Welcome to the tenth edition of the EYE, which supports implementation of the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF). The EYE is intended for everyone who works with children aged from birth to eight years.

This edition has a focus on Learning and Development Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing, with particular attention to wellbeing in very young children from birth to three years.

Ideas to incorporate this Outcome in your practice:

• Use approved learning and development frameworks to build evidence of children’s wellbeing and explore: What does wellbeing look like in babies and young children? What determines wellbeing? How is wellbeing supported?
• View the video clip interview with Dr Rosemary Roberts to build on your knowledge and understanding about wellbeing from birth to three years.
• Read how early childhood professionals from enhanced maternal and child health, early intervention, family day care and long day care support children to have a strong sense of wellbeing.

Dr Rosemary Roberts is an early years consultant and trainer from the United Kingdom. She has worked extensively in early childhood, primary and higher education. Dr Roberts has presented at seminars and conferences in Victoria during 2011 and 2012.

In this interview Dr Roberts:

• outlines her research and insights on wellbeing in children, particularly with the birth to three-years period
• highlights the importance of the quality of relationships, experiences and learning in the earliest years
• describes four constructs of wellbeing: Physical, Communication, Belonging and Boundaries, Agency
• advocates the use of ‘Pebbles Records’ as a way to engage with families and to enable services to work in partnership.

The VEYLDF emphasises the importance of wellbeing as including ‘good mental and physical health, feelings of happiness and satisfaction … Relationships that are warm and supportive assist babies to express feelings such as joy, sadness, frustration and fear, and support strong attachments.’ (VEYLDF, p. 22)
Snapshots

Regional and metropolitan cultural organisations offer many opportunities for connecting children, families and early childhood services in their communities. In these learning spaces children participate in interactive experiences, explore objects and art works and listen to stories.

‘Participating in their communities strengthens children’s sense of identity and wellbeing.’ (VEYLDF p. 20)

Bendigo Art Gallery, Programs for Children – an inspiring and spectacular studio to learn about and make art

Writer: Margot Feast, Education Officer, Bendigo Art Gallery
Throughout the year children of all ages and their families are regularly invited to fill the Bendigo Art Gallery spaces and join in specially designed activities aimed at introducing them to the diversity and dynamics of art and the joy of creativity.

One ongoing program at the Gallery especially for children aged five years and under and their carers is Gallery Giggles. It is presented on the first Wednesday of the month during school term.

Each Gallery Giggles session begins with children sitting on brightly coloured rugs in front of a selected artwork. While the group gathers, children are provided with clipboards, paper and crayons and encouraged to observe and draw the things they see.

The selected artwork and props are then used as a springboard for discussion with the children on many different art related topics: including art materials and tools, visual art qualities such as line and colour and the stories we find in art. To extend learning about the artwork, books and songs related to the artwork and the children’s own lives are also enjoyed in the session.

Gallery Giggles, along with all other children’s programs at the gallery, are delivered in the grand gallery spaces with art works from many eras and countries.

Bendigo Art Gallery’s children’s programs relate to the following outcomes:

• Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world
  – Children develop a sense of belonging to groups and communities
  – Children respond to diversity with respect
  – Children become socially responsible and show respect for the environment

• Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners
  – Children develop dispositions for learning such as curiosity, cooperation, confidence, creativity, commitment, enthusiasm, persistence, imagination and reflexivity
  – Children develop a range of skills and processes such as problem solving, inquiry, experimentation, hypothesising, researching and investigating
  – Children transfer and adapt what they have learned from one context to another
  – Children resource their own learning through connecting with people, place, technologies and natural and processed materials.

NGV Kids Corner and Kids Space, National Gallery of Victoria 2012

Writer: Dianne Hilyear, Program Coordinator, National Gallery of Victoria (NGV)
The Great Hall ceiling of NGV International is a field of vibrant colours and shapes. Babies and toddlers, lying on the carpeted floor or in their prams, can gaze upwards at one of the NGV’s highlights. The ceiling and the water wall at the front of the NGV have been enjoyed by generations of visitors and the youngest are welcome to discover and delight.

