

# Connection and Contribution Practice Guide



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# Introduction

The *Connection and Contribution Practice Guide* supports implementation of the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF).

The VEYLDF describes five Learning and Development Outcomes. The information and reflective scenarios in this guide support engagement with key concepts of the VEYLDF, particularly the Learning and Development Outcome *Children are connected with and contribute to their world*. This Outcome has four key components:

- Children develop a sense of belonging to groups and communities and an understanding of the reciprocal rights and responsibilities necessary for active civic participation.
- Children respond to diversity with respect.
- Children become aware of fairness.
- Children become socially responsible and show respect for the environment (VCAA 2017b).

A summary of research about these components and how they can be assessed is available in *Assessment of Children as Connected with and Contributing to Their World in Early Childhood Education and Care: Literature review* (Noble, Jackson & Mitchell 2020). This practice guide complements the literature review by describing how the Outcome can be supported in practice.

The *Connection and Contribution Practice Guide* focuses primarily on the Practice Principle *Assessment for learning and development*. It also relates to other Practice Principles, perhaps most strongly *Respectful relationships and responsive engagement*, which recognises that respectful relationships and responsive engagement ‘support children to take healthy risks, share their expertise and engage in constructing new meaning and learning with others’ (Department of Education [DET] 2017, p. 8). Connecting with and contributing to their world involves children exploring new environments, with early childhood professionals supporting them to take risks safely.

## Purpose

This practice guide seeks to provide early childhood professionals with a deeper understanding of children’s connection with and contribution to their world, and its importance to learning. In turn, this will support the development of assessment practices that enhance early childhood professionals’ understanding of a child’s development, and inform their decision-making about future learning opportunities for the child.

The purpose of this guide is to:

- strengthen early childhood professionals’ understanding of the importance of children being connected with and contributing to their world across the birth to eight years age range
- guide the development of practices and experiences that support the development of children’s connection with and contribution to their world aged birth to eight years, including in early childhood education and care (ECEC) and the early years of school
- promote practices that enhance children’s own ability to recognise how their connection with and contribution to groups and the community is developing
- guide early childhood professionals in implementing quality assessment, reflection and pedagogical decision-making in relation to the VEYLDF Learning and Development Outcome *Children are connected with and contribute to their world*.

## How to use this guide

The first sections of this practice guide summarise the theory that underpins day-to-day practice, drawing on *Assessment of Children as Connected with and Contributing to Their World in Early Childhood Education and Care: Literature review* (Noble, Jackson & Mitchell 2020) and suggesting strategies for supporting children’s connection with and contribution to their world in everyday pedagogical decision-making.

The ‘Reflective scenarios’ section describes scenarios that are designed to prompt professional reflection and illustrate ways in which early childhood professionals can improve their practice in relation to the VEYLDF Learning and Development Outcome *Children are connected with and contribute to their world*.

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# Connection and contribution in the early years

The VEYLDF Learning and Development Outcome *Children are connected with and contribute to their world* has multiple components. This means that defining this Outcome involves drawing from a broad base of research, as was demonstrated in the VCAA literature review associated with this Outcome.

In describing this Outcome, the VEYLDF starts out with the observation that ‘children increasingly enjoy being in groups and contributing to family and social life from birth’ (DET 2016, p. 19). The connection part of the Outcome is closely related to and supported by children’s sense of belonging – and belonging to or being part of a family or a social group involves the rights and responsibilities to contribute too. In describing the contribution part of the Outcome, the VEYLDF refers to children’s response to diversity, awareness of fairness, social responsibility and respect for the environment (VCAA 2017a).

The right to be part of a community is enshrined in human rights law. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNGA 1989) states that every child should be ‘fully prepared to live an individual life in society ... in the spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality and solidarity.’ The convention includes a child’s right to express their views freely and have them taken seriously, as well as their rights to religion, conscience, association and information (Lansdown 2010).

In order to uphold these rights, early childhood professionals need to be aware of what being connected with and contributing to their world looks like for young children, and how it develops over time.

This practice guide helps early childhood professionals to unpack the VEYLDF Learning and Development Outcome, by proposing a conceptual model of what young children being connected with and contributing to their world involves. This model was developed in *Assessment of Children as Connected with and Contributing to Their World in Early Childhood Education and Care: Literature review* (Noble, Jackson & Mitchell 2020). The model explains these two big ideas or concepts by using two statements about what children can do: ‘I explore my world’ (connection) and ‘I shape my world’ (contribution). Each of these concepts contains three components, as set out in Figure 1.

**Connection** refers to how a child engages with their world. In the model, connection is defined as exploration, which has three components: **orientation**, **curiosity** and **participation**.

**Contribution** refers to how a connected child actively makes a difference in the world. The three components of **decision-making**, **negotiation** and **responsibility** refer to how a child understands and exercises their rights and responsibilities to engage in a way that benefits themselves, their community and the natural world.

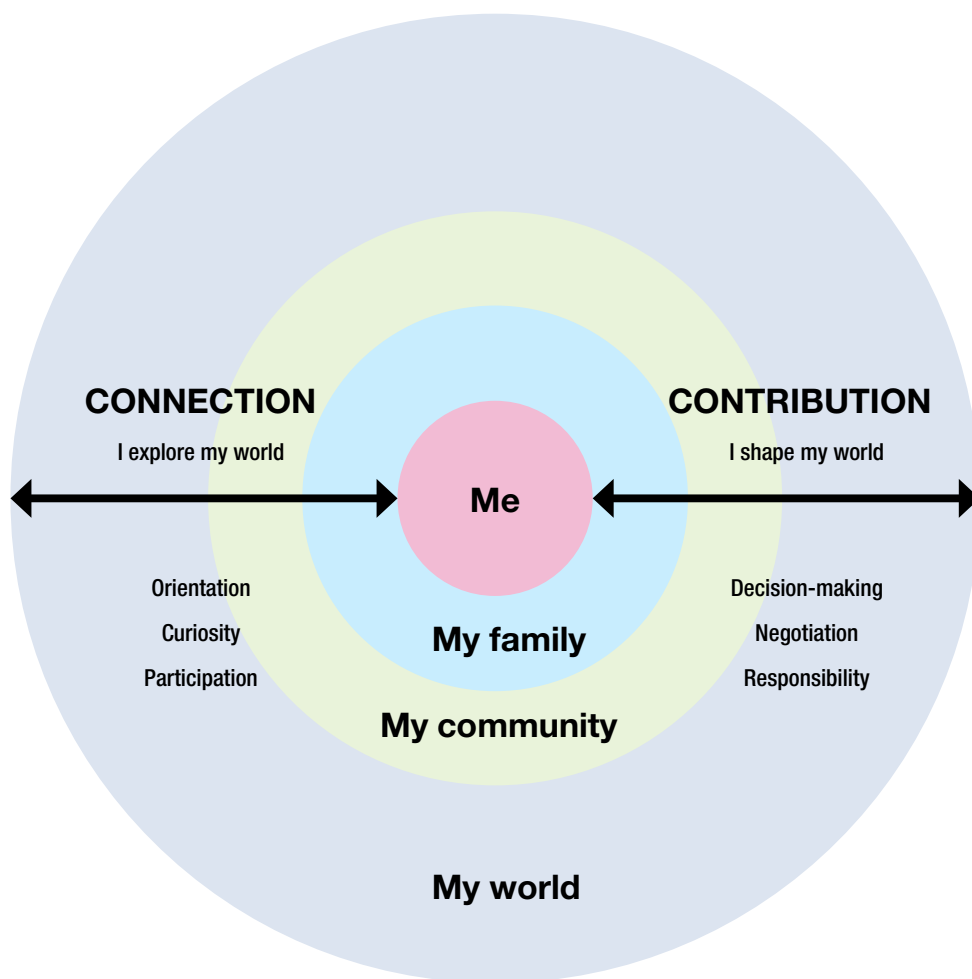
These components sit over the rings of the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner 1979), showing the child in the centre with the layers of their world in concentric rings beyond them. This helps to remind early childhood professionals that children’s worlds have many connected layers:

- **Me:** This model conceives the child as central and maps the child’s interactions and influences expanding from the child outwards.
- **My family:** The first concentric ring surrounding the child shows the dominant influence on a child’s learning and development to be those who are directly responsible for the child.
- **My community:** This ring includes the child’s close community, defined here as friends, neighbours, ECEC settings, school and other children’s services. It also refers to highly significant and familiar natural and built environments, which for some children might include their home, a park or Country.
- **My world:** The outer ring represents the wider world, defined as comprising influences and institutions beyond (but linked with) community, such as media and communications, social services, the natural world, and political, cultural and commercial structures.

The six components of the conceptual model developed for the literature review are summarised here.

**Connection** refers to how a child conceives of and understands their place in the world, and their motivation to learn by exploring and becoming an active participant in that world.

When a child is physically or socially ready to explore their world, they begin to demonstrate **orientation**. When a child is interested in connecting with an object, a person or an activity, early childhood professionals observe **curiosity**. When a child is motivated and confident in connecting to their world, this leads to **participation**.



**Figure 1: A conceptual model of children as connected with and contributing to their world**

The conceptual model was developed using the following research-based constructs of connection:

- **Orientation** has multiple meanings that are applicable to early childhood learning and development, in particular, it refers to the ability to identify the position or direction of objects or points in space (Benton & Tranel 1993).
- **Curiosity** is a state of motivation associated with exploration, openness to new experiences, and a willingness to engage with the unexpected (Kashdan & Silvia 2009).
- **Participation** refers to forms of social engagement, including children’s participation in games, cultural activities and communities.

**Contribution** refers to how a connected child builds on their connections and contributes to their world. When a child actively engages with their family and community, they feel confident and empowered to ‘shape their world’.

The conceptual model was developed using the following research-based constructs of contribution:

- **Decision-making** has four components: understanding, appreciation, reasoning and choice (Appelbaum & Grisso 2001).
- **Negotiation** involves the child in adapting to or accommodating the other people or objects in their world, as they pursue their goals (Baker 1994).
- **Responsibility** is closely linked to rights. When children understand, demonstrate and enact their rights and responsibilities in a positive way, this is described as citizenship (Covell, Howe & McNeil 2008).

The conceptual model aligns with the VEYLDF Learning and Development Outcome *Children are connected with and contribute to their world*, which has key components of belonging, friendships, common values, respect for others, civic participation and rights (VCAA 2017a).

