The Early Years Exchange (EYE) is a series of online publications to familiarise you with the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (the Framework). There will be a further monthly update in June 2010 to support your thinking, discussions and planning with families, colleagues and children. The EYE is intended for everyone who works with children from birth to age eight.

This bumper issue of the EYE explores ways to consider Practice Principle 6: Integrated teaching and learning approaches to support lifelong learning in children and adults. It includes snapshots of programs from cultural organisations: zoos, botanic gardens, museums, libraries and art galleries. These programs are designed for children and families.

Website details for cultural organisations are included. There is information on links to onsite, online and outreach programs that can support learning in early childhood services and schools.

Guest appearance

Christine Joy is the education coordinator at the Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne Education Programs in the Ian Potter Foundation Children’s Garden. Christine works with children and families to encourage children to explore the wonders of plants in an interactive hands-on environment. The educational programs are experienced-based, creating connections through gardening, play and stories.

Snapshot 6 can be seen on page 7.

Useful references for those interested in children and outdoor experiences are available here.

Sustainable practice at the early childhood level is not about a few ad hoc outdoor experiences with plants and animals, but a holistic approach that integrates all aspects of sustainability into early childhood services.

(Early Childhood Australia Environmental Sustainability Policy)
Snapshots

Snapshot 1
Children’s Learning Environment, Melbourne Museum, 2010

The Children’s Gallery at Melbourne Museum is a favourite destination for families with young children, playgroups, early learning groups from schools and kindergartens as well as professionals and students from the early childhood education and care fields. One section of the Children’s Gallery, the Learning Environment, is changed annually to reflect different themes. The current Learning Environment is themed around biodiversity and relates to:

Children are connected with and contribute to their world
Children are confident and involved learners.

Big Idea: We depend on nature.

‘We depend on nature’ is the Learning Environment key message in 2010. This big idea has been broken down to three key concepts.

Concept 1: Animals are diverse and we are part of nature.

An interactive display unit in Alcove 1 encourages children and adults to touch, smell and look to explore differences in animals and environments.

There is also a wall of images – animals and humans – interspersed with mirrors so that children can see themselves as part of the animal world.

At regular intervals, Live Exhibits staff bring out lizards and stick insects for close-up observation.

Concept 2: Nature is part of our everyday life.

We depend on nature.

Alcove 2 provides an immersive space for children to explore their role in biodiversity. Families can sit together under the Biodiversity Tree and read a book about Victorian animals or conservation. They can also express their thoughts and emotions about nature by writing or drawing on a cardboard leaf which will then be hung up on the Biodiversity Tree.

On a large interactive magnetic board, families can move creatures around the ‘backyard’.

Concept 3: Victoria has diverse habitats in which animals live.

Alcove 3 provides a welcoming habitat space in which families learn about ecosystems through role-playing as Victorian animals by using a variety of animal puppets and dress ups.

Children, parents, carers and teachers enjoy the experience of learning together in a playful context. Museum staff members are involved in constantly observing, evaluating and adapting the Learning Environment.

Acknowledgement: The 2010 Children’s Gallery Learning Environment was developed with support from the Department of Sustainability and Environment.

Melbourne Museum website:

‘The world is a young child’s classroom’
(Centre for Community Child Health, www.rch.org.au/econnections/publications)
The children have just stepped through the gum trees into our bush room. Small animals nestle into enclosures, blending into the painted landscape. The wild sound of dawn bird calls, frogs croaking and possums scampering back to their nests, fills the room. The sky lightens over the Yarra Ranges – the hills in the distance tinged with pink. Spread throughout the room are puzzles, books, puppets and a puppet theatre, families of toy animals in mulch trays, feathers, eggs and fuzzy felt animals on a huge board.

The children are visiting the Healesville Sanctuary Discovery Centre to participate in one of the Kindergarten Early Childhood programs: ‘Things that Go Bump in the Night’.

The program is 45 minutes long and aims to open the world of nocturnal animals to 4 year old children through immersive sensory experiences, singing and movement all designed to inspire in the children inquisitive and caring behaviour towards our native animals. Children discover that nocturnal animals have different features, behaviours and homes.