Recently the NGV introduced two gallery spaces designed especially for children and their families. The spaces reinforce the Gallery’s commitment to being part of education and life experience for our earliest of learners and references the Learning and Development Outcomes. At the Ian Potter
Centre: NGV Australia, Federation Square, there is Kids Corner, and NGV International in St Kilda Rd has NGV Kids Space. Both cater for children aged from birth to eight years and the exhibitions, sourced primarily from the NGV collection have interactive, interpretative and fun activities. Families are welcome to relax, play and learn and share their experience in a safe environment.

The Time Catcher exhibition, currently at Kids Corner, looks at art works through time and explores the notion of time and how the past influences the present. Toddlers can climb through nooks, sit in a pretend car to view digital artworks, interact with a multimedia installation to see themselves on screen or build with lightweight blocks. At Kids Space: An Excellent Adventure, children can become explorers and discover wonderful objects from around the world. A floor puzzle can be arranged to create a ‘new land’ and a multimedia installation of the night sky, projected onto the floor, is triggered by children’s movement as they crawl or run. Or they may choose to climb into a child-size pyramid and discover an original Egyptian headdress up close.

NGV Kids also has a range of family programs plus programs for children from three years. All program details can be found on the NGV website, or in the NGV Kids seasonal brochure.

The NGV is also a great destination for playgroups and friend’s groups to meet, picnic, play and learn.

The NGV welcomes families with young children, recognising the importance of fostering a love of art from an early age, with a view of encouraging its youngest visitors to make creative experiences and the Gallery a part of their lives for many years to come.

Sovereign Hill Ballarat – Grandma Gerty and Grandpa George

Writers: Annemarie Kierce and Peter Hoban, Education Officers, Sovereign Hill

Sovereign Hill has programs specifically tailored for the early years. They are designed with local kindergarten staff, providing many opportunities for learning and to reflect on traditions in a flexible and safe environment. These programs support planning to the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS) and the early years Learning and Development Outcomes.

Early childhood groups visiting Sovereign Hill can meet Grandma Gerty. She is a beautifully costumed volunteer in one of Sovereign Hill’s cottages. Grandma Gerty is unwell and asks the children for their help with her shopping. Equipped with a basket, a shopping list and ‘olden days’ money, the children and their helpers embark on a shopping trip to Main Street.

Groups can visit Grandpa George on the Red Hill Gully Diggings. They can help him find his tools which are scattered over the diggings and go panning for gold. Groups can also visit Mary Bath’s hut. This is specially set up with experiences including washing, sweeping, gardening, games and stories.

For further information on how these programs support implementation of the VELS and both the VEYLDF and EYLF Learning and Development Outcomes go to the Sovereign Hill Education website at: http://sheducationcom.ascetinteractive.biz/?id=grandmagertyvanderand

State Library of Victoria – Family Programs

Writer: Emma Baker, Family Programs Officer, State Library of Victoria

The sound of 160 pairs of hands, both large and small, clapping echoes around Play Pod. The Very Hungry Caterpillar, who has been hiding in his cocoon, finally reveals his transformation into a beautiful butterfly.

Welcome to Storytime at the State Library of Victoria, where children and parents bond together and engage in what will be life-long learning.

Play Pod at the State Library is a place for families with young children to share stories and play experiences together. Weekly Storytime and Baby Bounce sessions cater to preschoolers and children aged under two years. The State Library and local libraries across Victoria provide an important outreach service to families and carers, supporting their role as a child’s first teacher and educator. One hundred and fifty parents, carers, friends and children regularly attend sessions and patrons come from many parts of the world. The State Library creates a strong sense of identity for families within the community.
Young children, like The Very Hungry Caterpillar, also experience a transformation. Book-related experiences stimulate language and cognitive development. By learning through ‘play’ children form a love of books and songs and sharing them. It is a special gift that will continue to develop throughout each stage of their lives and contribute to their learning and development in the five Outcomes:

- Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity
- Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world
- Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing
- Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners
- Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators

The State Library of Victoria has a proud history of reading promotion, which Family Programs augments through encouraging the development of the next generation of library users.

The State Library of Victoria has strong partnerships that have enabled state-wide outreach programs for Victorian public libraries and the families within their local communities. These include The Wheeler Centre, Vision Australia, Playgroup Victoria, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) and Public Libraries Victoria Network (PLVN). Furthermore programs are supported by Family Program volunteers who donate their time to both the organisation and young families across Victoria.