The VEYLDF also specifically mentions the environment in the statement ‘Children become socially responsible and show respect for the environment’ (VCAA 2017a). Children connect with and contribute to a range of different environments as part of their world. These different environments include built, natural and social environments as well as digital environments, which contain both built (technology) and social elements.

For this practice guide, there are four types of environments:

- **social environments**, which focus on socialising, social support and a sense of belonging (Frieling, Peach & Cording 2018)
- **natural environments**, which encompass all physical settings except those that are predominantly constructed by humans
- **built environments**, which refer to the physical characteristics of the constructed environment in which children play, learn and live
- **digital environments**, which involve engaging with others and their world through technology.

All VEYLDF Learning and Development Outcomes are interconnected – for example, when a child contributes in a social setting their sense of identity is strengthened – and this practice guide can help early childhood professionals monitor progress towards other VEYLDF Learning and Development Outcomes too. An extensive review by Renshaw (2019, p. ix) to define and measure identity and culture in children in Australia found several potential protective factors related to children being connected with and contributing to their world. These include children having:

- positive perceptions of their neighbourhood and local community
- opportunities to participate and contribute to their community
- access to knowledge and meaningful engagement with cultural heritage and practices.

In the VEYLDF a child’s wellbeing is linked closely to the wellbeing of their community (DET 2016, p. 19). As early childhood professionals use this guide to understand children’s connection with and contribution to their world, they may also explore how children’s development in this area reinforces other aspects of holistic learning and development.

## Connection, contribution and executive function

As in other practice guides in this series, the importance of executive function as a critical skill for independence in daily life is recognised, and it requires specific attention when thinking about the development of children’s connection with and contribution to their world.

Executive function is a ‘specific set of attention-regulation skills involved in conscious goal-directed problem-solving’ (Zelazo, Blair & Willoughby 2016, p. 2). There are three components of executive function, and these develop significantly in early childhood. The following is a summary of the three components of executive function that are defined in greater detail in *Assessment of Children as Confident and Involved Learners in Early Childhood Education and Care: Literature review* (Cloney, Jackson & Mitchell 2019):

- **Cognitive flexibility** (or flexible thinking) involves thinking about something in multiple ways – for example, considering someone else’s perspective or solving a problem in various ways.
- **Working memory** involves both keeping information in mind and, usually, manipulating it in some way – for example, when playing a game or listening to a story, a child might remember several pieces of distinct information or ideas, and integrate them into a coherent whole.
- **Inhibitory control** (or self-control) is the process of deliberately suppressing attention (and subsequent response) to something – for example, ignoring a distraction, stopping an impulsive utterance, or taking turns.

*Assessment of Children as Connected with and Contributing to Their World in Early Childhood Education and Care: Literature review* (Noble, Jackson & Mitchell 2020) explores research about how the development of executive function relates to a child’s connection with and contribution to their world.

The social elements of children’s play, such as taking turns or mature imaginative play, can support both executive function and connection and contribution. Studies of mature play indicate that a child’s ability to regulate others precedes their own self-regulation (Germeroth et al. 2019, p. 195). The experience of having alternative identities and viewpoints also builds children’s cognitive flexibility (Carlson, White & Davis-Unger 2014).



Physical activity is known to benefit executive function, and this can be extended to include the physical aspect of children's connectedness to the built and natural environment. Wayfinding (an aspect of orientation, as children explore their worlds) can be harnessed to strengthen self-regulation and working memory. For example, as noted by Ernst and Burcak (2019), a recent study found that children who had a greater exposure to nature in their ECEC setting developed greater curiosity, creative thinking and resilience than their peers who had had less exposure (although the level of executive function development was the same in both study cohorts).

In the early years of school, children's development of inhibitory control can continue to be assessed through the first three levels of the Personal and Social Capability in the Victorian Curriculum F-10, where children learn 'to recognise and regulate emotions, develop empathy for others and understand relationships, establish and build a framework for positive relationships, work effectively in teams and develop leadership skills, and handle challenging situations constructively' (VCAA 2017b).

### **Strategies for supporting children's connection with and contribution to their world**

This section outlines strategies that early childhood professionals can think about using to support a child's connection with and contribution to their world. The following strategies reflect the structure of the conceptual model (Figure 1). The reflective scenarios in the section following this illustrate these strategies in an integrated and practice-based context.

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## **Connection**

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To support children's connection with their world, early childhood professionals can use their knowledge of these components in their observations of children. The three components of connection are deeply interrelated.

### **Orientation**

Very young children spend much of their time engaging with the built and natural physical world, making these environments particularly influential in children's development and connection. Children who explore and learn how to make their own way develop cognitive maps and a sense of their environment based on places, things and connections (Proshansky & Fabian 1987).

The VEYLDF also refers to orientation in terms of values, particularly the values of respect, children's rights, fairness, diversity, democracy, reciprocity and environmental sustainability (VCAA 2017a). Early childhood professionals help a child to orientate to their environments when they introduce people to that child, or explain rules and expectations in a social context. These actions help the child feel that they 'know their way around' the world that they live in.

Orientation can also be supported through anchor points that help a child feel secure. This can be seen in object attachment, where a child forms attachments to favourite toys or resources (Bachar et al. 1998; Fortuna et al. 2014). As a child develops, the amount of time they spend on an activity or in a particular environment can be an indication of their sense of connection.

**Executive function is important for learning and development outcomes in many areas.**

**VCAA's *Identity Practice Guide* (2020), *Learning Practice Guide* (2019), *Wellbeing Practice Guide* (2016) and *Communication Practice Guide* (2018) all focus on the critical role of executive function to support children in the VEYLDF Learning and Development Outcomes:**

- **Children have a strong sense of identity**  
[www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Documents/earlyyears/IdentityPG2020.pdf](http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Documents/earlyyears/IdentityPG2020.pdf)
- **Children are confident and involved learners**  
[www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Documents/earlyyears/LearningPGweb24102019.pdf](http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Documents/earlyyears/LearningPGweb24102019.pdf)
- **Children have a strong sense of wellbeing**  
[www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Documents/earlyyears/EYWellbeingPracticeGuide.pdf](http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Documents/earlyyears/EYWellbeingPracticeGuide.pdf)
- **Children are effective communicators**  
[www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Documents/earlyyears/CommunicationPracticeGuide.pdf](http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Documents/earlyyears/CommunicationPracticeGuide.pdf)

## Curiosity

Curiosity involves learning about consequences and making critical evaluations about new experiences. Safely exploring social, natural, built and digital worlds helps children to learn about their likes, dislikes and boundaries. Hands-on, practical projects led by children and supported by adults allow children to explore or examine things that are of interest to them in their community.

Adults can be role models for curiosity when they show an interest in the world around them, create stimulating learning environments and set up excursions and incursions that reflect, extend or promote learning. They might also encourage and extend children's questions, and explore the possible answers together using digital technology and the library to find answers. Open-ended questions and activities can help children to wonder and investigate (Zero to Three 2010).

## Participation

Participation refers to a child joining in with experiences in ECEC settings, which is enabled by curiosity and orientation. It also involves children's participation in decision-making. Hart's (1992) ladder of involvement (Figure 2) is a helpful tool for educators to self-assess the extent to which they promote genuine participation by children. There are eight levels of participation, from least positive (manipulation) to most positive, at the highest level (child-initiated, shared decisions with adults).

## Contribution

When children contribute to family and social life, the community and the world around them, they develop a sense of purpose and agency, both of which are important aspects of learning and development in the early years.

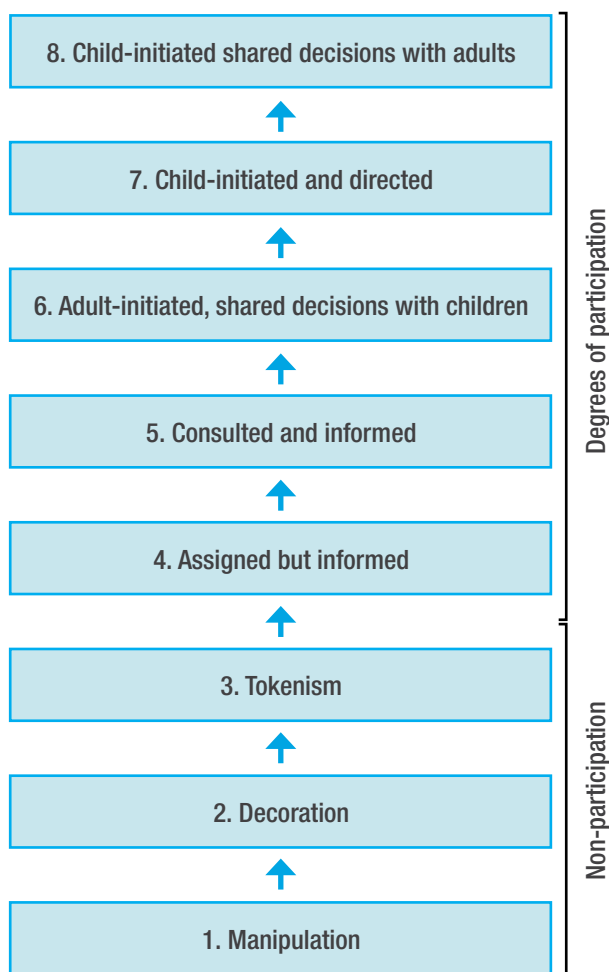
## Decision-making

The four components involved in decision-making are:

- understanding that there is a problem that needs to be resolved
- appreciating the outcome of finding a resolution to the problem
- comparing and weighing up the consequences of the possible choices
- making a decision and sustaining that decision.

Early childhood professionals can support a child to develop these skills by having sustained shared conversations with the child, in which they explore choices, and then allowing the child to make a choice.

There is a strong positive relationship between the decision-making ability of a child and their self-esteem (Park & Park 2012). Children who are less confident may benefit from reinforcement when they make appropriate choices, even if the decisions are minor.



