's learning. Combined with this, reflective action includes reflective decisions about where children are in their learning, next steps for learning, and reflecting on the use of teaching strategies. A feature of reflective action is to encourage children's intentionality and capacity for reflection on their own learning.

| Further information on this concept is presented in the [Reflective action fact sheet](#)

Box 2: Culture of intentionality

A culture of intentionality can be characterised by shared language, reflective discussions and collective responsibilities which lay a foundation for intentional teaching to be enacted across a team. A culture of intentionality can be actively fostered. Service and educational leaders enable and sustain the development of a culture of intentionality.

AERO's intentional teaching model research found that a culture of intentionality exists when services create a shared understanding around intentional teaching and what it looked like in their context, with the children they're working with.

Services where a culture of intentionality thrive use team meetings to:

- reflect on intentional teaching and create shared understandings and approaches
- discuss and reflect on intentional teaching within practice
- display intentional teaching posters and other visual resources to keep the concept 'alive' within the day to day.

The research shows that when a culture of intentionality exists within a service, staff knowledge and practice improves with a flow on to children's learning.

| Further information on this concept is presented in the [Culture of intentionality fact sheet](#)

Working with this early childhood intentional teaching model

This practice resource explores the intentional teaching model in practice. Three tools in particular support strengthening intentional teaching practices:

- **Guide to developing learning intentions:** This resource supports you in developing clear, specific learning intentions.
- **Front of mind/back of mind summary sheet:** This resource helps you organise and prioritise learning intentions, staying focused in the moment while remaining open to other possibilities.
- **Knowledge, skills and dispositions teaching guide (including the Continuum of teaching strategies):** This resource supports you in identifying the kind of learning you're aiming for and choosing the most appropriate teaching strategies to achieve it.

Reflection questions

Consider your underpinning beliefs and knowledge:

- What are my core beliefs about play and its role in learning?
- How do I view children as learners?
- What assumptions do I hold about children's capabilities?
- What knowledge do I draw on when I make decisions with children?

Where these beliefs and knowledge come from:

- What experiences, training, people or settings have shaped my beliefs?
- Which beliefs come from evidence, and which come from habit, tradition or personal preference?

Additional questions to guide reflection:

- What does our service philosophy say we believe about intentional teaching and the specific components of the intentional teaching model?
- Is this true for all of us?
- How does intentionality look currently in each of our rooms?
- What things are we most looking to transform or improve in relation to intentional teaching?
- How do we share the importance of intentional teaching with families?



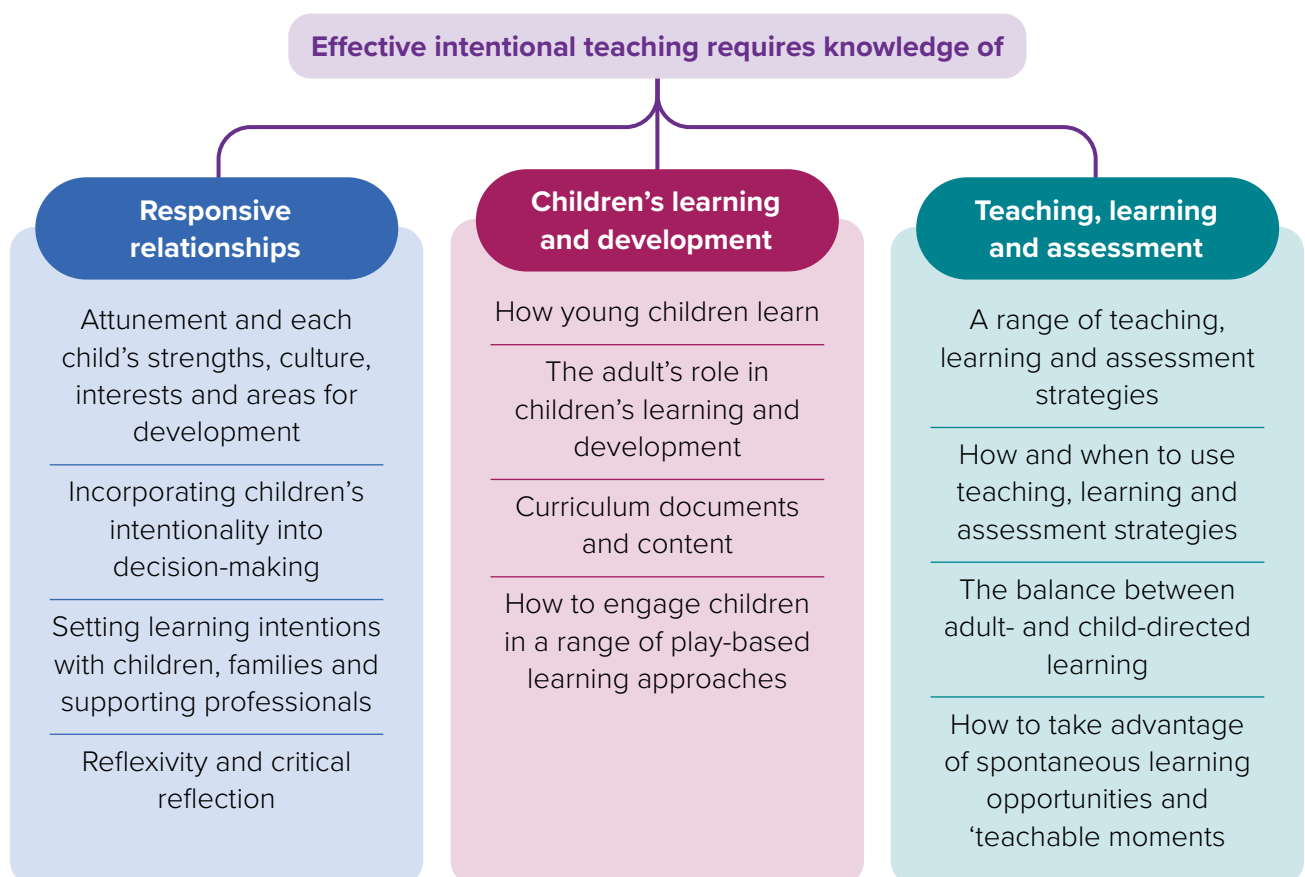
Understanding the foundations – Professional knowledge and beliefs

AERO's research identified 3 key professional knowledge pillars that enable and impact effective intentional teaching. These 3 pillars are shown in Figure 4.

These include:

- responsive relationships
- children's learning and development
- teaching, learning and assessment strategies.

Figure 4: Three professional knowledge pillars for effective intentional teaching



We've created a series of fact sheets (compiled in this practice resource) that support you in developing professional knowledge aligned with each of these pillars.

We've also created additional fact sheets to support your professional knowledge around new concepts developed as part of the intentional teaching model research: reflective action and culture of intentionality. While these concepts don't sit under the professional knowledge pillars, understanding these concepts is critical to intentionality.

Each fact sheet introduces key evidence-informed foundational knowledge that underpins effective intentional teaching. The fact sheets can be used individually or as a single resource. They are:

1. [The importance of responsive relationships](#)
2. [Attunement](#)
3. [Children's learning](#)
4. [Play and learning](#)
5. [The adult role in learning](#)
6. [Teaching, learning and assessment strategies](#)
7. [Reflective action](#)
8. [Culture of intentionality](#)

We have provided resources with these fact sheets to help move knowledge into practice. The [Play and Learning packs](#) complement the model developed in the 2025 research. They're focused on a specific aspect of the program and support meaningful planning for individual children and the whole group. They were designed to help early childhood teachers, educators and leaders understand:

- what intentional teaching is
- what it looks like in practice
- how to strengthen it in their settings.



Fact sheets

1. The importance of responsive relationships	22
2. Attunement	24
3. Children's learning	26
4. Play and learning	28
5. The adult role in learning	30
6. Teaching, learning and assessment strategies	32
7. Reflective action	35
8. Culture of intentionality	36

1

The importance of responsive relationships

Key points

- Relationships are the foundation for effective ECEC.
- Relationships don't 'just happen'. Effective educators actively and intentionally support the development of their own relationships with children and also of those between children.
- Successful relationships benefit both adults and children and help to ensure ECEC settings are places of warmth, care and togetherness.



Relationships in early childhood education and care

ECEC is based on relationships. The intertwined nature of care and education for young children means that the quality of the relationships between adults and children in ECEC settings underpin everything else that happens.

Effective educators prioritise relationships because they know how important they are. Warm, caring and supportive relationships ensure that children feel safe, secure and included and provide the best conditions for effective learning.

At the same time, it's through their relationships with children that teachers and educators gain the knowledge about each child's strengths, interests and capacities that help them to make effective decisions about what learning to pursue and how best to go about this.

Through strong relationships educators can:

- build connections that foster a sense of community and belonging
- understand and extend children's thinking
- promote language learning
- model important interpersonal skills and dispositions
- support and guide children's behaviour
- ensure that ECEC settings are warm, welcoming and characterful spaces.

Relationships between children are also important. In ECEC settings, children learn how to interact with each other in ways that are positive and constructive. They:

- form friendships and experience the joy of togetherness and companionship
- cooperate and collaborate in their play
- learn how to function as a member of a group
- contribute ideas and help to make decisions
- listen to others and work to resolve differences.



While many of these important relationships form easily and naturally, some don't. Effective teachers and educators work to support all children to form meaningful and rewarding relationships with each other and with the adults around them. They also actively work to develop a sense of community and group identity within the group of children that they work with. And they prioritise warm, supportive and frequent interactions as the building blocks of strong relationships.

In this way, relationships both help us to plan and implement effective learning experiences for children and are themselves essential learning experiences – helping children experience positive interactions and connections with others and learn how to be an active and valued part of a community.

Reflection questions

It's important to prioritise building positive relationships with children and their families.