Family Programs, State Library of Victoria:

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Melbourne Museum – Stories and Cultures
An interactive experience at Melbourne Museum for children aged from birth to six years

Writer: Margaret Griffith, Manager Education and Community Programs, Melbourne Museum

The Learning Environment space in Melbourne Museum’s Children’s Gallery provides the opportunity for children and adults to engage with the stories of different cultures through play involving costumes, props, books and toys. The new theme for this space is Stories and Cultures featuring stories from Indigenous Australia, Mesopotamia and Ancient Rome.

Concept 1: Indigenous Australia
The Victorian environment is represented by images of grassland and coastal habitats, while the space is populated with toys, puppets, stories and dress-ups related to Aboriginal traditions. An interactive wall uses touch buttons to highlight different Indigenous constellations.

Concept 2: Ancient Rome
Large foam columns represent Roman architecture and children are invited to move items around and play with ideas of Roman architecture. Big books with stories from Roman myths encourage children and their carers to sit together near the columns and read the stories of Romulus and Remus or Hermes and Apollo. Ancient Roman dress-ups provide opportunities for kinaesthetic learning as well as photo opportunities.

Concept 3: Mesopotamia
In this alcove Ancient Mesopotamia is visually represented by large format images and an interactive mosaic magnet board. Children and adults can create the Ziggurat of Ur with large foam blocks. Big book stories, toy lions and dress-ups encourage imaginative play based on the Gilgamesh stories.

The Learning Environment space is a special favourite for repeat visitors with young children. It draws on the principles of early learning and family learning, and provides exciting learning opportunities in a safe, welcoming and playful context.
Interviews with early childhood professionals

Four early childhood professionals provide insights into their experiences in using the VEYLDF Outcomes to describe children’s learning and development.

Here they talk briefly about their changing work with the VEYLDF Outcomes to:

- support children to have a strong sense of wellbeing
- have conversations about children’s learning and development with children, families, colleagues and other professionals

There is a significant overlap between what affects the wellbeing of children and the wellbeing of adults. A key focus for me is on how each interaction the children has with their parent and vice versa is contributing to a strong and positive sense of self. This in turn contributes to a sound emotional wellbeing for both infants and their parents. When children are supported in a responsive, loving, caring and respectful way, a secure base is formed from which children are free to explore their world and become active participants in their learning and development.

In supporting children to have a strong sense of wellbeing I am looking for an infant who is keen to explore the world around them with confidence, curiosity and enthusiasm. I am looking for the emerging trusting relationship the infant is seeking and how willing and keen infants are to engage with their parents and myself.

Since being involved in the Outcomes Project, I find I talk more with parents about what developing a sense of security means for the baby and how this contributes to and is essential to building the foundations for later relationships, managing emotions and learning.

I watch keenly for how the infant looks back to their parent for reassurance that they are in a safe place. I comment on this when I notice this is happening.

In my conversations with parents I refer to ‘emotional wellbeing’ and describe more confidently what I am observing and noticing.

I ask parents what they may have noticed between visits to the maternal and child health centre. This is also an ideal opportunity to explore with parents how they are feeling, to ask about how they have adjusted to parenting and how they are feeling about their own emotional wellbeing.

I have richer conversations with children and families and I have replaced the word ‘doing’ with ‘learning’. This has led to a significant change in the way parents view their child. Focusing on what the child is learning helps to remind us that learning is an ongoing process that continues throughout life and is not simply defined as the acquisition of a particular skill or set of skills.

Parents ask questions about what the learning means for their baby and how it contributes to their development. Some will comment that they have never thought of their child as being an active contributor to their own learning but rather that learning ‘just happens’. They may have viewed their baby and infant as more of a receiver of their physical care and emotional comfort.