**Figure 2: Hart's ladder of young people's participation, based on R Hart, 1992, *Children's Participation from Tokenism to Citizenship*, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, Florence, p. 8.**

The skills of decision-making are both supported by and contribute to participation. The VEYLDF states that children are 'citizens with equal rights and are consulted meaningfully, with families and communities, about issues that affect them' (DET 2016, p. 19). Early childhood professionals can document their consultation with a child through observations, interviews, scribing of children's conversations, photographs and artwork. For these consultations to be meaningful, early childhood professionals should focus on 'analysing, synthesising and reporting children's messages in ways that are authentic and true to children's meanings while speaking to an official audience' (Harris & Manatakis 2013, p. 12). When early childhood professionals help children see the thinking process that went into shared decisions, they foster independent decision-making skills.

## Negotiation

Like decision-making, negotiation requires a number of different skills. The skills required for negotiation include collaboration, coordination, communication, decision-making and conflict resolution. Negotiation often involves different and competing goals, but any effective negotiation process is underpinned by a common commitment to settle on a mutually satisfactory outcome.

Focusing on make-believe play is a way of helping children develop self-regulation and negotiation skills. Early childhood professionals can create the conditions for negotiation skills to be learnt, by treating children as active co-creators of early childhood programs, rather than just passive recipients.

Children can also learn to negotiate with each other and with the environment around them. Just as orientation to a physical environment enables children to learn to negotiate pathways and obstacles, orientation to social environments can help children learn to negotiate with others. Early childhood professionals can help children develop negotiation skills by setting up clear spaces in which negotiation is possible, such as spaces for snack time or for using particular resources. Knowing where space exists for negotiation can also help children understand rules that cannot be negotiated (such as safety measures or respect for other children) and their responsibility to respect them.

## Responsibility

Understanding and abiding by rights and responsibilities requires respect for other people and for the natural and built environments. This starts with early childhood professionals modelling rights and responsibilities in their own practice. By keeping commitments to children and each other, early childhood professionals can be role models for responsible behaviour that respects other people and the world.

Children can contribute to built environments through the simple act of looking after physical resources, such as through tidying-up routines. In order to foster children's development of responsibility, ECEC settings and schools can create 'positions of responsibility' that are age-appropriate and provide meaningful ways for children to contribute to their community. Responsibilities that children can fulfil independently can help them to feel valued and capable in their world.

Contributing to natural environments includes the promotion and protection of the environment and a commitment to sustainable practices (Hughes 2019). Today's children will inherit the task of making a better world and achieving sustainable social, economic, environmental and cultural development, and they need to be prepared for this. Cultivating a sense of hope that what they do can make a difference, even in the earliest years of life, is a simple way to prepare children for this responsibility.

## Assessing children as connected with and contributing to their world

For early childhood professionals, assessment involves collecting and analysing information about children and their learning and development, in order to inform planning. The range of techniques for collecting this information goes well beyond individual testing of children, or checklists. It encompasses multiple ways of observing learning and development that are embedded in everyday practice.

However, assessment also goes beyond observation, and involves interpretation, analysis and making a judgment against indicators (Barnes 2012). To make sure this judgment is accurate and provides a useful assessment of a child's sense of identity, early childhood professionals should follow accepted principles about what is being assessed and how the assessment is undertaken.

The following information about assessment is a summary of a discussion in *Assessment of Children as Connected with and Contributing to Their World in Early Childhood Education and Care: Literature review* (Noble, Jackson & Mitchell 2020), which included a set of principles for assessing children as connected with and contributing to their world and a review of assessment tools, to encourage early childhood professionals to think about this Outcome more deeply. Consideration of different assessment tools is part of the daily decisions that educators make about the most appropriate ways to collect information about children's learning (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership 2011).

The most important difference in assessing this Outcome, compared to other Learning and Development Outcomes, is that this Outcome concerns the relationship between the child and a particular context (their 'world'). This means assessment must occur in the contexts in which the child lives, learns and plays. Children's progress on this Outcome may also vary across different contexts, so observations across these different contexts are needed to understand the child's learning and development fully.

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## Principles for assessing children as connected with and contributing to their world

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*Assessment of Children as Connected with and Contributing to their World in Early Childhood Education and Care: Literature review* (Noble, Jackson & Mitchell 2020) identifies six principles specifically relevant to assessing children's connection with and contribution to their world. These principles of assessment connect to previous literature reviews in this series, as they are also relevant to other VEYLDF Learning and Development Outcomes.

The six assessment principles are:

1. Assessment addresses established components of children's connection with and contribution to their world.
2. Assessment enables early childhood professionals to describe a trajectory of development.
3. Assessment is valid, reliable and fair.
4. Assessment is conducted in a way that enhances engagement and relationships.
5. Assessment includes children's self-assessment.
6. Assessment involves the child's community and informs professional partnerships.

These principles start with checking the purpose of assessment, move on to consider the design of an assessment, and finally highlight considerations related to the administration of the assessment.

The first principle establishes that the early childhood professional undertaking the assessment is clear about the purpose of the assessment and what is being assessed: in this case, whether or not the assessment relates directly to children's connection with and contribution to their world. A tool that enables comparison to an evidence-based standard is good practice in assessment; however, for this VEYLDF Learning and Development Outcome, there are few such assessment tools available.

Principle 2 reflects that the development of a child's connection with and contribution to their world occurs on a continuum. While being conscious of the diverse ways that children demonstrate their connection with and contribution to their world, a well-designed assessment tool enables early childhood professionals to recognise a child's true level of development.

Validity and fairness are key to ensuring an assessment leads to accurate conclusions about a child's development, and in turn informs appropriate planning. Principle 3 reminds professionals to select assessment methods and tools that provide children with opportunities to confidently demonstrate their capabilities.

Child-oriented assessment also means children can self-assess (Warash & Workman 2016, p. 97). If early childhood professionals have a deep understanding of

each VEYLDF Learning and Development Outcome, they can enable children to recognise progress in their own learning, using language children will understand.

These principles recognise that assessment does not occur in a vacuum. There are many contextual issues that should be considered when selecting and using an assessment tool. At the outset, it must be logistically feasible to undertake an assessment, and to 'do no harm' (including emotional harm) in the process of administering it.

Assessment is valuable only if its findings and results are documented, understood and acted upon. This includes communicating in a timely manner to parents and families, other professionals and, where appropriate, to children.

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## Tools to support an understanding of children's connection with and contribution to their world

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*Assessment of Children as Connected with and Contributing to Their World in Early Childhood Education and Care: Literature review* (Noble, Jackson & Mitchell 2020) identifies a set of tools that have been used in research to assess children as connected with and contributing to their world. These tools were selected according to the six assessment principles, noting that formal assessments of a child's connection with and contribution to their world are relatively rare, and there are very few tools available that can meet all these criteria.

Using the summary table of tools for assessing children as being connected with and contributing to their world in Section 3 of the literature review, early childhood professionals can explore tools that are relevant to the components of connection and contribution as defined in the conceptual model (Figure 1), across a range of ages and settings. The tools are applicable in a range of ECEC contexts, so assessments can be matched to what is most appropriate for particular children and can be used to investigate a particular component of connection and contribution.

The assessment of orientation, curiosity, participation, decision-making, negotiation and responsibility in young children is a relatively new area, and there are very few validated, direct assessments of this Outcome.

Components of connection (orientation, curiosity and participation) are typically assessed via observational rating scales completed by early childhood professionals or parents. A relatively common theme in assessment tools in this area is the measurement of a child's connection with the natural world (Wilson, Mott & Batman 2004). Connectedness to nature is characterised by empathy for nature, enjoyment of nature, awareness of nature and responsibility towards nature (Sobko, Jia & Brown 2018).

One of these tools, the Assessment Framework for Children's Human Nature Situations (ACHUNAS),

expresses children's connection with nature as a progression, moving from being in nature, to being with nature, and leading to being for nature (Giusti et al. 2018, p. 16).

The assessment of components of a child's contribution to their world (negotiation, decision-making and responsibility) presents a different set of challenges. Negotiation skills can be readily observed through play activities and in daily routines, recognising that each interaction will have a unique context. To assess decision-making and responsibility, early childhood professionals look for ways to design and facilitate authentic, meaningful opportunities for young children to demonstrate their skills. Children's recognition of their contribution will be enhanced when early childhood professionals facilitate a feedback loop that follows up and reports on the effects of their contribution over time.

When considering the key environments or worlds in which a child participates, early childhood professionals can observe and assess a child in their ECEC setting, and in some cases in their community. Partnerships between early childhood professionals and families are critical for supporting both the professionals' understanding of a child's connection with and contribution to the 'family' part of their world and the child's connection itself. Families are also valuable partners in imagining what children's connection with and contribution to their worlds might look like, as each family may have different aspirations for their child in relation to this Outcome, reflecting their own values and beliefs.

As structured assessment tools for children under three years of age are scarce, early childhood professionals are more likely to use observational methods to document children's learning and development for this VEYLDF Learning and Development Outcome. When documenting observations, early childhood professionals are encouraged to consider the language and ideas shared in this practice guide, to extend the depth and precision with which they can describe the learning that is occurring. While all the VEYLDF Learning and Development Outcomes may seem like simple statements, each one contains many specific components that can be observed in children's everyday play and described. The reflective scenarios in the following section of this guide illustrate how these understandings about connection and contribution could be applied in practice and used to plan learning experiences that respond to and extend children's learning and development.

Any assessment of children's connection with and contribution to their world must be clear and purposeful in order to be useful for informing future program planning and delivery. The reflective scenarios in this guide illustrate examples of educators applying the VEYLDF Early Years Planning Cycle to the focus Outcome in a range of different contexts.

## Additional reading

*Children's Voices is a professional learning resource to guide early childhood professionals who are seeking to undertake consultation with young children.*

*Developed by the University of South Australia in partnership with the South Australian Department for Education and Child Development, it is a collection of tools and resources designed to support and empower children and young people's participation as active citizens and learners: P Harris & H Manatakis 2013, *Children's Voices: A principled framework for children and young people's participation as valued citizens and learners*, University of South Australia in partnership with the South Australian Department for Education and Child Development, Adelaide, [www.education.sa.gov.au/sites/default/files/childrens-voices-framework.pdf](http://www.education.sa.gov.au/sites/default/files/childrens-voices-framework.pdf)*

# Reflective scenarios

## About the scenarios

The reflective scenarios in this practice guide illustrate how early childhood professionals can improve their practice in relation to the VEYLDF Learning and Development Outcome *Children are connected with and contribute to their world*. The scenarios are designed to inspire all early childhood professionals to think about new ways of supporting children to develop, using the cycle of observing and documenting, analysing learning, developing a learning plan, implementing the plan, and reflecting and reviewing the outcomes of the delivered plan. The scenarios highlight the important role that meaningful assessment of children's connection with and contribution to their world has in this cycle, and they also highlight that assessment can take many different forms.