Ask yourself:

- How do I plan for building supportive relationships in daily routines?
- How do I ensure children experience consistent emotional support while in the centre?
- How do I support children in developing skills to interact successfully with others?
- How do I build this into my daily program and planning?



2

Attunement

Key points

- Attunement means understanding and being ‘in tune’ with someone else.
- Attunement develops through supportive interactions and relationships.
- When educators are attuned to the children they’re working with, they can make better decisions about how to support and guide their learning and wellbeing.



Attunement in early childhood education and care

Attunement describes our ability to understand others and to use this understanding to be responsive.

When we’re attuned with someone, we’re ‘in tune’ with them. We ‘get’ them and we understand what they’re thinking and how they’re feeling.

For early childhood educators, attunement is a vital skill to develop. When we’re attuned to the children we work with, we can make better decisions to support their learning and emotional wellbeing.

How attunement develops

Attunement develops through the interactions we have with each child and the relationships we develop.

It’s about getting to know each child and learning what makes them ‘tick’. When we pay attention to children as individuals and begin to understand their unique personalities and ways of thinking, we become more attuned.





Why attunement matters

Importantly, attunement allows us to adjust our approach to better meet the specific needs of individual children. Being attuned to a child helps us know how they're likely to learn best, to notice when they're not coping or are unsure, and how to support them in just the right way.

In this way, attunement is the key to how we make sure that learning intentions and teaching strategies are optimised for each child. It's also how we ensure that our interactions with each child have the right 'tone' so that these interactions are supportive and helpful.

This helps us when it comes to making decisions about learning. In most situations, there are many possible directions learning can go. Knowing what's most important to pursue is difficult if we don't understand the children we're working with. Attunement to each child's strengths, interests, capabilities and areas for development makes such decisions much easier, and the resulting learning more meaningful.

Reflection questions

Parents and caregivers have aspirations and intentions for their children's learning too. Ask yourself:

- How do I work with families to best understand their child?
- How do I tailor my approach to make families feel comfortable sharing in ways that value them as their child's first teacher, and the expert in their children's lives?
- How do I listen to what families hope for and want for their children?
And how do individual educators in the team do this?
- How do I build this into my decision-making?



3

Children's learning

Key points

- There are different kinds of learning identified in the EYLF V2.0 – knowledge, skills and dispositions.
- Early childhood plays a critical role in supporting children to be successful learners now, and into the future.
- Our role as educators is to be intentional in identifying, prioritising and promoting learning and development to maximise children's outcomes.



Learning in early childhood education and care

Learning is defined in the EYLF V2.0 (p. 67) as:

the process of gaining knowledge, skills and dispositions and from birth children naturally use exploration to expand their intellectual, physical, social, emotional and creative capacities. For young children, learning is happening all of the time. It is how they make sense of the world and their place in it.

The EYLF V2.0 (p. 7) highlights this when it defines curriculum as:

all the interactions, routines and events, planned and unplanned, that occur in an environment designed to foster children's learning and development.

Knowing what learning to promote and how best to do this, however, isn't always easy. We often think of learning as being about what you know. The idea that knowing information equals learning and intelligence is common. But while facts and information are an important part of learning, they're not the only part.

The EYLF V2.0 identifies 3 different kinds of learning in early childhood: knowledge, skills and dispositions.

Knowledge is the facts or information you know about something.

A **skill** is the ability to do something – it might be applying knowledge in a practical situation (e.g., using your knowledge of the alphabet to write your own name), the ability to do a practical, hands-on task (e.g., cutting with scissors), a more abstract mental skill (e.g., problem-solving) or a social-emotional skill (e.g., entering play or regulating emotions).



Dispositions are defined as ‘habits of mind that affect how children approach learning’ (AGDE, p. 67). Often dispositions aren’t things that we consciously know, but rather are underlying ways that we look at and engage with the world. Examples of dispositions include curiosity, flexibility, creativity, imagination, problem-solving and persistence.

These categories provide a helpful way to think about learning and can guide our decision-making and actions. Focusing on **knowledge** is important, but knowledge alone can lead to learning that’s superficial or is only about remembering information without necessarily understanding or being able to use it.

One of our aims in teaching young children is to encourage more complex (or higher-order) thinking. Higher-order thinking is the ability to analyse information, solve problems and create new ideas and connections. It’s based on **knowledge**, but also requires **skills and dispositions**. We, therefore, need to make sure we promote all 3 kinds of learning, rather than focusing on just one or 2.

Early childhood experiences also play a critical role in laying a foundation for lifelong learning. One of the biggest impacts we can have on young children’s lives is to provide learning environments, interactions and experiences that develop the **skills and dispositions** that will support children to become successful learners.

Reflection questions

Learning in early childhood paves the way for successful lifelong learning.

Ask yourself:

- How do I maintain high expectations for all children’s learning?
- How do I tailor my approach to ensure each child’s learning needs are respected and supported?
- How do I ensure children are respected as active participants and decision-makers in their learning?



4 Play and learning

Key points

- Play is a natural and universal part of childhood.
- Play is not one thing – it includes a range of behaviours and activities.
- Play provides motivation for learning, but learning through play isn't always systematic or comprehensive.
- Play-based learning is most effective when it includes a balance of child-led and adult-guided play.



Play and learning in early childhood education and care

Play is a natural and universal part of childhood. Through play, children engage with the world around them, learning their place in it and how it functions. Drawing on Early Childhood Australia's (ECA) Statement on Play,³⁰ play is recognised as a fundamental context through which children develop wellbeing, learning and a sense of belonging. This is supported by evidence from multiple disciplines, including neuroscience. The neuroscience of play suggests that playful experiences stimulate neural pathways associated with executive functioning, emotional regulation, creativity and social cognition. Through exploratory, social and imaginative play, repeated activation of brain networks strengthens synaptic connections and supports the development of the prefrontal cortex – a region critical for self-regulation, planning and problem-solving. As the ECA Statement emphasises, play is not a break from learning but a primary mechanism through which children construct knowledge and develop competence. Neuroscientific research further indicates that playful interactions promote brain plasticity and healthy stress regulation, providing important foundations for lifelong learning and resilience.^{31,32,33}

For such a common behaviour, play is a surprisingly difficult concept to define. It can describe a range of different activities and behaviours that children engage in. Rather than trying to define play as being 'one thing', it can be useful to think of it as a continuum of behaviours that share some common features.

These include that play is usually:

- freely chosen
- enjoyable
- hands-on and interactive
- process-oriented (i.e., focused more on the doing than on the end product).

Taking this approach, we can see that play ranges from what we typically call ‘free-play’ (i.e., play that is completely child-led) through to ‘adult-guided play’ or ‘playful learning’ (i.e., activities or experiences that aren’t exactly play but retain key characteristics of play, such as being hands-on and enjoyable).

Importantly, play provides a motivation for learning. We know that learning is most effective when it’s meaningful, enjoyable and engaging. That is – when it’s fun. This is why, for young children, learning through play is so important and effective.

Learning in play is also usually holistic. It’s rarely about just one thing, or one subject. Rather, it’s dynamic and integrated. This is important for young children. It suits the way their brains are working at this point in their lives and ensures learning is interesting and engaging.

However, it also means that what children learn in their early years isn’t always systematic or comprehensive.

Learning through play is a great way to learn about things that interest you. But not everything that’s important to learn is going to be interesting to every child. A purely play-based approach to learning is, therefore, likely to be hit and miss, with some children learning lots and some not so much. Even for individual children, a purely play-based approach is likely to lead to lots of learning about some things and less about others, depending on each child’s interests and opportunities.

Educators, therefore, have a key role in helping to guide, shape and lead children’s learning in important and helpful directions. How we do that, however, isn’t always straightforward. Research suggests that a balance of child-led and adult-guided learning works best. Knowing when and how to be involved in learning is a key skill for educators to develop.

Reflection questions

Play-based learning builds on children’s curiosity and sense of wonder.

Ask yourself:

- How do I balance a range of approaches to supporting children’s learning through play?
- How do I respond to children in spontaneous moments to enrich their learning?
- How do I plan to extend and enrich children’s thinking and learning in ways that celebrate children’s individual strengths and capabilities?



5

The adult role in learning

Key points

- Effective learning results from a combination of child-led, adult-guided and adult-directed learning.
- Effective educators take on different teaching roles depending on the situation.
- Children should engage most in learning that is child-led or adult-guided, and sometimes in learning that is adult-directed.



Adults' role in learning in early childhood and care

Research shows that young children's learning is most effective when educators take on an active role in the learning process. What this looks like, however, isn't always straightforward.

It means finding a balance between child-led, adult-guided and adult-directed learning. Knowing when and how to be involved in learning is a key skill for educators to develop. Too much adult involvement can smother children's learning, while too little leaves learning to chance.

As educators, this means our roles have to be flexible and varied. While we might have a 'natural' teaching style that we instinctively gravitate towards, we also need to know how and when to switch into other styles of teaching that will best support learning in a particular situation.

Child-led play and learning is most effective when an experience or materials are open ended and/or exploratory and where educators don't have set goals in mind (or where the goal is for children to be creative and explore the possibilities inherent in a resource or situation).

The adult role in child-led play is primarily to observe and take note of children's ideas, interests and actions in order to inform planning for future learning.

Adult-guided play is best used when educators have broad goals in mind but are also open to children's input and direction.

The adult role is to engage with children in a way that supports their learning and guides in the direction of the educator's goals, but is flexible enough to allow children's ideas and intentions to guide in other directions too.

Guided play may also develop from child-led play when educators see an opportunity to step in to take advantage of a 'teachable moment' to extend or guide children's learning.



Adult-directed learning is best used when an experience or materials have a specific focus (i.e., are closed rather than open-ended) or where there's a clear right and wrong way to do something.