I now discuss with parents how they can best support their baby through some of the more stressful periods in a child’s life such as separation anxiety, tantrums and challenging behaviours and what this means for the baby. Supporting a strong sense of emotional wellbeing is essential for building further relationships and a solid foundation for future learning.
I’ve come to realise that wellbeing is central to children’s learning. One of the things I notice is that Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing permeates many of my observations. In thinking about wellbeing, what I look for is evidence of each child’s concept of self, their sense of belonging, level of engagement and interest in their learning environment and how they interact with others (including social play). I talk with parents and kindergarten staff around supporting children to understand their own feelings and strategies to assist them to begin to self-regulate strong emotions.

I use the VEYLDF to look for evidence across the five Outcomes. This provides a greater sense of purpose in the way we collect and record evidence. Evidence across the five Outcomes gives a snapshot about how each child is going and I use this information with teachers and families to plan for future learning. As a PSFO my contact with each child generally occurs once a term, and so I find that I need to work through the planning cycle ‘on the spot’. I analyse the learning observations as I go and look for children’s strengths, as these form the basis of my discussion with families.

Family-centred practice supports me in prioritising with families the things about their child’s learning and development they would like to focus on. This is a strong part of my practice and I find my conversations with families are often around resilience, confidence, emotions and self-regulation.

Part of the PSFO’s collaborative role also includes support for kindergarten staff. The wellbeing of colleagues is certainly something we consider to be important. As a PSFO, a priority is to listen and engage with staff to support them to identify the next steps and options for children’s learning.

One thing that is different for me now is that I am more aware of children’s emotions, including children experiencing anxiety. In the past I would sometimes describe children as being ‘shy’ or ‘reserved’ and these were also the words other educators and families would use. In focusing on children’s wellbeing, I look beyond personalities to think about what else is happening for the child. I know how important having a strong sense of wellbeing is to their learning and development.

Taking part in the Outcomes Project and working with the VEYLDF has strengthened my skills as an educator and field officer, and helped me build stronger relationships with children, families and colleagues.

I strongly believe that children’s wellbeing is pivotal, that it is an important Outcome interconnected to all other Outcomes. If children have a strong sense of wellbeing, they feel they belong. Having a strong sense of who they are, and what they are capable of, creates confident and involved learners who have the ability to communicate effectively and contribute to the world around them.

I strive to make the children’s environment secure, warm and supportive, all of which helps children develop a sense of belonging and a strong sense of wellbeing. Family day care supports this with its home-based learning and caring environment.

Since being involved in the Outcomes Project I have become more skilled at recognising ‘learning in the everyday’ and acknowledging how important the routines in daily life become as a focus for children’s learning. These daily learning experiences include collecting mail, meal times, resting times and feeding the chooks.

One of the key differences I have noticed about my practice is the conversations I have with children, families and colleagues. In my work with family day care educators I now use the language in the VEYLDF to describe children’s learning. This is a shift away from focusing on the activities and what children are doing. I find this supports us to ask ourselves ‘What is the learning that is occurring?’ and ‘What conversations are the children having?’ and to question why we are choosing and providing particular experiences for children. Educators also talk about how they are taking the time to listen to the children from a distance, and how this helps them to notice the learning.

The learning and development frameworks provide a common language for us all, not just within our service, but also across early years services and with schools. This is an exciting time for early childhood as we embrace the learning and development frameworks and continue to strengthen our focus on describing children’s learning with children, with families and with other early childhood professionals.
Being involved in the Outcomes Project provided me with access to current research about how children’s experiences in their first five years set the course for the rest of their lives. This was a powerful statement about the importance of the early years and a reminder about my professional role and the influence I have on children’s learning.

Fostering wellbeing in young children is an important role for educators. Previously, my thinking about children’s wellbeing was generally confined to the importance of nutrition, physical exercise and sleep. A significant discovery for me is that wellbeing is enhanced by other important factors including children’s level of involvement, participation and active learning, self-esteem, feelings and emotions.

In the past I talked more with families about their child’s day at the centre and the experiences they accessed. Reading the VEYLDF and being reminded ‘that children’s learning and development takes place in the context of their families, and that families are children’s first and most important educators’ (p. 7) reinforced for me the importance of parent involvement. Particularly as a way of supporting children’s wellbeing.