This cycle can occur in different early childhood settings, responding to the range of opportunities and challenges that they offer. The VEYLDF Early Years Planning Cycle describes the cycle as occurring within or around a particular context, as shown in the diagram in Figure 3.

The context may be defined by many factors, including the type of early childhood setting; the age and characteristics of the children; the knowledge, skills and values of the early childhood professionals; and the needs and aspirations of the community. All these factors affect how the planning cycle will happen in each specific context, with no two cycles ever looking the same.

The scenarios describe the planning cycle in action, across diverse contexts. They illustrate:

- the components of children's connection with and contribution to their world, as described in the first sections of this practice guide
- a range of early childhood settings and early childhood professionals
- diverse philosophies about children's connection with and contribution to their world, and how children can be assessed and supported
- different situations arising for individual children or groups, at different points of development.



**Figure 3: VEYLDF Early Years Planning Cycle**

## Using reflective scenarios

Each reflective scenario begins with key points – or ‘takeaways’ – for professional learning, and questions for reflection to keep in mind while reading and reflecting on each scenario. Each scenario also identifies the components of the Outcomes for children and VEYLDF Practice Principles that are most strongly illustrated in the scenario. This will help you to select a scenario that is relevant to current priorities for the children in your setting and the issues that you are currently facing in your practice; however, each scenario covers multiple outcomes and VEYLDF Practice Principles, due to the deeply integrated nature of children’s learning and development, and of professional practice.

You are encouraged to question, debate, affirm or critique the decisions that the early childhood professionals make in these scenarios, and how they are implementing the VEYLDF Early Years Planning Cycle in their context. Reflection on the scenarios is particularly effective when it occurs collaboratively, so that different points of view can emerge and colleagues can support each other’s professional learning.

*... None of these scenarios represents ‘ideal’ practice, simply because there is no such thing ... You are encouraged to question, debate, affirm or critique the decisions that the early childhood professionals make in these scenarios, and how they are implementing the planning cycle in their context ...*

## Reflective scenario 1: I can do that!

### Key points for professional learning

- Exploring the world outside of ECEC settings offers important opportunities for learning and connecting with the community, but some activities offer richer opportunities than others.
- Learning can occur within child-directed exploration of the social, built and natural environments.
- Supporting children's recognition of landmarks and routes, and their generation of cognitive maps, helps to build their memory and experiences, and supports wayfinding.

### Questions for reflection

- How can everyday activities be harnessed to support children's connection with and contribution to their community?
- How can you nurture and extend these skills and areas of development when working with children of different ages, and at different developmental stages?
- How do you involve and empower children to participate in their community and develop a sense of responsibility as a member of their community?

### Outcomes for children

- Orientation
- Participation
- Responsibility

### VEYLDF Practice Principles focus

- High expectations for every child
- Integrated teaching and learning approaches

## Scenario

Mara had been providing education and care in her home for Jack and Chloe (both aged four) and Jaala (aged two) for over a year. Chloe and Jack would be starting school next year, and Mara had spent much of the year trying to focus on the skills they would need to thrive during their transition.

Both Chloe and Jack were confident in themselves and their abilities, especially since Mara had decided to give them more opportunities to try things for themselves. Mara wanted to prepare them to maintain that confidence in the school environment, among all the other children. She and the children enjoyed the closeness of the family day care environment, but school was a big wide world and she was worried they would feel overwhelmed. In particular, Jack had a limited range of contact with other children, and he didn't have siblings or attend kindergarten.

Whenever Mara encountered a challenge relating to her practice, she took it to the online chat group for family day care educators in her service, led by her coordinator, Ava. When Mara asked how the other educators were preparing children for the 'big wide world' of school, Ava sent her a link to some thoughts and articles relating to the VEYLDF Learning and Development Outcome *Children are connected with and contribute to their world*.

Mara realised that this Outcome captured what she wanted to achieve with Jack and Chloe. She liked the diagram that Ava had shared, showing the child in the middle of ever-widening circles of their family, community and the whole world. Mara's mind boggled as she realised how quickly Jack's and Chloe's worlds were about to expand, as they encountered so many new children, adults and ideas.

Mara had always included daily visits to the park and the playground in her program, both of which were close enough for them to get home in time for two-year-old Jaala's nap each afternoon. Encouraged by Ava and inspired by other educators, Mara decided to expand the range of places that they could go to, in order to 'connect' the children to a wider world. Other educators in the online chat group had shared stories of weekly visits to the library, community gardens, the local shops and the post office, and Mara reflected that these would give the children more opportunities to connect with other children and adults.

Ava gently nudged Mara to expand the depth as well as the breadth of the children's experiences, so they could see themselves as active contributors to their world. Mara had observed that Jack was often passive in new situations, but animated in familiar settings where he felt in control. Ava had encouraged Mara to notice and comment when Jack did something active in a new environment, even if it was only making a choice or exploring an object, because this would help develop his confidence and curiosity.



Mara spent some time chatting to Jack, Chloe and Jaala about the places they knew and enjoyed nearby. Inspired by articles that Ava had posted online about how 'cognitive maps' can 'grow' your brain, Mara and the children looked at an online map to work out where everything was, and Mara related the online map to locations the children were already familiar with. Some of the children's favourite places were too far to walk, but some were shops and cafes within walking distance.

As Jack and Chloe became increasingly excited about the prospect of an adventure, Mara took the opportunity for sustained shared thinking, and asked them what they liked best about each place that they had mentioned. The children's responses included the dolphin mural at the library, the nice bookshop owner with the purple glasses, and the stack of toys at the post office, which all helped Mara see the world through their eyes.

Then Mara asked about the things they had to do when they visited each place with their families. Waiting to cross the road, queueing to buy groceries, and saying 'please' and 'thank you' were all ways that the children exercised responsibility and contributed positively to their community. Mara reflected that Chloe knew a lot about rules and manners, whereas Jack knew more about getting things done, like buying milk or posting a letter. The children could learn a lot from each other!

Mara and the children embarked on their adventures over the next few weeks. They started with small changes, to ensure that it was manageable. The biggest change was not only where they went, but how they talked about what they were doing. As Jaala continuously pointed out new things, Mara made sure she spoke to Jaala about what she saw, and Jack and Chloe also took great delight in explaining things to Jaala. Mara pointed out key landmarks on their trips, and they explored different routes, navigating their way as a team, looking for landmarks and other clues.

Jack and Chloe were chuffed to be 'in charge' of crossing the road (although they knew that Mara had the final say), and took turns in looking in all directions and then declaring it 'safe to cross'. The children became familiar with the weekday librarians, and the staff at the local supermarket. Mara chatted with all of them and, following her cue, the children did the same. Mara commented whenever the children made someone smile, so they could see that they had made a difference.

To encourage their active participation, Mara asked the children to complete tasks during their outings, and invited them to suggest ideas for making their outings more purposeful. Chloe liked keeping a lookout for litter on the ground (Mara began carrying gloves for this purpose), while Jack had his eye on a local construction site and had collected his own observations about how it was changing.

Reflecting on their new routines with the educators in the online chat group, Mara shared what she'd learnt about the important learning and development the children had experienced in the community. She wrote about the curiosity and bravery that she had observed in the children (and how her own curiosity had developed with them) and how they were learning to balance this with respect, responsibility and care for their environment. Mara felt this combination of curiosity and responsibility was exactly what they needed for school. Ava warmly replied that it was a good combination for early childhood educators too.

Not only had connecting with and contributing to the world become an enjoyable part of their daily routine, but Mara was also confident that it was setting Jack and Chloe in good stead for the major transition ahead. Starting school would change and expand their world significantly, and their willingness to explore, their growing sense of responsibility, and their skills in navigating their surroundings and connecting with others would all stand them in good stead to thrive.

## Reflective scenario 2: More than a worm farm

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### Key points for professional learning

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- Young children have the capacity for, and often the interest in, engaging with complex ideas around environmental protection and degradation.
- Storytelling can play a crucial role in helping children learn about the natural world. This practice is particularly embedded in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.
- Engaging effectively with parents can promote the idea of children as citizens with rights and responsibilities, and the important roles of educators and parents in supporting these.

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### Questions for reflection

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- Have you engaged with young children about events in their community or the world that involve political or cultural sensitivities, and how have you managed these?
- How do your own experiences as a member of your local community influence your practice in supporting children to become confident and involved learners? How can you support your colleagues?

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### Outcomes for children

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- Curiosity
- Participation
- Responsibility

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### VEYLDF Practice Principles focus

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- Partnerships with families
- Reflective practice

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## Scenario

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Greta worked in a long day care centre in regional Victoria. The entire community was still reeling from a recent unprecedented bushfire season over the summer. While the fires hadn't reached the town in which Greta lived and worked, they had ripped through communities further along the coast, destroying infrastructure and badly affecting the livelihoods of families. Talk of the fires had dominated conversation among the staff, and it has been a prominent feature of talk among the children in the Tisdall room, where Greta worked with four- and five-year-olds. At staff meetings, they'd had some discussions about how to deal with these conversations; the staff had agreed to focus on reassuring the children that their community would be safe, while at the same time empathising with those who had lost so much.

Once the fires were under control, long day care had started, and things seemed to be settling down. Karen, the service manager, convened another meeting to check in with staff about how they and the children were doing. It became clear the experience had had a transformative effect on staff, and there was concern and some confusion about how to ensure that the inevitable conversations with children went beyond superficial reassurances and 'sparing a thought' for others.

Some children had seemed obsessed with the fires, wanting to talk about them every day. Most had demonstrated significant interest and curiosity, asking questions about how and why the fires were happening, what was happening to the people and animals in the fires, and whether or not they had all been able to get to safety. Many were also wanting to help those who had been affected. Some children had relatives and friends living in bushfire-affected communities, but even those who didn't have this personal connection demonstrated a strong desire to contribute, through a range of creative and practical ideas.

What had really struck the educators personally was a sense of powerlessness in the face of what felt like an existential threat. Greta and a colleague spoke up about how they had felt ill-equipped to support the children through the experience, but how they had learnt a lot by being thrown in at the deep end. Looking to the future, they were keen to consolidate their learning and develop their skills.