The adult role is to help children learn a specific skill or concept that would be difficult or impossible for them to learn without guidance or direction, or where an extended period of trial and error to learn a new skill would be counterproductive and lead to unhelpful frustration.

The proportions of each of these will vary depending on the nature of the experiences and resources provided for children. But, in general, children should engage mostly in child-led play or guided play, and sometimes in adult-directed learning.

Reflection questions

Balancing child-led, adult-guided and adult-directed learning is an important skill to develop.

Ask yourself:

- How do I deepen my understanding of how to balance these types of learning?
- How can I become aware of my own preferred styles and approaches so that I can continuously broaden my skills?
- How do I monitor and reflect on the balance evident in my practice?



6

Teaching, learning and assessment strategies

Key points

- Educators build a repertoire of teaching, learning and assessment strategies that provide the foundation for effective teaching and learning (see [Figure 5: Continuum of teaching strategies](#) for examples).
- Effective educators combine their knowledge of early childhood curriculum and pedagogy, child development and the context they're working in to underpin their decision-making.



Teaching, learning and assessment strategies in early childhood education and care

Using a range of teaching, learning and assessment strategies involves understanding how and when to use different strategies to support children in progressing (growing, developing) their knowledge, skills and dispositions for learning. Professional knowledge and experience support educators in delivering a balance across the spectrum of adult- and child-directed learning. It also helps them know how to maximise opportunities for spontaneous learning in the moment through identifying and planning on the fly when teachable moments present themselves. Teaching, learning and assessment strategies include:

- **using relevant curriculum documents.** (For many, this will primarily be the EYLF V2.0 but could also include other state-based or organisation-specific learning frameworks). These help us understand, in broad terms, what we should be aiming for and how we should be going about it.
- **balancing adult-directed and child-led learning.** This includes understanding the nature of learning at this age, the importance of play-based learning and the role of the adult in supporting learning through a range of different teaching strategies. It also means being skilled enough to take advantage of spontaneous learning opportunities and teachable moments.
- **Understanding of child development.** Understanding how children's learning and development typically progresses enables us to make effective decisions about what learning is most appropriate and important for children and the most effective ways to support this learning. It can help us tailor our approach to the ages of the children we're working with. Understanding learning trajectories (i.e., how learning typically progresses in particular areas) helps us make decisions about how to extend learning and what learning to introduce next.

AERO has developed a series of [Early Childhood Learning Trajectories](#) that describe how children learn and develop in the following key domains:

- Executive functions
- Social and emotional learning
- Mathematical thinking
- Language and communication
- Physical development.

- **Understanding of context.** In early childhood education, context is everything. What works in one setting with one group of children and families may not work in another. Understanding your context by getting to know your service and the community that you work with is crucial if you're going to be able to effectively put your professional knowledge into action.
- **Knowledge about children.** Ultimately, all of our professional knowledge and experience enable us to make better decisions about how we support and guide the learning of the specific children that we're working with. Understanding children as individuals, knowing their strengths, needs, interests and personalities helps us to be more effective decision-makers about the learning that is most important for them.

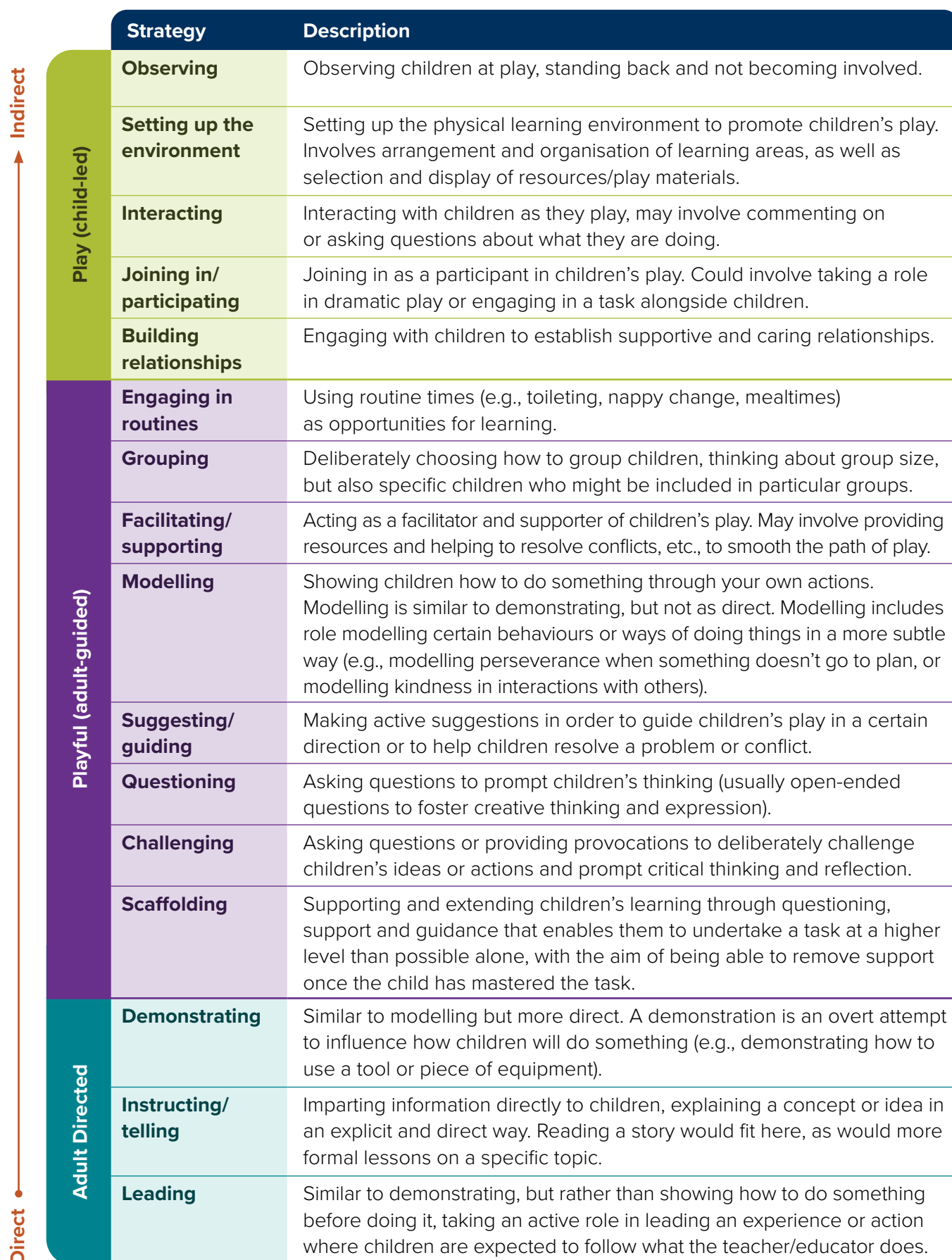
Reflection questions

Teaching, learning and assessment strategies influence children's ongoing learning and development.

Ask yourself:

- What curriculum frameworks, documents and resources support me in my work?
- How do I use assessment in a variety of ways to inform my knowledge of what children know and can do?
- How do I consider each child's context and the service environment and community in my pedagogical decision-making?



Figure 5: Continuum of teaching strategies


The diagram illustrates a continuum of teaching strategies, organized into three main categories: Play (child-led), Playful (adult-guided), and Adult Directed. A vertical arrow on the left indicates the level of directness, ranging from Indirect at the top to Direct at the bottom.

	Strategy	Description
Play (child-led)	Observing	Observing children at play, standing back and not becoming involved.
	Setting up the environment	Setting up the physical learning environment to promote children's play. Involves arrangement and organisation of learning areas, as well as selection and display of resources/play materials.
	Interacting	Interacting with children as they play, may involve commenting on or asking questions about what they are doing.
	Joining in/participating	Joining in as a participant in children's play. Could involve taking a role in dramatic play or engaging in a task alongside children.
	Building relationships	Engaging with children to establish supportive and caring relationships.
Playful (adult-guided)	Engaging in routines	Using routine times (e.g., toileting, nappy change, mealtimes) as opportunities for learning.
	Grouping	Deliberately choosing how to group children, thinking about group size, but also specific children who might be included in particular groups.
	Facilitating/supporting	Acting as a facilitator and supporter of children's play. May involve providing resources and helping to resolve conflicts, etc., to smooth the path of play.
	Modelling	Showing children how to do something through your own actions. Modelling is similar to demonstrating, but not as direct. Modelling includes role modelling certain behaviours or ways of doing things in a more subtle way (e.g., modelling perseverance when something doesn't go to plan, or modelling kindness in interactions with others).
	Suggesting/guiding	Making active suggestions in order to guide children's play in a certain direction or to help children resolve a problem or conflict.
	Questioning	Asking questions to prompt children's thinking (usually open-ended questions to foster creative thinking and expression).
	Challenging	Asking questions or providing provocations to deliberately challenge children's ideas or actions and prompt critical thinking and reflection.
Adult Directed	Scaffolding	Supporting and extending children's learning through questioning, support and guidance that enables them to undertake a task at a higher level than possible alone, with the aim of being able to remove support once the child has mastered the task.
	Demonstrating	Similar to modelling but more direct. A demonstration is an overt attempt to influence how children will do something (e.g., demonstrating how to use a tool or piece of equipment).
	Instructing/telling	Imparting information directly to children, explaining a concept or idea in an explicit and direct way. Reading a story would fit here, as would more formal lessons on a specific topic.
	Leading	Similar to demonstrating, but rather than showing how to do something before doing it, taking an active role in leading an experience or action where children are expected to follow what the teacher/educator does.