I now facilitate the amazing journey for children, connecting learning between home and the centre. I diligently seek parent involvement in their children’s learning in a number of ways such as:

- deliberately talking with families about children’s successes and noticing how children learn
- using thought-provoking questions with families so I include the families’ understanding of their children in planning and actively engage them in their child’s learning
- inviting parents to share their experiences with children in the program, valuing parent contributions and reinforcing that children learn through the life experiences of others
- using a PowerPoint presentation with families to support their thinking and understanding about wellbeing. I have observed that parents now see wellbeing in a different light. They notice children making choices, expressing their feelings and learning by watching others.

Working together with other educators at the centre, we have used and adapted the Evidence Collection Tool and prompt sheet from the Outcomes Project to support our documentation of children’s learning. In team meetings, I share examples of evidence collection and we spend time discussing what we notice about what children know and can do and reflecting on our practice. By working collaboratively to share information we provide better support to families and strengthen continuity of learning for children.

The current reform in the early years has created new trends and possibilities for leadership. ‘New understandings describe leadership as localized, reflective and based on relationships. Acts of leadership are shared and are related to the daily lives of children, colleagues and families within local communities.’

In the Outcomes Project 2010–2011, participants developed a more interconnected view of children’s learning and described the Outcomes as being threaded through programs to support shared conversations with families and with other professionals.’

(adapted from Report on the Outcomes Project 2010–2011)

MythBuster

Paying attention to children’s development is not relevant now as we have the five learning and development outcomes

Children’s development is important. Contemporary evidence, in neuroscience and early childhood education and later learning, contributes to a holistic view of the way children learn and grow within families and in community.

The VEYLDF aligns with the EYLF and links to the VELS in schools and the Framework in School Age Care in Australia (FSAC). These frameworks are grounded in a national set of priorities for young children’s learning and development to support consistency and a shared language to describe children’s wellbeing, engagement and progress in learning.

Contemporary ways of working with children and families are outlined in the Practice Principles with a strong emphasis on relationships with families and children to support learning and intentional teaching. The Practice Principles draw on a number of knowledge bases about children’s learning and development to support the best learning outcomes.

The Learning and Development Outcomes are key reference points to identify how far children’s abilities have progressed. The Outcomes are interrelated with physical, social, emotional, neural, spiritual, creative, cognitive and linguistic aspects of learning (EYLF, p. 17).

The frameworks expand an ages and stages or skills focus on development. They acknowledge that children learn at different rates, in different ways and at different times. Learning and development may not always be easy or straightforward, and requires different kinds of support and engagement (VEYLDF, p.17).

Thinking about a familiar milestone

A significant milestone for young children is identified when they say their first words. Babies have an innate capability to listen to voices and start to grasp language long before they can use it themselves. In achieving this milestone, over time, babies are learning to enjoy the natural flow in exchange of sounds and information, using verbal and non-verbal language, delighting in shared experiences such as rhymes, song and reading, with adults. Over time children learn to interact with others, clarify their thinking and exchange their ideas, feelings and understandings. This contributes to a strong sense of identity and wellbeing.

Early childhood professionals, with families, support children’s communication attempts and repeat and extend their ideas in repeated meaningful exchanges. They look for opportunities within routines and experiences to support and interpret young children’s verbal contributions.

What does this mean for practice?

Now, with the EYLF and VEYLDF, there is much greater focus on an intentional approach to observing, analysing and acting in response to what we see:

• What is the meaning of this behaviour?
• What does this mean for my practice decisions?

Appreciating and understanding children’s learning and development requires early childhood professionals to become familiar with the details in each of the Outcomes and to think about what this means for the learning environments they design and for their interaction with children.
Action Plan

Documentation of Children’s Learning Resource

This resource was developed to support evidence collection of children’s learning during the Outcomes Project 2010–2011.

This resource can be used and adapted by early childhood professionals to suit their setting, and includes:

- The Early Years Planning Cycle to support assessment for learning (p. 1)
- Prompts to support recording children’s learning (p. 2)
- Key questions for reflection and understanding of the learning (p. 3)
- A form that can be used to collect evidence of children’s learning (p. 4).

This resource can be used in planning meetings within services and at network meetings. The prompts and questions can be used to guide thinking, discussions and to support ongoing practice change.