After exploring the games and toys together, the children meet some of the nocturnal inhabitants of the bush. Rufus our ringtail possum shyly climbs out of his nest for us. Children are in awe of his soft, cosy fur, and ask lots of questions about his curly ringtail and his bulgy eyes. Many children talk to Rufus when they meet him – asking how he is and telling him how beautiful he is.

Our green tree frog surprises us all when he catches crickets to eat. Outside we look for frog homes in the mud around our Frog Bog and for possum nests in the trees.

Children are delighted by our tawny frogmouths, and in spring last year, we were visited by a family of tawnies showing off their new chicks.

Most feedback from kindergarten teachers has mentioned the ‘magical’ nature of the experience.

Healesville Sanctuary Learning Experiences also runs ‘What are You Wearing Today?’ which examines animals’ body coverings and how they help animals to survive. We are currently developing ‘Animal Rescue Team’, which will run in the Animal Wildlife Hospital in the Sanctuary, complete with animal patient beds, toy veterinary equipment and a live animal ‘patient’.

The Healesville Sanctuary learning programs relate to outcomes:

- Children are connected with and contribute to their world
- Children are socially responsible and show respect for the environment
- Children are confident and involved learners
- Children develop dispositions for learning such as curiosity, cooperation, confidence
- Children develop a range of skills and processes such as problem-solving, enquiry, investigating
- Children transfer and adapt what they have learnt from one context to another
- Children resource their own learning through connecting with people, place and materials

Healesville Sanctuary website:  
http://www.zoo.org.au/Learning/Programs/Healesville/Early_Years
The Young Readers Program encourages families to share reading and books with children from an early age. The program focuses on the sharing of rhymes and songs as the first steps towards reading and emphasises the importance of reading with young children in the home.

The program provides a free It’s Rhyme Time booklet and DVD for every four-month-old child through their Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Centre and a quality Australian picture book free to every child at their two-year-old MCH key age and stage visit. The timing of these touch points is critical – promoting responsive engagement between nurturing adults and children. The program also offers professional development sessions for MCH nurses, children’s librarians and early childhood professionals across Victoria to support these outcomes.

MCH nurses have noted the positive impact of the free book. They comment that it provides a ‘prop’ for them to focus on early literacy discussions with families – reinforcing the benefit of families spending time together and how shared reading can increase their child’s love of reading and, ultimately, develop a disposition for lifelong learning.

Families tell us:
‘I like the fact that it encourages parents and caregivers to read to children no matter what age they are. My son is under twelve months of age and struggles to sit still to listen to a story, but he loves to touch books, turn pages and look at the pictures.’

While the delivery of the 100 000th picture book in February 2010 is evidence of the Young Readers Program’s reach into the Victorian community in its two years of operation, a series of extension programs are planned to further embed early literacy. Public libraries are developing additional support tools and projects targeting groups who have not, as yet, engaged.

These new initiatives will contribute to an enhanced community understanding of the importance of reading and emergent literacy from birth.

State Library of Victoria website:
Snapshot 4
NGV Kids Corner, National Gallery of Victoria 2010

Writer: Dianne Hilyear, Program Coordinator, National Gallery of Victoria

NGV Kids Corner is the National Gallery of Victoria’s first dedicated space for young children up to 8 years of age, their family and friends to enjoy creative art installations.

Each year there are two creative installations which highlight different aspects of our world and engage children through different learning experiences. The inaugural installation Going Places Sitting Down (opened January 2010) centres on Hiraki Sawa’s video of journeys across fantastical lands created from familiar imagery in the artist’s home. Children can sit on a rocking horse, elephant or shag pile rug to view this magical world. Hiraki’s work is the inspiration for the selection of other NGV art works spanning antiquities to present day. Art works, include an earthenware horse dated 265 AD to an aeroplane headdress by James Elesi, an indigenous Australian artist.

The second installation Light Play commencing June 2010 draws on a wide variety of works from the NGV collection. Light Play encourages playful interaction through light, with artworks including an eighteenth century English candelabrum to a small ceramic frog amulet from ancient Egypt. Each installation invites a living artist’s response and contemporary artist Juan Ford’s contribution will include a large kaleidoscope. Light Play will coincide with the Winter Lights Festival held at Federation Square.