7

Reflective action

Key points

- Reflecting on educator and child intentionality supports intentional teaching practices.
- Reflective actions impacts developing learning intentions and selecting and using teaching, learning strategies and assessment practices.
- Professional knowledge enhances our ability to engage with reflective action.
- Reflective action can be thought of as our 'on the fly' thinking.



Reflective action in early childhood education and care

Reflective action highlights the dynamic way educators reflect on their intentionality, and children's intentionality, in planned and spontaneous moments, and supports making this process explicit.

Reflective action includes insights drawn from noticing and reflecting on spontaneous and planned opportunities to extend children's learning. Combined with this, reflective action includes reflective decisions about where children are in their learning, next steps for learning and reflecting on the use of teaching strategies. A feature of reflective action is to encourage children's intentionality and capacity for reflection on their own learning.

Intentional teaching and the process of intentionality calls on educators to engage in cycles of thinking and reflection on their approaches. The concept of reflective action captures this 'on the fly' thinking.

Intentionality within play-based learning is a complex process with interconnected components. The decision-making that educators engage in through spontaneous moments, as well as planned moments, happens largely inside educators' heads, making these decision-making processes invisible to others.

Naming reflective action as an important concept makes the implicit, explicit. Reflective action is a dynamic decision-making process.

Reflection questions

Critical reflection and evaluation are key elements of high-quality practice.

Ask yourself:

- How do I think and reflect in action? What supports would help me to do this?
- How does my reflective action support children's intentionality?
- How do I support children to reflect on their own learning?



8

Culture of intentionality

Key points

- A culture of intentionality enables intentional teaching.
- A culture of intentionality is characterised by shared language, reflective discussions and collective responsibilities that lay a foundation for intentional teaching to be enacted across a team.



Creating a culture of intentionality in early childhood education and care

Regular team meetings that focus on supporting children's learning helps with intentional teaching practice. A culture of intentionality includes all stakeholders, including children and their families. Existing literature suggests although intentional teaching is frequently conceptualised as an individual educator's practice, its enactment is inherently relational and situated within team contexts.³⁴

In shared learning environments, where children move between educators and spaces across the day, pedagogical conversations become particularly essential as they enable educators to develop collective understanding.

Cultivating shared understanding of both intentional teaching and play across the broader learning community is critical to its successful implementation. Service and educational leaders play a critical role in the development of a culture of intentionality. Embedding ongoing intentionality within everyday practice requires educators to adopt expanded understanding of intentional teaching – one that recognises that they need to draw from a variety of teaching, learning and assessment strategies and practices.

Teaching and learning occur in context. This means teaching, learning and assessment might look different across ECEC services based on the children, families and communities. Professional dialogue that supports children's learning in context enables tailored and contextual approaches. This means that, as educators, intentionally reflecting on opportunities for maximising children's learning involves us thinking about how teaching, learning and assessment is impacted by our context, the team we're working with and the children and families we're working with.

Educators' practices are shaped not only by their professional knowledge and pedagogical beliefs, but also by policy expectations, established service practices, accountability requirements and parent perspectives.³⁵

Using the intentional teaching model and supporting resources enables a collaborative culture of intentionality characterised by professional dialogue, collective pedagogical approaches and reflective action.

What intentional teaching looks like in action

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Intentionality – Professional knowledge into practice

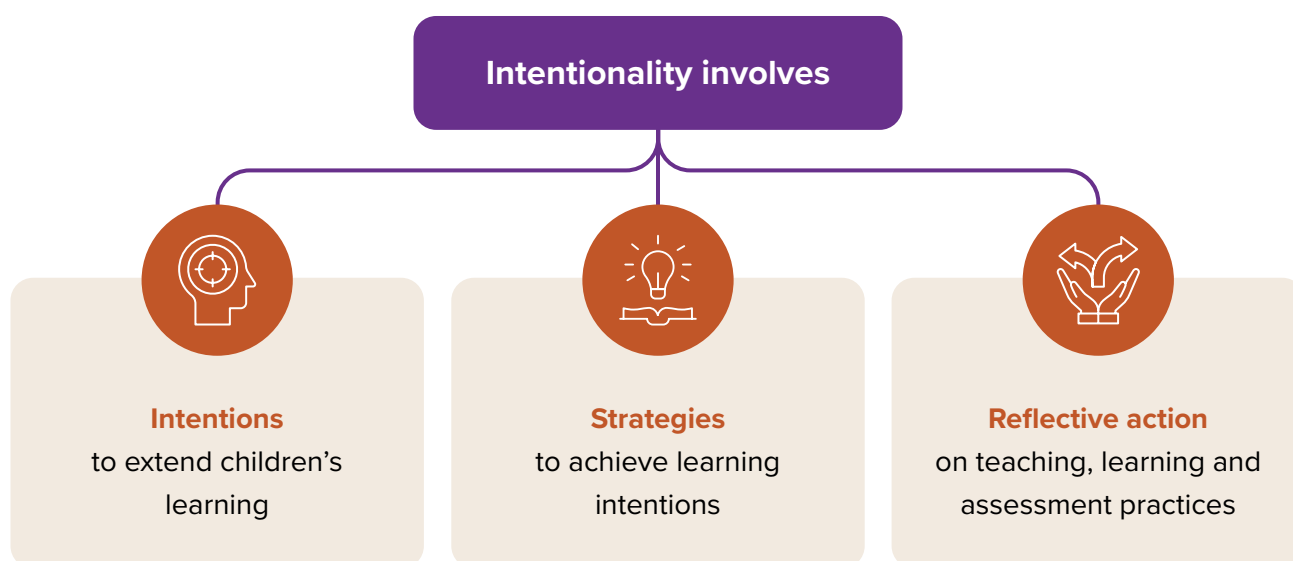
Educators hold a critical role in maximising outcomes for all children. The following resources help educators move their professional knowledge into practice.

Importantly, this isn't a one-way process – professional knowledge supports educators to be intentional in practice *and* practice builds professional knowledge.

The model shows that professional knowledge enables – and is enabled by – intentionality, which involves intentions, strategies and reflective action (Figure 6). The concept of 'reflective action' related to intentional teaching is a new contribution from the research.

Effective intentional teaching enables and is enabled by professional knowledge.

Figure 6: Intentionality involves intentions, strategies and reflective action



In the intentional teaching model, educators – no matter their level of experience – benefited from using intentional teaching resources to support their professional knowledge and practice. ECEC educators who participated in the study said:

‘I’m studying a diploma at the moment – this is very helpful.’

‘It’s been a good opportunity to reflect ... It’s empowered me, knowing that I was doing it right.’

The resources are creating ‘shared language and understanding’ around intentional teaching.

These resources provided opportunities to build new knowledge and practice, reflect on or refresh existing knowledge and practice, and helped establish consistency of understanding and approach across teams.

The following resources were used in this research to support effective intentional teaching:

- [Intentional teaching in action – The Intentional Teaching Thinking Tool](#)
- [Guide to developing learning intentions](#)
- [Knowledge, skills and dispositions teaching guide](#)
- Continuum of teaching strategies with learning types ([Figure 8](#)).
- [Being an intentional teacher poster](#).

Intentional teaching in action – The Intentional Teaching Thinking Tool

Intentional teaching is a crucial part of effective early learning. When educators are thoughtful about their intentions and purposeful in how they put them into action, children's learning is enhanced.

Intentional teaching is, therefore, a 2-step process. The first step (intentionality) is about developing intentions and knowing what you're aiming to achieve. The second (professional decision-making and actions) is about choosing the best ways to do this.

Often, however, these steps aren't considered separately. Instead, intentional teaching is seen as being all about teaching strategies. Crucially, this approach often leaves the intentions out of the equation, and, by doing so, reduces the effectiveness of our actions.

Developing meaningful, relevant and thoughtful learning intentions isn't always easy. It requires a thorough knowledge of the children you're working with, as well as strong understandings of:

- child development
- how children learn
- the content to be learned.

However, with clear and specific intentions in mind, educators are much better able to successfully support and guide children's learning.

We designed the Intentional Teaching Thinking Tool to help educators to do just this – to develop meaningful learning intentions and to choose the best teaching strategies to achieve them, to enhance each child's learning.

What is a thinking tool?

A thinking tool is simply a framework or guide to help us to think about something. A good thinking tool can help to keep us on track as we think about something complex or can help us to consider things that we might otherwise overlook.

Teaching young children is a complex and demanding task. Every day, educators make hundreds of professional decisions. Sometimes, the sheer number of these decisions can feel overwhelming. Sometimes, the sheer busyness of the day means we don't have time to think things through as deeply as we'd like.

The Intentional Teaching Thinking Tool aims to help educators focus on their intentions as the basis for this decision-making. By focusing on 6 key questions, it helps you cut through the busyness and complexity of the day, and gain the clarity needed to develop meaningful learning intentions and select the best ways to achieve them.

Who is the Intentional Teaching Thinking Tool for?

The Intentional Teaching Thinking Tool is designed to support all educators, regardless of their qualifications and experience.

For skilled and experienced educators, the tool serves as a reminder of good practice and can help to encourage ongoing reflection about appropriate learning intentions and teaching strategies. While skilled educators may not need to use it to guide every decision, it can be a useful check to ensure that thinking and decision-making processes remain on track over time. It can also be used to support mentoring less experienced educators as they develop their teaching skills and sense of intentionality.

For new educators, the tool provides a scaffold to support the development of their thinking about intentionality and professional decision-making. Initially, it may need to be referred to on a regular basis, but the intention of the tool is that educators will gradually internalise the decision-making process that it outlines, so that this will ultimately become a part of their everyday thinking.

How does the Intentional Teaching Thinking Tool work?

The core of the Intentional Teaching Thinking Tool is a set of 6 questions that focus on what you're aiming to achieve (your intentions) and how you're going to achieve it (your actions). Working through these questions will help educators clarify and crystalise their thinking.