To read and hear about a range of early childhood professionals observing, analysing and taking action go to:

- Report on the Outcomes Project 2010-2011

Research

Harvard University: Compelling evidence from neuroscience

Emotional wellbeing and identity provide a strong foundation for emerging cognitive abilities. These qualities, which reflect the Learning and Development Outcomes, are described by Harvard University researchers as the bricks and mortar that form the foundation of human development. Cognitive, emotional and social capacities are linked with the brain.

The following video clip highlights an important aspect of relationships to support learning right from birth.

It’s described as the ‘serve and return’ relationship between infants and toddlers and their families and early childhood professionals, who respond meaningfully to support emerging language development.

Serve and Return Interaction Shapes Brain Circuitry

Key Messages

- Brains are built from the bottom up: skills beget skills
- ‘Serve and return’ interactions build healthy brain architecture
- Cognitive, emotional and social development are all connected: you can’t do one without the other.
Resources

VEYLDF Assessment for Learning and Development Practice Principle Guide

What is assessment for learning and development? Why is it important? How do you go about it? With examples from practice, discussion starters and reflective questions, Practice Guide 7: Assessment for Learning and Development will help early childhood professionals to have meaningful discussions about assessment for learning and development and how to use it to make program and practice decisions.

This guide is one in a series of eight guides on the VEYLDF Practice Principles by Dr Anne Kennedy and Anne Stonehouse AM. The guides are based on evidence about what works and why. Papers on the evidence that informed The Practice Principle Guides and can be found by searching for Learning Resource ID GRH4TT on FUSE.

KidsMatter

KidsMatter is a national mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention initiative. It has a focus on strengthening the mental health and wellbeing of children, reducing mental health problems, and achieving greater support for children experiencing mental health difficulties, and their families.

The KidsMatter website provides resources to assist early childhood services and primary schools to implement evidence-based mental health strategies and to support children and families in accessing a range of information and services.

Follow the links to these resources:
- KidsMatter Early Childhood: to support implementation in early childhood education and care services
- KidsMatter Primary: to support implementation in primary schools
- KidsMatter Transition to School: to support transition to school.

These resources can be used to build knowledge and understanding about children’s mental health and wellbeing through reading material, discussions at team meetings and networks and in conversations with children and families.

- What does mentally healthy mean for babies, toddlers and young children?
- How can you continue to build positive relationships with all children and families?
- Are you looking for information about children’s mental health to share with families, colleagues and other early childhood professionals?

KidsMatter website at a glance:
- Help children who are experiencing mental health difficulties: Component 4 Information for Families pack
- Hear what educators and parents say about KidsMatter Early Childhood on this video: www.kidsmatter.edu.au/ec/
- Hear what schools are saying about KidsMatter Primary: www.kidsmatter.edu.au/primary/
- Find out about creating a sense of community: Download KidsMatter Early Childhood Component 1 Literature Review

For more information on mental health and young children go to the KidsMatter website: www.kidsmatter.edu.au
Arts Victoria – Cheap Arts Guide

Whether it be a gallery tour, wandering through exhibitions exploring culture and history, attending a movie-making workshop or joining a storytelling or dance group, all of these activities and many more can be found in Arts Victoria’s Cheap Arts Guide.

Inside the Cheap Arts Guide you will find the following themed experiences for younger children, older children, families and adults:

• Museums, galleries and art to look at
• Theatre, cabaret, comedy, dance ... arts to watch
• A calendar of arty fun
• Art that’s music to your ears
• The art of words
• Artful ways to keep kids entertained
• Art outside of Melbourne’s city limits

Follow the link below to a guide on what’s on offer in the arts in Melbourne and right across Victoria.

www.arts.vic.gov.au/Arts_in_Victoria/Features/Cheap_Arts_entertainment_on_a_shoestring

ONLINE EYE SURVEY

Have your say

The VCAA Early Years Unit welcomes your comments, suggestions and feedback about the EYE.

Have your say or ask a question about ongoing implementation of the VEYLD by emailing the VCAA Early Years Unit at: veyldf@edumail.vic.gov.au

In this edition we are seeking feedback about the EYE. Your experiences and opinions are important and assist the VCAA in tailoring implementation resources.

Follow the link to the online survey: www.surveymonkey.com/s/8662LXW