As emotions welled up about the difficult summer, Karen listened for opportunities to connect this back to their program. Many educators were concerned about climate change, and how they could equip the children for life in the future that scientists around the world were predicting. Conversations about worm farms and recycling no longer seemed an adequate response to the scale of the challenge.

Karen was aware that there were different views about climate change in the parent community, so she brought the focus back to the service's core business. The Quality Improvement Plan already had a focus on Element 3.2.3 *Environmentally responsible*, because the team had felt that they could do better. This was also a great opportunity for the children to learn how to contribute to their world.

'Children have a right to know how things are changing and why, and how they can be part of the solutions we need to develop as a society,' Karen said. 'We can help families talk about climate change using science instead of politics, and we can help children navigate the mixed messages that they see in the media. Children are curious about solutions, and we need to help them explore.'

There was no shortage of volunteers for the initial task of examining their current program and practices and investigating how both could be improved. Greta's job was to think about how they would document children's learning in this area, in order to know whether their practice was successful. Greta had been working on improving her learning stories, to focus on what children were learning rather than what they were doing, so was pleased to take on a new challenge that aligned with her own philosophy.

Greta knew the summer had been transformative for families too, and so she was interested in how it had changed families' aspirations for their children. She drafted an email acknowledging the difficult time they were all experiencing and inviting families to imagine how they wanted their child to develop to be ready to thrive in the future world. Families jumped at the chance to turn their fears into hopes for their children, and their responses ranged from practical ('learn how to treat injured wildlife') to political ('fight for climate action') to humanitarian ('willing to help others in a crisis').

Greta used the responses to start a list of what to look for in her observations of the children. Some were future hopes, so she thought about what these aspirations would look like in the different age groups at the service. She got more ideas for her observations from her professional reading, such as the theory of biophilia (the natural inclination for humans to connect with the natural world) and an interesting assessment tool that described connectedness to nature for preschool children. Greta was comforted by knowing that even the little things that she had observed children doing to care for their environment were the seeds from which a bigger sense of environmental responsibility could grow.

Anne, the preschool teacher for the three-year-olds, had the task of finding resources that would provoke children's thinking about contributing to the environment. She found *Big Rain Coming* (2002), by Katrina Germein and Bronwyn Bancroft, a picture book about an isolated Aboriginal community waiting for the rain. The children loved *Diary*

*of a Wombat* (2002) by Jackie French and Bruce Whatley, and their 2014 book *Fire* was right on topic. *One Small Island: The story of Macquarie Island* (2011), by Alison Lester and Coral Tulloch, talked about environmental damage, protection and restoration. Greta and Anne planned how they would introduce these stories to the children in their rooms, and how they would both support and observe the children's learning.

The stories tapped into the children's intense interest in what was happening around them. *Fire* generated particularly enthusiastic participation, as children offered imaginative ideas of how to help. Cautiously, Greta and Anne moved from the story to imaginative play outside, recognising that some children had been playing 'fires' already. The ideas quickly became reality, with a 'rain machine' emerging from the construction corner; firefighters, doctors and wildlife rescuers arriving with dress-ups and soft toys; and an array of builders, gardeners and cooks helping with rebuilding.

Greta remarked later that her learning stories from the imaginative play experience had gone down well with the parent community. The donation box in the foyer for the local CFA, which was one of the children's suggestions, was also generating interest, and the children excitedly emptied it together each day. Greta and Anne had discovered a rich learning opportunity to explore, and looked forward to building on these first observations to develop the children's environmental awareness even further. Even better, Greta felt that they had also contributed to healing in the wider community, and that the children were able to teach the adults a lot about connecting with and contributing to their world.

## Reflective scenario 3: Babies make decisions too

### Key points for professional learning

- A baby's expression of their preference is an early indication of their engagement in decision-making and participation.
- Responding to a baby's preferences and providing opportunities for play and exploration based on their interests can support their learning.

### Questions for reflection

- What are the early signs of decision-making and participation that might start to be visible in babies, as they increasingly explore and interact with their environments?
- In the context of busy routines, how can intentional teaching be integrated into everyday practice, to support a baby's exploration of their environment?

### Outcomes for children

- Curiosity
- Participation
- Decision-making

### VEYLDF Practice Principles focus

- Respectful relationships and responsive engagement
- High expectations for every child

## Scenario

Alex was in her first year of working with babies at a long day care centre, having recently transitioned into her new role from working with three-year-olds. Working with an age group that learnt so quickly and communicated so differently from the older children had been a huge learning curve; however, Alex was increasingly aware of how important this room was in the lives of children and families, because it was often their first experience of non-family care. After starting off lacking confidence, Alex and the children had settled into a well-established routine.

Alex learnt a lot from watching how the experienced educators in the room interacted with the children. She had especially noticed how Jamila, who was often rostered on with her, seemed to form attachments with babies very quickly. Alex had nicknamed her 'the baby whisperer' and had fallen into a habit of turning to Jamila whenever things didn't go as she had planned.

Jamila had been happy to help Alex settle the new children into the room at the start of the year, which Alex had sometimes found stressful; however, Jamila was worried that Alex was underestimating her own ability to connect with the children in the same way. Jamila felt that if Alex could realise her own ability to make connections, then her work would be so much more fun! Jamila could see that Alex's difficulties in playing with the babies were making routines harder for her too. Nappy changes and meals were far easier when they were just another playful interaction.

Jamila knew that just telling Alex what to do was not going to help her – Alex was already relying on her to make too many decisions. As she pondered how Alex needed to develop greater confidence in her own ability to make things better, she thought about how the VEYLDF also said that children need to be connected with and contribute to their world. Maybe Alex just needed help to see that the room was a space where everyone contributed.

'How was your day today, Alex?' Jamila asked, as they cleaned up at the end of their shift.

'Billie drove me crazy, again,' said Alex. 'I just can't seem to get him to want to play.'

'He's made a big contribution to his world today then, hasn't he?' laughed Jamila. 'These babies are so powerful, the way that they can change how a grown adult is feeling.'

Alex noticed the reference to the VEYLDF immediately. 'What do you mean?' she asked.

Jamila put her mop down for a moment: this was a great opportunity for critical reflection. She asked Alex to describe all her interactions with Billie that day, and what decisions she had made – and the decisions that Billie had made too. The first part was easy for Alex, who saw

her job as making decisions about Billie's needs, or about educative games to play. It was harder for her to see the decisions that Billie was also making throughout the day.

Jamila suggested to Alex that she focus on Billie's ability to make decisions as part of his learning, instead of focusing on his willingness to comply with decisions that she had made. This involved reframing how she thought about each interaction, thinking about the interaction from Billie's point of view.

Alex started thinking about the choices that the babies were making every day. She noticed how the babies were starting to explore their environment and were developing interests in certain activities and materials. Jackson was interested in climbing and using his body to move objects around in his environment – the bigger, the better. Amelia liked people and faces, and she was fascinated by their big book of photographs. As for Billie – well, he liked making noises, crashing and banging with whatever he could grab. Alex reflected that his fondness for banging his spoon had been the starting point for many difficult mealtimes that week.

But if the babies were making the decisions, how could Alex implement intentional teaching? Alex reflected that observing children's decision-making was a kind of assessment ... maybe there was an assessment tool that could help her answer this question. Her research led her to the Asset-Based Context Matrix (ABC Matrix), and she could see how this tool could be useful. Its purpose was to map children's interests in their homes, communities and early childhood settings, and then to help educators build on these interests in planning their programs.

Alex had spent a lot of time with Billie's mum, Deb, exploring various aspects of his learning and development during his difficult settling-in period, and she knew Deb was keen to learn more about how children learn. Sure enough, Deb was happy to help out with a 'trial' run of the tool. Alex emphasised that it wasn't a formal assessment, just a way to record Billie's interests more systematically. Alex invited Deb to join her to talk through the ABC Matrix – Alex organised a quiet and private space where they could have a relaxed conversation over a coffee. Alex learnt that what Billie loved doing at the centre he was also doing when he was at home. He especially loved it when his older brother helped him play 'drums' with wooden spoons.

The next day, Alex sat near Billie and began striking the xylophone with a mallet. Billie's face lit up, and when Alex offered him a mallet, he happily took it and started banging along with her. Soon it had turned into a playful game, each banging and giggling at each other in turn. The next day, Billie pointed to the xylophone when Alex picked him up, and they played again. Soon, when Billie began banging other things, Alex used their playful relationship to either join in with him or gently redirect him.

Next time they were chatting, Alex apologised to Jamila about the noise she and Billie had been making. They were certainly contributing to their world, by filling it with music! Jamila smiled and reminded Alex that everyone belonged in their room, even the noisy ones. Alex realised there were still times when she could make Billie's decisions for him, such as when other babies were sleeping. As Billie trusted Alex more, he became more willing to let her guide him in their daily routines.

This was certainly progress for Billie, but Jamila was curious as to whether Alex had noticed the change in herself as well. 'So are you a baby whisperer too now?' Jamila teased.

To Jamila's surprise, Alex carefully explained how Billie's noisy play was part of her intentional teaching, using what she learnt from completing the ABC Matrix with Deb. This was what Jamila admired about Alex – she was always open to researching things and coming up with new ideas. Alex agreed to help Jamila try it herself, with other families in the room.

Deb was amused to see that Billie's musical contributions to the program featured strongly in the next learning story about how he was connecting with and contributing to his world. 'Is he behaving himself?' she asked Alex. 'He's making more decisions,' Alex responded, with a renewed sense of confidence in her own professional decision-making and practice.

## Reflective scenario 4: That's not fair!

### Key points for professional learning

- Children can engage with complex and challenging aspects of the world around them by tapping into their 'natural flair for fairness'.
- A preference for fairness can lead to a child's aversion to inequity, and an emerging sense of responsibility to resist unfair decisions and outcomes.

### Questions for reflection

- How can we support young children's exploration of fairness, equality and social justice?
- How often do you hear the words 'it's not fair'? How do you deal with this in the classroom, and how might your response provide opportunities for exploring equity and responsibility?