Accompanying the thinking tool are several other resources and tools you can use, as needed, to help you answer each question.

These include:

- [Guide to developing learning intentions](#) (including a [Learning intention template](#))
- [Front of mind/back of mind summary sheet](#)
- [Knowledge, skills and dispositions teaching guide](#) (including Continuum of teaching strategies).

The thinking tool is also designed to be used in conjunction with [AERO's Early Childhood Learning Trajectories](#) in the following 5 areas:

- [Executive functions](#)
- [Social and emotional learning](#)
- [Mathematical thinking](#)
- [Language and communication](#)
- [Physical development](#).

The end result of using the thinking tool is clear and specific learning intentions, matched with effective and appropriate teaching strategies that enhance children's learning.

Six key questions

The Intentional Teaching Thinking Tool consists of 6 key questions that guide the developing of learning intentions and the selection of actions to achieve them.

The questions have been carefully developed to capture the thinking process of intentional teaching as clearly and simply as possible. At the same time, the questions are broad enough to allow them to be used in any situation.

The first 3 questions **focus on intentions** and help you sift through what you know in order to decide what learning is most important to focus on.

Intentionality

- 1 What do I know?
- 2 What stands out?
- 3 What learning will I focus on?

The second 3 questions **focus on the actions** you will take to achieve your intentions and how involved you should be in supporting and guiding the learning that takes place.

Curriculum decision-making

- 4 What type of learning is this?
- 5 What will I do to achieve this?
- 6 What strategies will I use?

In this way, they support you to move from intentionality to effective curriculum decision-making.

1

What do I know?

This question aligns with Step 1 of the EYLF V2.0 Planning Process – Observe

This question asks you to consider what you know about the children that you work with based on your interactions with them, your observations of their play and learning, and your conversations and interactions with their family members.

From your observations, what do you know about:

- the children's strengths and abilities?
- their interests and ideas?
- their areas for learning and development?

At this stage, it is also important to think about the group as a whole.

Depending on the age of the children you are working with, consider:

- How does the group function?
- What are the dynamics like between the children?



2

What stands out?

This question aligns with Step 2 of the EYLF V2.0 Planning Process – Analyse

Observation is a great tool for finding out more about the children that you work with. However, it also produces lots of information. The key to effectively planning for children's learning is being able to work out what parts of this information are most important. This question is where you do that.

To be important, the information we have about children needs to tell us something. It might tell us something directly about the child, it might tell us something about us as adults or it might tell us something about the learning opportunities that are available in the learning environment.

So, what are we looking for? What makes something 'stand out'?

Firstly, ask yourself, 'Why is this important?'

If you are unsure, the following 'moments' are a useful guide.

As you observe children, look out for:



'Wow!' moments

These are moments that stand out because they are a significant achievement or step forward. Usually, they bring with them a sense of joy and achievement. Some 'Wow!' moments are personal and important for an individual child, while others will be important for all children. Recognising 'Wow!' moments is about knowing the children as individuals and what is important for each of them (being attuned), and also knowing about child development and important developmental milestones for all (professional knowledge).



'Aha' moments

These moments are about you as an adult. They are moments where the children's actions trigger an idea, or where something clicks into place to give you a new understanding of what is going on.



'What's missing?' moments

These moments help you identify a gap in learning or an area that needs greater attention. It might be for an individual, or it could be for the group as a whole. They are important because they help you to reflect on your program and identify new areas to focus on.



'Need to know more' moments

These are moments that puzzle you, where something important seems to be happening, but you aren't sure what. These moments demand more investigation, but then often lead to an 'Aha' moment!

3

What learning will I focus on?

This question aligns with Step 3 of the EYLF V2.0 Planning Cycle – Planning

Your answers to Questions 1 and 2 will hopefully have helped narrow your focus. But there are still probably a number of potential directions in which you could take the learning that you have observed.

This question is about clearly identifying the learning intentions that you will focus on, using the following steps:



Make a choice!

The first step in this process is to make a decision. While it is important to be flexible and open to different kinds of learning, there is a point at which you need to decide what specific learning you will pursue.

To make this decision, weigh up what you have discovered by answering the first 2 questions: 'What do you know?' and 'What stands out?'

Think too about what learning you know is important (based on your knowledge of the EYLF V2.0 and of children's development) and, importantly, what learning is most achievable in the situation.

Remember, learning can be about knowledge, skills, dispositions or a combination of these. Identify what type of learning seems most relevant or important to the situation.

Remember, too, learning usually works best when children are interested and motivated. Where possible, use the learning potential of the situation to help provide motivation, rather than trying to introduce something that is unrelated or that pushes in too much of a different direction.



Identify what you want to do about this learning

While there are many different teaching strategies we can use, our overall intention in any learning experience will usually fit into 5 broad approaches:

Introduce	For new learning that does not directly extend on existing play, introduce a new concept, idea or resource.
Simplify	If an existing task or idea is too challenging or complex, simplify it by going back a step or breaking it down into more manageable pieces.
Consolidate	Repeat or offer a similar experience to help a child master an idea, skill or task.
Extend	Identify and support the next step for this learning.
Challenge	Prompt critical thinking about an idea.



Be specific about what learning you would like to see

Use the [Guide to developing learning intentions](#) to help set specific learning intentions.

Being specific will help you to:

- Be clear about what you are aiming for.
- Plan learning experiences that are most likely to lead to this learning.
- Plan how you and your colleagues can best support this learning to occur.

For groups of children, consider if there might be different intentions for different children within the same experience.

Don't worry if you identify multiple learning intentions at this point. The holistic nature of learning in early childhood means this is highly likely!

The [Front of mind/back of mind summary sheet](#) outlined in the next step in the process will help you to prioritise your intentions.



Prioritise your learning intentions

Use the [Front-of-mind/back-of-mind learning intentions](#) to identify:

- What is *most* important or immediate? (Front-of-mind intentions)
- What else is important to keep in mind? (Back-of-mind intentions)

Front-of-mind intentions help keep us focused on our most immediate task.

Back-of-mind intentions help us keep in mind other, less immediate but still important intentions.

Back-of-mind intentions are very helpful when an experience does not go as planned and we have to revise our intentions quickly, or during spontaneous interactions and 'teachable moments'.



4

What type of learning is this?

This question aligns with Step 3 of the EYLF V2.0 Planning Cycle – Planning

Active adult involvement plays an important role in young children's learning. Knowing how involved to be though is not always easy to judge. Too much involvement can smother children's learning, while too little can leave it unfocused and subject to chance.

Use the [Knowledge, skills and dispositions teaching guide](#) to determine what type of learning you are aiming for.

This will help you identify what kind of learning experiences are likely to be most effective in meeting your intentions.

Generally speaking, knowledge will require more adult direction. Dispositions will require less, and skills will require adult support but not necessarily direction.

Consider whether this might vary for different children participating in an experience. Will some children require more adult assistance to participate than others?

Remember, too, a well-balanced program is mostly play, and what's not play is mostly playful. Adult-directed learning is important, too, but should only be a small part of what you do.

As you think about your plans, think too about the balance between adult- and child-directed learning across your program (see Figure 7 for suggested proportions).

Figure 7: Approximate proportions of play, playful learning and adult-directed learning in effective ECEC programs



5

What will I do to achieve this?

This question aligns with Step 3 of the EYLF V2.0 Planning Cycle – Planning

Now that you have identified your learning intentions and the type of learning you are aiming for, you can start to plan the best way to achieve this.

Think about the specific experiences or interactions you are going to plan for:

- What are you going to do?
- What resources and/or preparation will you need?

Having clear intentions will help with this. So will knowing the children. Plan experiences that will lead to your intentions *and* be interesting and engaging for the children involved.

Next, consider the learning environment. How are your intentions supported by the set-up of the physical environment and the resources provided?

Look at the environment through a child's eyes. What does it 'say' to you? What could you do here? What possibilities are there? How would you use the resources that are available? Are they interesting? Are there enough of them to make this a satisfying experience?

Now, look at it again from an adult perspective. Does the set-up and provisioning of resources match your intentions? To test if this is clear, think about how you would explain these intentions and the way they are reflected in your learning environment to someone else. Does your explanation make sense?



6

What strategies will I use?

This question aligns with Step 3 of the EYLF V2.0 Planning Cycle – Planning

Once you have identified the kind of learning you are aiming for, and the learning you are going to offer you can identify what your involvement in the experience will look like.

Again, the [Knowledge, skills and dispositions teaching guide](#) will help you. The Continuum of teaching strategies section of the guide outlines a range of teaching strategies, ranging from less to more directive.

Consider the specific teaching strategies that you might use that are most appropriate for the learning goals you have set, and whether these might be different for different children.

Your knowledge of, and attunement to, individual children will help determine what will be most effective.

In play and playful learning, consider how your involvement can support and guide children's learning without overwhelming or disrupting the children's play.

For adult-directed learning, consider how you can still make these experiences engaging and interactive, so that children retain a voice and are able to contribute to their own learning.

Plan how you will share this information with your colleagues.

Do you already have processes in place to share curriculum planning? If not, when could you find time to talk through each other's intentions and plan how you will work together to implement them?

Clearly identified learning strategies, plans and teaching strategies work most effectively when everyone is aware of them and they are implemented consistently.



Examples of the Thinking Tool in practice

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Example 1 Making patterns

1. What do I know?

Many of the children in the Waratah group (3- to 5-year-olds) have been incorporating informal patterning into their play. They have been using loose parts and natural materials to make pictures and patterns, and have been decorating their block buildings with stones and crystals in simple repeating patterns. They have also proudly shown off their creations to educators and been keen to take photos to record what they have made.



2. What stands out?

This stands out as a significant moment for the children ('Wow!' moment) – their pride in their work shows this. As an educator, it also stands out ('Aha moment') as an opportunity to further investigate ideas about patterns and patternmaking as important mathematical concepts.

3. What learning will I focus on?

In order to help the children think more consciously about patterns and patterning, it would be good to introduce them to specific pattern-related vocabulary. This would help them communicate about what they are doing in their play and help them to consciously recognise and identify patterns in their environment. So...

To introduce the Waratah group to learning about patterns, specifically vocabulary associated with patterning (e.g., same, different, pattern, repeat). This links to EYLF V2.0 Learning Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators.

4. What type of learning is this?

The learning here is knowledge about patterns. Knowledge is most effectively learned when there is a higher degree of adult direction in the learning experiences.

5. What will I do to achieve this?

To do this, we will read a book that includes lots of patterns and talk about what a pattern is and see what patterns we can identify in our environment. As educators, we will all consciously use patterning language when we are talking with the children about their creations.

6. What strategies will I use?

I will introduce the vocabulary about patterning through our group time discussion (**telling/instructing**), and we will follow this up with modelling of patterning language in everyday situations and **questioning** to guide the children's thinking about patterns and **encourage** them to recognise patterns and predict what might come next in a sequence or pattern.

Example 2

Climbing with Audrey

1. What do I know?

Audrey (18 months) has been so interested in climbing lately. But she seems to find it hard to climb on the equipment that we have out at the moment and is getting frustrated and discouraged.

2. What stands out?

It seems like the equipment is too big for her, and she is finding it too hard to climb on it, even though she wants to. ('What's missing' moment and 'Aha' moment).

3. What learning will I focus on?

To help Audrey develop her climbing skills, we need to simplify the task so that she is able to be successful and develop her skills before attempting to climb on the larger equipment.

To simplify Audrey's learning about climbing, specifically climbing up and over a climbing frame. This links to EYLF V2.0 Learning Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity and Learning Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing.

4. What type of learning is this?

This kind of learning is a skill and will be learned most successfully with adult guidance and support.

5. What will I do this to achieve this?

I will find some smaller trestles and climbing frames and set up a lower and less complex obstacle course for Audrey.

6. What strategies will I use?

The teaching strategies I will use are **setting up the environment** and then encouraging Audrey to attempt to climb over the new obstacle course. As she does so, I will provide **guidance, support** and **encouragement**.



Example 3 Fairness and Inclusion

1. What do I know?

Some children in the Wombat group (4-year-olds) have been excluding other children from their play, saying things like 'Only our friends can play here' or 'We're playing with this, there's no room for you' or 'This game is only for girls'. With adult support, the children are able to be more inclusive, but this does not always happen when there is not an adult close by. I know this kind of behaviour is common at this age, but it is making everyone upset!

2. What stands out?

The children are still developing their sense of fairness, and including others is not happening consistently. It needs more work to consolidate this. I think focusing more on positive social interactions within the group and building a sense of community and fellowship among the children will help.

3. What learning will I focus on?

To consolidate the Wombat group's learning about fairness, specifically how to include others in their play in an inclusive way. This links to EYLF V2.0 Learning Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity and Learning Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world.

4. What type of learning is this?

This learning is complex. It involves a combination of dispositions (friendliness, inclusivity and fairness), skills (social skills) and knowledge (understanding social rules and expectations, and how it feels to be excluded).

Achieving it will involve a combination of adult support and guidance as well as some adult direction.



5. What will I do to achieve this?

To address the immediate issue, we will talk with the group, review our 'class rules' and ask the children for their ideas on what we can do to be more inclusive. We will also take the opportunity to introduce an 'appreciation circle' where the children will be able to talk positively about their peers and identify positive things that they 'appreciate' about each other. This will become a regular and ongoing part of our routine to help create a more positive social climate within the group.

6. What strategies will I use?

The group discussion and initial setting up of the appreciation circle will require **adult direction** and **instruction**. However, during our discussion, we will also ask **questions** and seek input from the children.

In the appreciation circle, the adults will go first to model the kind of things that might be said. Children will then be **guided** and **supported** to participate.

Example 4 Dinosaur names

1. What do I know?

Ava (4 years 6 months) has suddenly become very interested in writing over the past few weeks. She has been writing her own name and trying to copy other environmental print around the room, but is finding it challenging to form all of the different letter shapes needed.

Her interest in dinosaurs has also continued, and she has been poring over the dinosaur books, doing lots of drawings and loves trying to say all of their complicated names.



2. What stands out?

Ava's interest in writing is great (a real 'Wow!' moment), and she has shown the ability to form a small number of letters accurately and legibly. While she is so interested, it seems like a great opportunity to support her in developing this further. Name writing is an important start, but with such a short name, it doesn't provide a lot of practice!

3. What learning will I focus on?

To extend Ava's learning about literacy, specifically learning to form a wider range of letter shapes. This links to EYLF V2.0 Learning Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners and Learning Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators.

4. What type of learning is this?

Writing is a skill that involves physical coordination, as well as knowledge of the different letter shapes.

It will be best supported by adult guidance with some adult direction in relation to the specific letter shapes.

5. What will I do to achieve this?

Ava's interest in dinosaurs provides a great opportunity to bring these 2 learning interests together. Children love how long and complicated dinosaurs' names are. Because of this, they provide great opportunities for writing long words with lots of different letters in them.

I will set up the dinosaur books at the writing table so that Ava can practice writing some of the dinosaurs' names.

6. What strategies will I use?

I will **set up the environment** at the writing table and (if needed) encourage Ava to participate. I doubt she will need much encouragement! I will suggest that we try to write some of the dinosaur names, providing **guidance** and **encouragement** and **modelling/demonstrating** how to write those letters that she finds challenging.

Example 5 The transition train!

1. What do I know?

The Bilbies group (2-year-olds) are a great group to work with. They have really great relationships with each other, they always enjoy singing and music and they just love being outside! But when it's time to come in for lunch and sleep, that transition really doesn't work. It just ends up being chaotic, disorganised and stressful, and then no one is in a good frame of mind when we sit down for lunch.

2. What stands out?

The transition isn't working because we are expecting children to move from one space to another, and from one part of the day to another, without anything to smooth that change. The children end up feeling dysregulated and confused because they don't know what is happening and because it is chaotic.

3. What learning will I focus on?

This is mainly about what we are doing (or not doing) as educators, but for the children, I'd really like them to be able to come in for lunch in a happy and settled mood. It's about helping them to better regulate their emotions at this time by changing how we manage this transition.

4. What kind of learning is this?

Emotional regulation is a skill. It develops with practice and definitely isn't fully developed at this young age. As a skill, it will require adult support and guidance to help develop it.

To introduce the Bilbies to a transition activity that will help smooth the transition to lunch and, specifically, develop their ability to regulate their emotions. This links to EYLF V2.0 Learning Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing.



5. What will I do to achieve this?

The transition is difficult because we are expecting young children to act like adults and simply move from one thing to the next. What if we used something they love to do as a way to make this easier? A transition song would pick up on their love of singing and help make the transition a fun game that would be enjoyable rather than stressful.

We'll sing the 'train song' as we trundle around the yard gathering everyone up for our 'train trip' inside. Doing this each day will help create a familiar ritual for this transition that will help the children to better regulate their emotions at this time of the day.

6. What strategies will I use?

To begin this ritual, I will take a directive role, **leading** the children by singing the song and **guiding** the 'train' around the yard to collect all of our passengers. As this transition becomes more familiar, I will be able to reduce my level of involvement and act more as a **guide** and **participant**.

Example 6

What floats and what sinks?

1. What do I know?

This week, Archer, Jayden, Sam and Ahmed (4-year-olds) have been very interested in the water tray in the playground. Almost by accident, they started to notice that some things float and some things sink, and this prompted lots of discussion and even arguments! For the moment, they have all agreed that heavy things sink and light things float.

2. What stands out?

This has been fascinating for a couple of reasons. Firstly, it was really interesting to see them theorising and discussing a scientific concept like this and drawing conclusions based on their observations. At the same time, it was also interesting to watch the group dynamics. Sam is often quiet and not always confident in sharing his ideas with the larger group. But in a small group with his friends, he was very vocal!

3. What learning will I focus on?

In this experience, I really want to focus on the scientific learning about buoyancy, but also on the problem-solving and theorising element of this. It would be interesting to see how they respond to some materials that don't fit their expectations – light things that sink and heavy things that float. It would also be great for Sam's confidence if we could continue this experience with these children and continue to encourage his active participation.

Front-of-mind goal: To challenge Archer's, Jayden's, Sam's and Ahmed's understandings about buoyancy, specifically to encourage further problem-solving and theorising about what makes things float. This links to EYLF V2.0 Learning Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners.

Back-of-mind goal: To consolidate Sam's self-confidence, specifically his willingness to share his thinking and contribute to group discussions and problem-solving. This links to EYLF V2.0 Learning Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity and Learning Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators.

4. What type of learning is this?

Learning about buoyancy and what floats is knowledge, but I am more interested in promoting the children's thinking, theorising and problem-solving. These are skills and will respond to adult guidance and scaffolding, while leaving room for the children to come up with their own answers.

For Sam, self-confidence is a disposition. Providing opportunities for him to contribute his ideas with a group of friends that he feels comfortable with will help him to feel more confident sharing his thinking. Adult support and encouragement will assist this.

5. What will I do to achieve this?

Provide a range of additional materials with the water play area that will challenge the children's current thinking – for example, a heavy piece of wood that floats, small light things that sink.

6. What strategies will I use?

Some adult guidance will be important to engage the children with this task. Reminding them of their previous theories and using questioning to encourage them to think about whether the new materials challenge these or not.

For Sam, it will be about being aware of his role within the group and, if needed, encouraging him to contribute and supporting the others to listen to his ideas in order to build his confidence.