### Outcomes for children

- Curiosity
- Orientation
- Responsibility

### VEYLDF Practice Principles focus

- Respectful relationships and responsive engagement
- Equity and diversity

## Scenario

Greg's Year 2 class had come a long way in the past six months. In Term 1, he'd decided it was time to start an honest conversation about social identity, focusing on the different ways that people live and different levels of resources they have access to. Working in a community where there wasn't much diversity meant that the children weren't exposed to a lot of difference in culture or socio-economic status – at least not at school.

Introducing his class to these issues had been important to Greg, but he had also sensed there may be sensitivities around talking about these issues so it had also been important to get colleagues and parents on board. That had been challenging, but it had been a worthwhile exercise in partnership. Over the course of the term, he and the class had spent quite a lot of time exploring different aspects of identity and culture through the lens of respect, one of the school's values.

These conversations were starting to have an impact. While the children's frame of reference had previously been their own lives and those of their friends and families, they were becoming increasingly curious about how things happened in the wider world. They had started talking about the differences between their immediate world and the one beyond their direct experience, such as when one girl talked about seeing hungry children in other countries on television.

As he observed a developing sense of respect and empathy among the children, Greg decided they were now well equipped to extend their learning. He had known early on that their conversations about different ways of living should lead to an exploration of fairness, inequality and discrimination, but his early focus had been on raising awareness of difference. The time now seemed right to build on the children's growing awareness of difference and to tap into their instinct for identifying fairness (and unfairness) so as to introduce the idea of rights.

Reading about other teachers' experiences and thinking had really helped Greg to organise his thoughts and plans earlier in the year. In particular, he had found a number of African-American teachers had written brilliantly on the issue of racial identity in the US and how they had explored this with young children. Seeking inspiration online for exploring fairness and equity with young children, he soon hit the jackpot.

Greg stumbled across a UK article detailing the use of candy-coated chocolate lollies to spark discussions with older primary students about fairness and equality. Immediately, he could see how the technique could work with the younger students in his class. The author talked about tapping into a 'natural flair for fairness' in children, to spark critical discussion about what equality and fair treatment are, and how (and by whom) they're defined.

'Flair for fairness' resonated strongly with Greg. To date, many of his conversations with the children were about different ways of living, and access to resources, and had focused on fairness. This experiment promised a way of bringing those observations into focus. Greg started out by divvying up collectible plastic figurines (instead of lollies), giving five to some children, one to others and keeping most for himself. Predictably, the children were outraged. Greg urged them to describe how they felt.

Those with fewer figurines were angry and upset. Most of the children with more were 'very happy'. Two children with more figurines grudgingly acknowledged that the distribution was unfair, even though they were happy to have more. Greg took the figurines back and redistributed them; this time he gave five to each boy, and two to each girl. Predictably, there was more outrage.

Lina, one of the girls, said that boys should never get more than girls, that it definitely wasn't fair. Another girl, Gemma, suggested that everyone should have the same number of figurines and that there should be a rule that when there are things to share, they should be shared in a way that is fair.

'But who decides what "fair" actually means?' Greg asked. 'Maybe Alice really loves these plastic figurines but doesn't have many, and James already has loads at home. Does that mean Alice should get more, and James fewer? Does fair mean we should share everything equally?'

Without planning to, Greg had now introduced the idea of equity to the children. Their response indicated that they might be ready for it, so he ran with it: 'It's not really fair for James to have even more figurines when he had loads to begin with.'

'Maybe he should get fewer now, because he'll have more later,' said Jack.

'But that's really complicated,' said Gemma. 'How do we even know who has what? And maybe some kids have more of other things.'

This was Greg's cue to try something more complex. He allocated half of the children to 'act as grown-ups', with the others remaining in their day job as children. The adults all received 20 cents as pay for the work they'd done that week. He gave the children 5 cents each, for pocket money. Then he delivered the blow: the plastic figurines cost 10 cents each!

'So not fair!' shouted the children. 'Adults don't even like these as much as kids.' So maybe fairness meant allocating resources thinking about what people needed to make them happy, not just based on numbers, Greg suggested.

Greg reflected on what he'd observed during the session. As he'd predicted, the children's sense of fairness was an instinctive one and it was strong. They already had the language to discuss justice, and when prompted,

they were able to consider some of the aspects and implications of injustice.

Greg knew from his experience earlier in the year that to make an impact and enable the children to connect more with the world around them, and move on to consider their role and contribution, this exploration needed to be extended and built on as the year progressed. He'd initially found these conversations difficult, but Greg's own confidence was now growing, and he felt increasingly capable of observing and extending the children's curiosity and engagement with the world beyond their immediate community. Most of all, he hoped they never lost their 'flair for fairness' and that their families and educators would support them in developing this as the foundation for their connection with and contribution to their world.

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## Reflective scenario 5: The world at our table

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### Key points for professional learning

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- Everyday activities and routines (such as mealtimes) can provide an opportunity for children to engage with and learn about the world around them, at a local and global level.
- Children connect with and contribute to their worlds in different ways, including by participating in and influencing the social environment in ECEC settings and the early years of school.

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### Questions for reflection

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- What everyday ‘worlds’ for children do you create in your day-to-day program? How does each child in your service connect with and contribute to these worlds?
- How can these everyday worlds be extended with ideas, objects or practices from the worlds of educators, families and communities?

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### Outcomes for children

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- Orientation
- Curiosity

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### VEYLDF Practice Principles focus

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- Reflective practice
- Equity and diversity

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## Scenario

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Abir was confused. She was learning to take observations of children’s learning as part of her Certificate III course, with help from her room leader, Nirmala. Her most recent project had been observing learning for their two- and three-year-old group during an everyday routine, for the VEYLDF Learning and Development Outcome *Children are connected with and contribute to their world*.

Nirmala had been so proud of how Abir had set up the activity. Abir had organised with the cook to take the children on a ‘world tour’ of different kinds of breads, beginning with samoon, the bread from her home country, Iraq. Other educators had contributed recipes for injera (bread from Ethiopia), pão de queijo (small buns stuffed with cheese from Brazil) and roti (flatbread from India). The children had been very excited to try each new recipe, and to learn the name of each type of bread.

But now Nirmala had asked Abir to look at the learning story again. Nirmala agreed that the bread experience had been successful and that the children had learnt a lot about breads from around the world. She also agreed that some children had enjoyed sharing breads that their families made at home and that this helped their (and the educators’) sense of belonging.

Yet Nirmala had said that Abir should look again and think about what she might have missed. Nirmala said that children’s worlds were both very big and very small, and that Abir needed to think about their worlds as being like an onion with many layers. She suggested that Abir try sitting at the empty dining table to do her critical reflection, and to think about the little world they created there every day.

So Abir was sitting at the table with her notebook in her hand, trying to observe the world with a different set of eyes. She thought about each step in the lunchtime routine. It started with the march down the corridor, with each educator taking small groups of children from the Echidna Room to the dining area. She thought about how confidently the children moved from the world of the classroom to the world of lunch. Had they always been like that? No, they had started the year wandering off in all directions, but now they all knew where they had to be.

Then the children took their seats. This was always a matter of intense negotiation. Some children had favourite places where they liked to sit; others had best friends that they had to sit next to. Abir reflected on how she always seated the tricky ones first, and then inserted the ones who didn’t mind in the empty spaces. What did that teach the children? Maybe some of them could learn that sharing the world means not always getting their way.

Children were already connecting with and contributing to their world, and the food had not yet arrived! Now that she was thinking critically about the differences within her group, Abir began to question what she had written



about all the children enjoying the breads. No, of course some didn't – but they were the children who were never curious about new food. This meant they were missing out on connecting to the wonderful world of bread, and all the other exciting foods the service offered. Abir reflected on the difference between the children who dived into new foods, and those who needed persuading. Could they learn to be brave?

Nirmala had encouraged Abir to think about what she had heard, as well as what she saw. At the time, Abir had been focused on teaching the children the correct names for the bread, and especially enjoyed sharing the word *samoon* because it was meaningful in her own world. She had also asked the children whether they liked the bread and reminded them to thank the cook. But there were lots of other conversations happening at the table: Bella and Alia talked about 'pointy bread', and Mahmoud told a long story about pancakes on injera day.

The lunch table was always a world of lively chatter, and Abir again reflected more carefully on who joined in and who missed out. Harley had a hearing difficulty, so the table buzz often passed him by. Abir recalled that he had watched her closely when she was explaining the word *samoon*, but she had been too caught up with the other children. What else could she have done, to expand Harley's world? How could he contribute to their lunchtime social chatter?

Then there was Violet. Abir could feel her posture stiffen as she thought about her biggest lunchtime challenge, a fiercely independent toddler who refused to sit still. One of the greatest achievements of the pão de queijo day was that Violet sat engrossed in her meal for at least 15 minutes, contentedly stuffing her small mouth with handfuls of savoury dough. Did Violet usually disrupt her world out of naughtiness, or was she just not interested? Abir resolved to ask Nirmala what she knew about how mealtimes worked at Violet's home.

Meals always finished with the same routine, in which all the children participated. Leftover food went in the compost bin, and plates got stacked on the trolley. Rashida, the cook, would come over to collect the trolley, and the children would all say 'thank you' for the meal.

Abir reflected on the number of times they had reinforced the importance of these daily rituals to the children. The compost bin was important for looking after the garden, and the natural world. The stacking of the plates was important to keep their inside world clean and tidy. And thanking Rashida was important for the social connection they all had within the centre.

By the time Abir got up from the table, she had almost forgotten about the different types of bread from around the great big world that the children were discovering. Her imagination had been fired by the tiny world that they created each day in the lunchroom, and the ways

in which all the children connected with and contributed to it. She reflected on her own childhood, and how the taste of samoon had brought back to her the tiny world of her family dinner table, where she always felt loved, nourished and at home. She realised that the educators' enthusiasm for sharing recipes may have been driven by a similar feeling.

Nirmala was proud to hear Abir say that her Certificate III lecturer had shared her learning story about the 'small world of the lunch table' with all the other students in her class. Even better, the service decided to focus on 'connection with and contribution to the lunch routine' in their Quality Improvement Plan, all because Abir had shown how important it was in the world of educators and children. As ideas rolled in for new recipes, routines and ways to involve the children's families, Abir quietly hoped that samoon would still remain on the menu.

## Reflective scenario 6: The journey as learning

### Key points for professional learning

- Contact with nature is positively associated with many benefits for children, including those related to length and quality of sleep, levels of physical activity, stress levels and cognitive skills (including focus, working memory, problem-solving skills and creativity).
- Educators can help families realise that connectedness to and responsibility for nature are important parts of children's learning, not just 'recreation' activities.