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Guide to developing learning intentions

Learning intentions are what you hope children will learn.

They can be called many different names – goals, aims, objectives, outcomes – but essentially, they're all about what you would like to see happen.

Developing clear learning intentions will help you to:

- identify the specific learning that you're aiming for
- plan learning experiences that are most likely to lead to this learning
- plan how you and your colleagues can best support this learning.

Sometimes, we avoid developing learning intentions because we feel that they can be too prescriptive or too limiting. The nature of young children's learning means that it can go off in all sorts of unexpected directions. This unpredictability is part of the challenge and the joy of working with young children.

However, without a clear idea of the learning you're aiming for, it's unlikely that it will just happen. And while children will always be learning 'something', that 'something' isn't always the most important thing. Child-led learning is incredibly rich and valuable, but it isn't always systematic. Avoiding intentions leaves learning to chance. Research shows that learning is most effective when there's a balance between child-led and adult-guided learning.

Getting this balance right is the key.

In developing intentions, it's helpful to be clear and specific so we know what we're aiming for. At the same time, we need to be flexible enough that we remain open to other possibilities and can change our intentions when needed.

Knowing how and when to do this is a key skill for educators to develop and comes with practice. Remembering to always ask 'What's most important *in this moment*?' will help you know when to stick with your original intentions and when to let them go.

Having clear intentions, and understanding the reasons behind them, will guide this decision-making.

Without intentions, we don't really know where we're going. With them, we have a sense of direction and of the how important that direction is.

Keeping this in mind will help us decide, in the moment, whether it's:

- worth maintaining our original intentions
- maintaining our original direction but finding other ways of getting there
- whether we should change direction altogether.

Developing learning intentions

Not all learning intentions will be written down. Many will be developed in the moment, in response to children's ideas and actions. Others will be held in the back of your mind, waiting for the opportunity to be put into action.

Writing intentions, though, can help to clarify exactly what it is that you're hoping to achieve.

If you're finding it difficult to decide on intentions, writing them down can be a good way to practice thinking about intentions and the language that you can use to express them. Written intentions are also easier to share with your colleagues and families.

When developing learning intentions, it's important to **focus first on the learning you would like to see** rather than the experience you'll provide. Doing this will ensure that you know what you want children to learn rather than just what you want them to do.

Separating your intentions from your actions (or teaching strategies) is also important because it helps to open other possibilities for learning. Jumping straight to what we want children to do often leads us to the obvious experience or activity. Identifying the learning first can help us think of a range of different experiences that might be helpful to achieve it.



The first step of developing learning intentions is, therefore, to **identify the learning that you'll focus on**.

Remember, not all learning is equally important or of equal value. Prioritising one kind of learning means not focusing on others. Try to make sure that your learning intentions make the best use of the learning time that you have.

Using the **Intentional Teaching Thinking Tool**, identify what you know about the child or children that you're working with and what stands out as being important.

Use your knowledge of your context and of the children and families. Being attuned to children (and families) will help you to know where they're at now and what's important for them to do next.

Identify who the learning intention is for: Is it an individual child or a group of children?

Developing **shared learning intentions** is an important strategy to make teaching easier. Trying to teach every child everything individually is impossible. Individual intentions are important for some learning but using them in combination with group intentions will make better and more efficient use of your time as the teacher or educator. Shared learning is often more effective too. Learning together means sharing ideas and thinking and developing the social skills needed to cooperate and collaborate effectively.

With this in mind, look for intentions that apply for multiple children, or for intentions that go together.

Think also about the learning outcomes from the **EYLF V2.0** and where the learning you're considering fits within these.

It can help to identify a broad learning area first (e.g., maths, literacy or social skills) before zooming in more closely on the specific aspects of learning you'll focus on.

It's also helpful to think about what you're aiming to do in relation to this learning.

Broadly speaking, we have 5 main approaches to learning. We can:

- **introduce** new learning
- **simplify** existing learning that's proving too complex or challenging
- **consolidate** learning that's in the process of being mastered
- **extend** learning once it has been consolidated
- **challenge** learning when we want to encourage children to think critically or in new ways about something.

With all of this in mind, you can start to put together your learning intention. If you aren't sure how to do this, the [Learning intention template](#) is a useful tool.

Learning intention template

Step 1

Identify the following information:

- **Who is the learning intention for?** This could be an individual child or group of children
- **What action will you be taking in relation to this learning intention?** Will you be introducing, simplifying, consolidating, extending or challenging learning?
- **What broad area of learning are you focusing on?**
- **What specific learning will you focus on?**
- **How does this link to the EYLF V2.0 Learning Outcomes?**

Step 2

Use the information to fill the blanks in the following statement:

To action who for? learning about broad area, specifically specific area. This links to EYLF outcomes.

For example:

To introduce the Waratah Group to learning about patterns, specifically vocabulary associated with patterning (e.g., same, different, pattern, repeat). This links to Learning Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators.

or

To simplify Audrey's learning about climbing, specifically climbing up and over a climbing frame. This links to Learning Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity and Learning Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing.

or

To consolidate the Wombat group's learning about fairness, specifically how to include others in their play in an inclusive way. This links to Learning Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity and Learning Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world.

or

To extend Ava's learning about literacy, specifically learning to form a wider range of letter shapes. This links to Learning Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners and Learning Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators.

or

To challenge Archer, Jayden, Sam and Ahmed's learning about buoyancy, specifically to encourage further problem-solving and theorising about what makes things float. This links to Learning Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners.

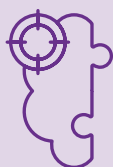
Note: These examples come from the [Examples of the Thinking Tool in practice](#).

Front-of-mind/back-of-mind learning intentions

There are different types of learning intentions. Some are short-term goals that are specific and focused on a particular experience or activity. Others are longer-term intentions that you work towards over many experiences. And some are broad underlying intentions that you will always have in mind.

All of these types of intentions are important, but sometimes there are so many that they can feel overwhelming. Mentally organising your intentions can help make them feel more achievable.

Dividing them into front-of-mind and back-of-mind intentions is one simple way to do this.



Front of mind

Front-of-mind intentions are your primary focus, or your **immediate priorities**. They are what you want to achieve in a specific experience or interaction. They are what you would probably say if someone asked you what the purpose of a particular experience was.

Front-of-mind intentions **help you focus** on learning that is most immediate and important in the moment.



Back of mind

Back-of-mind intentions, on the other hand, are not your primary intentions. But that doesn't mean that they aren't important. They might be **longer-term intentions** that you are working on in the background, or that don't suit being the main focus of attention. Or they could be underlying intentions that you always have in mind, ready to be put into action when the right opportunity arises.

Back-of-mind intentions **allow you to be flexible** if your intentions need to change. They also help you to take advantage of spontaneous 'teachable moments' as they arise. Having thought about learning ahead of time, you will be more aware of spontaneous opportunities when they arise, and better prepared to capitalise on them.

Thought about in this way, front-of-mind and back-of-mind intentions work together to support different kinds of learning.

Front of mind/back of mind summary sheet

Learning experience or child:

Date:



Front-of-mind intentions

1.

2.

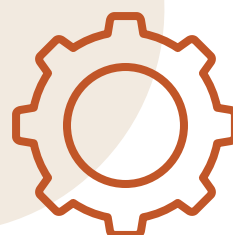
3.

Back-of-mind intentions

1.

2.

3.



Knowledge, skills and dispositions teaching guide

The EYLF V2.0 identifies 3 kinds of learning that are important in the early years: knowledge, skills and dispositions.



Knowledge

Knowledge is the facts or information you know about something.



Skills

A skill is the ability to do something – it might be applying knowledge in a practical situation (e.g., using your knowledge of the alphabet to write your own name), the ability to do a practical, hands-on task (e.g., cutting with scissors) or a more abstract mental skill (e.g., problem-solving).



Dispositions

A disposition is an underlying way of looking at and engaging with the world. Dispositions can be positive or negative but are deeply rooted and often subconscious.

Positive dispositions include curiosity, creativity, imagination and persistence.



Different teaching strategies will be more effective for some kinds of learning than others. Knowing what kind of learning you’re aiming for will help you to select teaching strategies that are most likely to be effective. As [Table 3](#) explains, each of the different learning types lends itself to different teaching strategies. Some of these are outlined in the Continuum of teaching strategies with learning types (Figure 8).

Using Figure 8 and the Continuum of teaching strategies ([Figure 5](#)) will help you to decide what strategies and approaches to implement, depending on the learning you’re aiming for.