### Questions for reflection

- What opportunities exist for children to engage with natural environments in ECEC settings, particularly urban settings, and how can we maximise these?
- How can we actively promote and assess children's sense of belonging and comfort in natural environments, especially for children who don't play in nature regularly?

### Outcomes for children

- Curiosity
- Participation
- Responsibility

### VEYLDF Practice Principles focus

- Reflective practice
- Partnerships with families

## Scenario

Elena felt like she'd embarked on an important journey at the long day care centre where she worked, not only with the children but also with their families. Elena worked as the room leader of the Blue Group (for three-year-olds) with an experienced co-educator, Nina. When she started at the service, Elena had been struck by the families' focus on pre-academic skills and school readiness. She and Nina had worked hard to acknowledge the families' aspirations, while broadening their notion of what success looked like in kindergarten, and to prioritise development of the whole child.

Their greatest success so far had been helping families to understand executive function, and how it could be developed through play-based learning. This had started to shift the conversations with parents away from children learning to read and write (a priority for many parents), and towards broader areas of learning and development. Elena was pleased to see that the energy families had been putting into pre-academic skills was now being directed towards helping their children develop their problem-solving, memory and self-regulation.

Now they were ready for the next step on the journey. Elena and Nina had recently started taking groups of children on a weekly walk alongside the canal that ran from the centre to a local playground. They incorporated plenty of intentional teaching, especially in fostering motor skills, spatial awareness and imaginative play at the playground. But families seemed more enthusiastic about this part of the program purely because it provided time outdoors.

Elena mulled this over as she strolled along the canal path. She was eager for the families to see all the learning that was happening on the excursions, but she had to admit they had a point. There was something nice about just being outdoors that seemed to bring the children to life. She could feel it even as they were walking along the canal path, with its tall trees, flowing water, and myriad birds and insects that changed every time. Was this feeling also learning?

Elena remarked to Nina later that the canal walk was the favourite part of her week, but she couldn't put her finger on why. Nina laughed and nodded. 'It's like the old saying: it's not the destination, it's the journey,' she said. She observed that the children often spent their weekends being driven to various activities, and their weekdays in busy family homes. There were very few times when they had the opportunity to simply be and connect with the natural world.

On the next walk, Elena observed more closely how the children connected to the lush green spaces around the canal path. Julia, Frankie and Imaaya always wanted to stop and look at trees, little creatures and plants along the route, and reached out to touch and explore.

Jack, Nyah and Blake were less interested, and intent on getting on with the walk. Elena and Nina observed to see if the same children were drawn to the natural materials they incorporated in the room and, sure enough, the same ‘explorers’ were always the first to investigate them.

Next came the puzzle of how to communicate their observations to families. It was hard to imagine Jack’s or Nyah’s family being interested in whether or not their children were fascinated by patterns on leaves, or were contented by the sound of flowing water. Their hopes for their children were for academic success, not daydreaming in the sunshine. They also remembered that Blake’s parents had reacted coldly to their decision to share homegrown vegetables instead of Easter eggs. They respected that nature played a different role in different families’ lives.

Their success in engaging families in executive function had been helped by an assessment tool Elena had discovered, which showed families how their child was learning. Did such a tool, to do with children’s connection to their natural world, exist? And so the research began!

The two educators settled on the Connectedness with Nature Index (CNI), which assessed children’s awareness and enjoyment of nature, and their empathy for and responsibility towards nature. It had been adapted specifically for young children, and even tested on children living in urban environments. It was designed for assessing changes in children’s engagement over long periods of time, not as a result of a single ‘session’, which suited their intent perfectly. Most importantly for Elena, research had demonstrated that children who scored highly on the CNI also showed strengths in their social and emotional development.

Elena and Nina wrote an email to parents talking about how they planned to use the CNI as an informal assessment of children’s connection to natural environments, which was a component of the VEYLDF. They included evidence of the benefits of children’s connection with nature on other kinds of learning. Finally, they explained how they would use the canal walks to focus on children’s awareness, empathy and responsibility in relation to natural environments. They explained that developing these areas could also have an impact on how the children perceived and interacted with social and built environments, as well as health and wellbeing benefits.

Elena and Nina used the CNI to guide a series of conversations with the children over the course of a few weeks, including some discussions sitting by the canal or at the nature table in their room. This helped them to build up a picture of the group’s connection to nature, as well as gain insights into the individual perspectives and experiences of each child. They also doubled the allocated time for their walk to the playground, allowing the children to stop to notice and discuss their surroundings, and incorporating intentional teaching en route.

The two educators repeated the same series of conversations the next term, gently incorporating purposeful assessment into their everyday interactions with the children. They reflected that things had shifted, with many of the children engaging more deeply and enthusiastically with nature. A few had even begun to take responsibility for caring for the canal, such as checking on favourite plants after heavy storms or tidying up fallen branches, which showed that the children were beginning to contribute to, not just connect with, the natural world.

As for families, their bemusement at another new kind of learning soon gave way to their usual enthusiastic support. Stories from the children suggested that nature walks were finding their way into families’ busy, goal-directed lives – hopefully with enough time to enjoy the journey.

## Reflective scenario 7: Risky business

### Key points for professional learning

- Discussions with children on what they know and can do is an important tool for learning that supports reflection and promotes motivation and involvement.
- Involving children in deliberation and decision-making can be challenging, but plays a valuable role in demonstrating democratic decision-making, rights and responsibilities.

### Questions for reflection

- How much agency do the youngest children have in your school or ECEC setting? Is there a balance between the children's capacity and your assessment of the risk involved and your duty of care?
- How important is it to provide opportunities for children to genuinely engage in negotiation and decision-making at school, to gain real-world experience in these areas?

### Outcomes for children

- Negotiation
- Decision-making
- Responsibility

### VEYLDF Practice Principles focus

- High expectations for every child
- Integrated teaching and learning approaches

### Scenario

'I played on the Year 4 playground yesterday after school,' Juno announced to the class one morning. 'I got to the top of the tree and down again by myself. It was SO MUCH FUN!'

Robbie said he'd also climbed the 3-metre-high tree stump that had footholds for going up and ropes for abseiling down. He'd been too frightened to get down once he had got to the top, but he had been helped down by his older sister. Clara was desperate to climb the stump, but her mum wouldn't let her because that playground was for the older kids.

Alice realised that she didn't really know why the recently built playgrounds had been allocated by year level, but she assumed that it was to reduce risk and overcrowding. The Year 4 tree stump, for example, probably hadn't been designed for five-year-olds, but they were utterly intent on conquering it. Alice's students were persistent; this was the fourth time in as many weeks that she'd been asked the same question. This time, she responded differently.

'So, most of you really want to play on the other playgrounds, and you feel like you've shown that you can do it safely, right? When we talked about this last time, I said that playgrounds are for different grades for a few reasons. Can anyone remember what they were?' she said.

'My mum says the tall playgrounds aren't safe for little kids. Is that a reason?' asked Clara.

'You have to take risks in your life!' said Benny enthusiastically. Alice asked the children to put their hands on their heads if they knew what a risk was. Many of them looked at her blankly in response. Benny gave a short but effective explanation, and Juno illustrated it by talking about what could happen if they fell off the big tree stump.

Alice summed it up: 'So, risks are things that might happen that we don't want to happen. But I wonder if it's possible to deal with these risks in other ways, so you guys can choose what playground you want to play on.' The group spent 10 minutes coming up with ideas. Alice promised to raise the children's request and suggestions with the principal, Mr Miller.

Later, she reflected on how the children had immediately been able to connect risk with learning, even though many of them hadn't previously known what risk meant. Some had pointed out they wouldn't be able to get better at climbing, or get braver, if they didn't take risks. While Robbie had been too scared to climb down once he reached the top of the stump, that hadn't dampened his enthusiasm, and he was confident he'd learn with practice.

Others had complained that the grown-ups weren't listening to them. Alice had talked about how children had the right to be heard, but also the responsibility to share their ideas respectfully.

The next staff meeting had a full agenda and Mr Miller didn't seem interested in a discussion about playground use. Alice persisted.

'I think there's a real appetite for opening this conversation up to include the children, and there's probably a way we can use this to model discussion, debate and decision-making. If the rules aren't changed, maybe they'll be more prepared to accept them. Or maybe they'll convince us to change the rules. Whatever the outcome, we're enabling democratic decision-making, and the kids will learn a lot from being in the driving seat,' she argued. In the end, the principal agreed, on the condition that all children would have the opportunity to engage.

Thinking about how it could work, Alice re-read *Children's Voices*, a South Australian publication she'd found online about active citizenship and the Early Years Learning Framework. It talks about seeing children as wiser than we might think, and as experts on their own lives. Alice also found a diagram called Hart's ladder of participation, which describes a continuum from tokenistic consultation to child-led decision-making. This prompted her to consult her class not only on the issue itself, but on the actual process of reassessing the playground rules.

To her surprise, they came up with a novel solution. Robbie's older sister was on the Student Representative Council for the school. Robbie told the class how his sister was allowed to talk to the principal and make decisions. Many of the children liked the idea of getting the 'big kids' to help them have their say. Alice reflected that they knew more about negotiation strategies than she had expected, and she suspected this might be a tactic that Robbie had used at home.

Seeing an opportunity for peer-to-peer learning, Alice invited the two Year 6 Student Representative Council members to talk to the children in her class. She helped them build their case and gently prompted a discussion about how other children and teachers might respond. The Year 6 students said that some big kids might be worried about little kids getting in the way, while the younger ones observed that the big kids might play too rough sometimes. But everyone agreed that the stump was worth sharing!

The next step was sharing their proposal with Mr Miller in one of his visits to their class. With Alice's help, they had devised a roster system for the use of the playgrounds. Alice used the roster to schedule time for her group in the playground into their play-based learning program during class time (when no older children were in the playground). Alice also prompted the children to share some of the other arguments they'd put forward, which included the children's ability to manage risk – making sure that there weren't too many children on the playground at once – and their ability to work together and help each other.

Mr Miller, clearly impressed, said that there was one more thing they needed to do – seek permission from their families. This provoked a lively discussion among the children about what their mums and dads might say. Together, they brainstormed a letter to the families explaining why the tree stump was important to them, and included a list of the things they could learn: being brave, sharing, helping and getting ready to be 'big kids' themselves.

When Mr Miller announced the new playground roster at whole-school assembly, Alice reflected on how the children had progressed from 'that's not fair' a few weeks earlier, to proposing and negotiating solutions. It had been a whole-school effort, but it had helped her see which children in her class were connecting to their world as capable agents, and which ones might need support to find their voice. In the meantime, there was a stump to enjoy.

## Reflective scenario 8: Creating worlds out of words

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### Key points for professional learning

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- Engaging extended family members in children’s learning can deliver benefits for all and can support children’s connection with and contribution to family and communities.
- Purposeful use of digital technologies in ECEC settings can offer new ways for children to connect to the world, and interactive technologies can enable them to contribute.

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### Questions for reflection

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- How can digital communication technologies be used in a way that supports connection with people, places and ideas, in an interactive way?
- Is it important or essential to have parents’ engagement on the use of digital technologies, and how can educators effectively approach this?

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### Outcomes for children

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- Orientation
- Participation

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### VEYLDF Practice Principles focus

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- Partnerships with families
- Integrated teaching and learning approaches

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### Scenario

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It was April 2020, and the global pandemic had turned everyone’s lives upside down. Andrej was still working in the three-year-old kindergarten program at a long day care centre, with a handful of children whose families continued to require access to the service. Andrej was glad to be keeping in contact with the children, as he worried about how families were coping. Ollie and Huia had sole parents, and he knew the centre had an especially important role in their lives.

Andrej was keeping a close eye on how the children were going. This was more than just making sure they were ‘okay’; it also meant monitoring the effects on their learning and development. He had spent some time with the other educators who were still at work, brainstorming the risks that children might be experiencing. Some of the educators who had to stay at home joined in, laughing through the ups and downs of connecting through unfamiliar video technologies.

The educators felt confident that they could maintain the children’s health and wellbeing at the centre, and there were plenty of ways to sustain their learning. The biggest loss was the sudden disappearance of so many people from children’s lives. Andrej knew that Ollie, Huia and others usually spent a lot of time with their grandparents and other relatives. Now their parents were trying to juggle demanding jobs with much less support from their extended families.

Andrej never saw the children as passive recipients of the decisions of adults. He believed that each child was capable of making a difference in their world, no matter how chaotic that world might be. He also realised that he could make a crucial difference to how the children themselves understood the crisis: if they did not learn about ways to contribute to their situation, even in small ways, there was a risk that they would learn to feel helpless. Andrej resolved to help the children to retain some sense of control over their experiences.

Andrej sat with the children and asked them what they wished they could do more often (he was careful not ask what they missed, to keep the conversation hopeful). Immediately all the missing pieces in their worlds came tumbling out. Sherie and Louis wished they could go to the beach and the library. Tonya wanted to go to the football with her dad. Ollie wanted to play with his grandpa in the garden. Huia just wanted her aunty to make her special toast.

As they talked, the children’s worlds came to life in their conversation. Andrej was struck by the power of language to create connections, and he encouraged the children to talk more. He noticed that some of the children became frustrated that they didn’t have the right words to describe the familiar people and places that – for now – existed only in their imaginations. Then he thought about his own

home country, which now only existed for him when his brother described it to him in their regular video calls – and suddenly he had an idea.

He started with Louis, who already had regular video chats with his grandpa. Andrej asked Louis's mum if they could do a chat from the centre's laptop, with all the children gathered around. At first, many of the children weren't interested – it was just another screen, and it didn't even have cartoons on it! But then Louis started playing his favourite game, where he told his grandpa what he wanted to look at in the house. They went to look at the budgie cage, the piano, the lolly jar ('Grandpa ate one!') and the big old clock in the hall. Grandpa talked continually about what they were seeing, with Louis chiming in with words he knew.

Andrej was thrilled to see curiosity light up in some of the children, who had seemed a little deflated lately. He also noticed that some of the more confident children had begun telling 'Grandpa' what to do, to the point where he had to engage in some negotiation about what to look at next. Thoughtful Sherie had quickly orientated herself to Grandpa's 'house', noticing the lolly jar whenever it appeared in the background. Andrej felt that the children's worlds, which had shrunk so rapidly, had the chance to grow again and become more interesting.

More video calls followed, with various relatives who were missing the children as much as the children were missing them. Andrej helped all the adults understand that they were not there just to entertain the children: they were there to create worlds with them, exploring and connecting to their surroundings. Some of the adults began creating worlds within worlds – one had a toy castle where the children could tell the knights and princesses where to go. Another had a marionette who did outrageous dances on request. Sometimes technology got in the way, but the excitement of 'will it work this time?' became part of the experience. The children took turns in clicking buttons, so a successful call was everyone's achievement.

Andrej realised he was also contributing to children's lives at home. Parents struggling to get through a stressful day had no time to settle a three-year-old in front of a computer screen to talk to a relative – especially when that relative was no longer present to offer physical support. By bringing children's worlds into the service, he could affirm how important those connections to other adults were in children's lives, which the parents may not have realised.

At pick-up time, Andrej joked to Huia's mum that she had a wonderful educator for a sister, as Huia's aunty had just spent half an hour online teaching the children some hilarious songs. Huia's mum was amazed – before the crisis, she had been feeling guilty about leaving Huia with relatives so often, without thinking about the connections that her daughter was making in her world. When Huia

came bouncing over full of pride and chatter, Andrej reflected that at three years old she was making a big difference in her mother's life too.

At their next meeting, Andrej was able to tell the other educators how the children were connecting to and contributing to their world, even though that world was still physically inaccessible. He felt that they had found a way for children to exercise their right to be connected with family and community, even at a time when so many things were prohibited.

Andrej also shared some of the rich conversations he had heard between the children afterwards: Emma the animal lover was still talking about 'Grandpa's' budgie, and he had seen Dimitri instructing Ollie where to move his plastic figures, just like they had seen on 'TV'. The children transferring the learning from the computer screen to real life was evidence that the experience was making a difference – and it was the best evidence Andrej could hope for. He began planning for transferring the learning from the strange world of the global pandemic crisis into whatever world came next.

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# Glossary

**Agency:** Having a sense of autonomy and being able to make choices and decisions, to influence events and to have an impact on one's world.

**Attributes:** Characteristics of a person, such as age, gender, ethnicity, social class, language background, personality, behaviour, and physical aspects. Attributes may be changeable over time, or fixed throughout a lifetime.

**Cognitive flexibility:** Human capacity to adapt mental processing strategies in the face of new conditions, to switch between different concepts, to think about multiple concepts simultaneously, or to think about something from another perspective. With working memory and inhibitory control, it is a key element of executive function.

**Cognitive map:** A mental representation of one's physical environment.

**Connectedness to nature:** An individual's affective and experiential connection to nature.

**Construct:** A construct is a theoretical idea, such as a quality or attribute that, while not directly measurable, can be assessed if broken down into observable properties.

**Country:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ongoing connection to place, collective spaces, ancestral heritage, values, and cultural obligations.

**Curiosity:** A state of motivation associated with exploration, openness to new experiences, and willingness to engage with the unexpected.

**Decision-making:** Identifying and choosing alternatives based on values and preferences.

**Disposition:** Specific motivational, temperamental or emotional trait, habit or response that contributes to a child's personality.

**Diversity:** The variety of differences in people, including their cultural and language backgrounds, religion, values, sexual orientation, abilities, educational background, socio-economic status, lifestyles and gender.

**Early childhood professionals:** The term early childhood professionals includes, but is not limited to, maternal and child health nurses, all early childhood practitioners who work directly with children in early childhood education and care settings (educators), school teachers, family support workers, preschool field officers, inclusion support facilitators, student support service officers, primary school nurses, primary welfare officers, early childhood intervention workers, play therapists, health professionals and teachers working in hospitals, and education officers in cultural organisations.

**Ecological model:** A conceptual model and set of principles for understanding the interrelationships between personal and environmental factors.

**Empathy:** The ability to understand and share the perspectives of others.

**Equity:** The quality of being fair and just, and the right of a child to fully participate. Also professional practice that values and respects diversity and consciously addresses barriers to achievement within a strengths-based approach, in consultation with children, families and communities.

**Executive function:** A specific set of attention-regulation skills involved in conscious goal-directed problem-solving. These skills include cognitive flexibility, working memory and inhibitory control.

**Fairness:** Being equitable in the treatment of others, including considering learners' characteristics and experiences that may advantage or disadvantage them in any particular assessment.

**Inhibitory control:** The process of self-control that enables a person to purposefully ignore a potential distraction, and to modify their response. With working memory and cognitive flexibility, it is a key element of executive function.

**Involvement:** Taking part in an activity at a level of engagement that exhibits sustained concentration, intrinsic motivation, focus and learning.



**Mature play:** Sustained pretend play in which children take on specific roles and consistently engage in pretend actions, speech and interactions appropriate to their characters.

**Negotiation:** The deliberation between two or more parties, aimed at reaching an agreement.

**Object attachment:** A child's attachment to a particular object, toy or resource for psychological comfort, sometimes known as transitional object.

**Orientation:** A child's physical sense of themselves in the world, or their feelings about a particular subject, and the ability to find their way and explore their world.

**Reliability:** An assessment's ability to produce valid results consistently, across contexts.

**Skills:** A child's ability to do specific mental and/or physical activities that may require practice in order to be performed proficiently. Skills can be both taught and learnt.

**Social skills:** Competence that facilitates interpersonal communication and appropriate behaviours in a social setting.

**Trajectories:** Developmental trajectories are a curve of repeated observations of an aspect of development. Individuals may differ in the starting point, the degree of acceleration or deceleration, the timing of acceleration or deceleration, or overall shape of the curve.

**Transition:** The process of moving between environments or routines, including between home and early childhood settings.

**Trust:** The belief that someone's words, actions, and honesty can be relied upon in a range of social contexts.

**United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC 1989):** A human rights treaty that sets out the civil, political, economic, social, health and cultural rights of children.

**Validity:** Level of assurance that an assessment tool in fact measures what it claims to measure.

**Wayfinding:** The process of orienting oneself in physical space and navigating from place to place.

**Working memory:** The ability to hold and manipulate distinct pieces of information over a short period of time. With cognitive flexibility and inhibitory control, it is a key element of executive function.

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