Figure 8: Continuum of teaching strategies with learning types

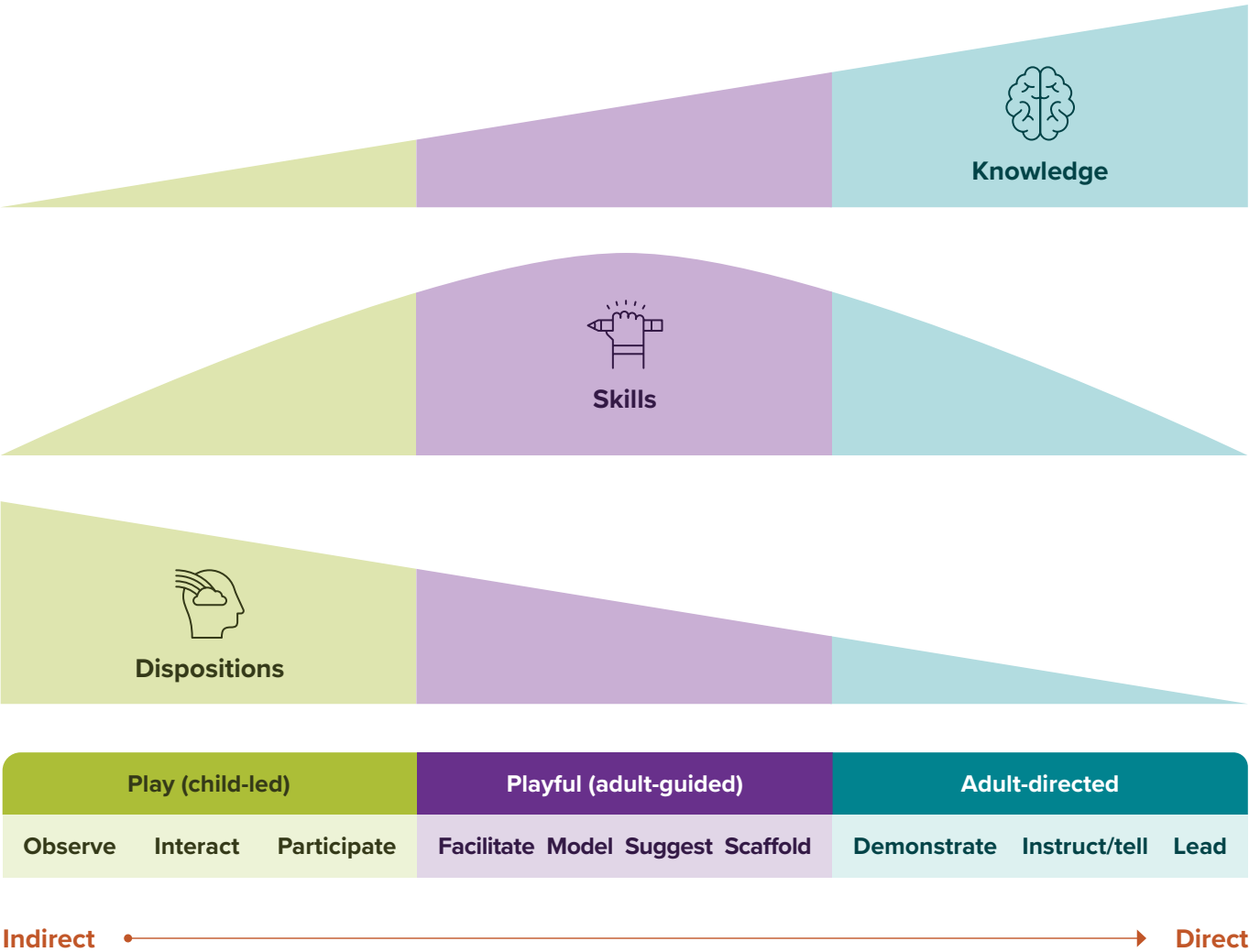


Table 3: Knowledge skills and dispositions

Learning type	Definition	Effective teaching strategies
 Knowledge	Facts or information you know about a topic.	Knowledge is most effectively taught using adult-guided or directed approaches. This is particularly true for specific knowledge systems that are difficult or impossible to learn intuitively (e.g., the alphabet).
 Skills	The ability to do something – it might be applying knowledge in a practical situation (e.g., using your knowledge of the alphabet to write your own name), the ability to do a practical, hands-on task (e.g., cutting with scissors) or a more abstract mental skill (e.g., problem-solving).	Skills typically require practice and, often, modelling and demonstration. They are not usually learned effectively by just being told about them, although sometimes knowledge is important in order to learn a skill that applies it. Some skills may be learned without the need for adult involvement, but this is not the case for most. A level of adult engagement is usually necessary and/or helpful. Approaches such as scaffolding, modelling and providing opportunities for practice are likely to be most successful. The aim of teaching a skill is to provide support for children while they are learning but then to be able to step back once the child has mastered the skill so that they can do it on their own.
 Dispositions	An underlying way of looking at and engaging with the world. Dispositions can be positive or negative, but are deeply rooted and often subconscious. Positive dispositions include curiosity, creativity, imagination and persistence.	Dispositions develop over time as the result of many learning experiences. They cannot generally be taught in a direct way, but rather are learned via experiences that encourage and promote particular ways of doing things. Adult modelling, support, encouragement and validation are also important. Strategies such as setting up open-ended environments that encourage creativity and curiosity are helpful, as are intentional interactions whereby adults support children to persevere when learning is difficult. While dispositions themselves are not usually taught in adult-directed ways, there is value in using adult-led learning to help children learn about dispositions and to label them (e.g., reading a book with the theme of resilience or perseverance to help children recognise what it means and value it in themselves). Such adult-led experiences, however, are best thought of as being knowledge-related learning experiences (i.e., learning about the disposition). While such knowledge is important, just knowing about a disposition is not enough. Opportunities to practice and develop key learning dispositions over time (as outlined in this section) remain essential.

The relationship between knowledge, skills and dispositions

While it can be helpful to think about knowledge, skills and dispositions as distinct learning types, it's important to remember that they are, in practice, deeply interconnected and inseparable.

Together they form a mutually supportive cycle. Knowledge is important for skill development, while skills allow children to apply their knowledge. Dispositions underlie everything and help to determine if and how children engage with learning opportunities.

Early childhood education has traditionally focused more on skills and dispositions rather than knowledge. There are good reasons for this. Without skills and dispositions, knowledge is of limited use. And too often when people talk about learning, they're only thinking about knowledge and equating the ability to remember facts and information with intelligence.

However, removing knowledge from the equation isn't the answer.

Without knowledge, skills and dispositions have little to work on.

Complex mental skills such as problem-solving require knowledge – otherwise what problems are we solving?

Similarly, dispositions such as creativity and curiosity don't make sense without knowledge. Without it, what are we curious about or creative with?

What is important is recognising that knowledge is just one part of learning, not the be all and end all.

A well-rounded early childhood program, therefore, aims to nurture and support all 3 types of learning by providing important knowledge, developing practical skills that apply this knowledge and fostering positive dispositions.

Identifying the different types of learning in what we do can help us recognise when we might be leaning too heavily in the direction of one or the other and ensure we maintain an effective balance between them.

Remember:

- Learning is important as a process (learning how to learn) and also as a product (what we learn).
- Knowledge, skills and dispositions are all important kinds of learning. Ensuring an effective balance between them is key.
- As educators, our role is to help guide learning in directions that we know are important, while also respecting children's intentions and interests.
- By identifying the different types of learning that might be occurring we can choose teaching strategies that are likely to be most successful.

Being an intentional teacher...

How can we be effective *intentional* teachers?

1. Develop good intentions

Learning intentions are the aims or goals you have for children's play and learning. 'Good' intentions are those that are appropriate for the children involved, based on your knowledge of the children and their circumstances, as well as how young children learn and develop. These intentions are what you're aiming for children to learn.

Setting good intentions also means working with your colleagues, families and the children themselves to ensure that these intentions are shared and everyone is working towards the same outcomes.

2. Choose the right strategies

Once you've worked out your intentions, you can choose the teaching strategies you'll use to achieve them. Remember, intentional teaching is not one strategy. Any strategy can be useful in the right situation. Intentional teaching is about using your knowledge of children and learning to choose strategies that are most likely to be effective for the kind of learning you're aiming to promote. Sometimes your strategies might be about allowing children the time and space to learn for themselves. Sometimes, they may be more adult-directed.

3. Be involved (but not too much)

Adults play an essential role in supporting children's learning. While children are capable of learning on their own, adult involvement can help to focus and direct learning so that it's most effective. Research suggests that a balance of child-led and adult-led learning works best. Knowing when to be involved and when to step back is a key skill for teachers and educators. Too much adult involvement can smother children's learning, while too little leaves learning to chance.

4. Make sure what you do is mostly play

Play is an essential part of young children's learning. It's how they explore and make sense of their world. While not everything is learned best through play, lots of things are. And even when children are not 'playing', learning is still likely to be most effective when it is 'playful', meaning interactive, hands on and fun. Adult guidance and direction is an important part of learning, but it shouldn't be the major part of what you do. There are no hard and fast rules for when to be involved and when to step back. This is a skill you'll need to develop over time.

As a general guide, most of what you do should be play, and most of what isn't play should still be playful.



Glossary

Table 4 provides AERO's definitions of key terms related to intentional teaching used in this practice resource.

Table 4: Glossary of key intentional teaching terms

Key term	Definition
Children's intentionality	Effective intentional teaching includes child intentionality. Intentional educators incorporate children's intentionality into their decision-making processes by drawing on children's ideas, interests, curiosities and funds of knowledge to inform their decisions.
Culture of intentionality	The conditions that foster ongoing intentionality within a service and sustain a focus on quality outcomes for all children. It includes shared understanding of, and consistent approaches to intentional teaching. A culture of intentionality encompasses all stakeholders, including staff, children, families, communities and other professionals. This collaborative approach builds consistency for children and promotes children's learning and engagement.
Intentional teaching	Intentional teaching can be defined as any thoughtful or deliberate action educators take to respond to children with purpose to make pedagogical decisions within environments (AGDE, 2022).
Intentionality	Intentionality is being thoughtful and purposeful in actions and making decisions and is something that both children and educators can do. Children are intentional in their thinking, ways of communication and learning and at times lead their own learning and the learning of others. Educators are intentional in the roles they take in children's play and the way they intentionally plan the environment and curriculum experiences (AGDE, 2022, p. 66).
Learning intention	A learning intention is an aim, objective, goal or intended outcome for children's learning and development.
Reflective action	Insights drawn from noticing and reflecting on spontaneous and planned opportunities to extend children's learning. It includes reflective decisions about where children are in their learning, next steps for learning and reflecting on the use of teaching strategies. A feature of reflective action is to encourage children's intentionality and capacity for reflection on their own learning.
Teaching strategies	Teaching strategies help educators achieve learning intentions or extend children's learning in spontaneous moments. Learning intentions, context and knowledge of individual children will determine which strategy will be most effective in extending children's learning.

Endnotes

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