These creative installations are presented along with specially designed activities to facilitate discovery and learning through art. Hands-on activities enable the young participants to experience the installations and art at their own pace and leisure while encouraging the best creative energy in children. For Light Play children can build with transparent coloured blocks on a lightbox or delight in their movements on a shadow wall. Diverse activities catering for different learning styles provide a variety of opportunities for shared learning experiences in an easy to navigate space encouraging observation, discussion, interpretation, creativity and response.

At NGV Kids Corner, the NGV becomes a part of a child’s world, where they can learn about their own and other cultures through art in a safe interactive and fun learning environment.

NGV Kids Corner highlights the Learning and Development outcomes:

**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 aware of fairness
- Children become socially responsible and show respect for the environment

**Children are confident and involved learners**
- Children develop dispositions for learning such as curiosity, cooperation, confidence, creativity, enthusiasm, and imagination
- Children develop a range of skills and processes such as problem-solving, enquiry, experimentation, and investigating
- Children transfer and adapt what they have learnt from one context to another
- Children resource their own learning through connecting with people, place and natural and processed materials

Families with young children are encouraged to consider Scienceworks an exciting and inviting space to visit again and again.

Each year, six local playgroups can participate in *The Science Morning Teas Program* (three sessions, each spanning two and a half hours).

*The Science Morning Teas Program*:
- aims to establish ongoing relationships with the families and the playgroup coordinator within the local community.
- focuses on engaging families who have not previously visited Scienceworks.
- gives priority to recently arrived families for whom English is a second language.
- caters for playgroups with approximately 16 preschool aged children (aged four years).

Each sessions in the program is related to an exhibition with interactive experiences, a demonstration and morning tea provided.

Children and families are provided with the opportunity to work both independently and collaboratively while:
- exploring exhibition interactive displays
- experimenting with sounds and instruments
- participating in imaginative role-play
- viewing a demonstration
- playing matching and naming games.

In providing this program, Scienceworks staff has reflected on the value of flexible programming and providing a range of delivery styles for families with young children. They look forward to developing a range of sessions to meet the needs of different groups.


‘All the world is a laboratory to the inquiring mind’

(Anon.)
Snapshot 6
Early Childhood Education at the Royal Botanic Gardens
Melbourne and Cranbourne

Writer: Sharon Willoughby, Manager, Public Programs, Royal Botanic Gardens, Cranbourne

Spaces for Learning

The outdoors, home gardens, play spaces, local parks and wild spaces are important places for learning. These are the places where we learn about:

• our contribution to the natural environment
• how our actions can lead to change.

Experiences in the outdoors provide opportunities for children to develop a strong sense of identity, wellbeing, and connection to each other and their community. At the Royal Botanic Gardens (RBG) Melbourne programs are delivered by early childhood professionals in the Ian Potter Foundation Children’s Garden (IPFCG) and at the Australian Garden at the RBG Cranbourne. Learning experiences are play-based, involving discovery of the natural world through gardening, art and stories. Richly planted landscapes provide a wealth of opportunity for sensorial, physical, social, emotional, spiritual and imaginative experience.

At the scale of the individual child, gardening is a fantastic activity that allows children to work in cooperation in order to negotiate and complete projects. Planting a seed or seedling can provide children with a sense of achievement and pride. This supports children in developing a sense of agency through creating change in their own environment. At the larger scale, creating a garden as part of a community of families and early childhood professionals allows children to discover their natural environment through the agency of their peers, families and community. By working together to create a garden we allow families to build communities while supporting childhood learning.

Educators’ testimonial

This has consolidated our belief in the importance of encouraging children to develop a connection with nature, for example, by bringing their tummies and cheeks up close to tree trunks, lying on branches, and rustling leaves through their fingers.

It provides children with the opportunities to become deep thinkers, exploring rich, expressive and meaningful language and concepts, as well as embedding awareness and understanding of our culture, ecological climate and sustainable practices. The outdoors is not only a rich sensory environment but an imagination starter, promoting inquiry and wonder.

Isabel and Fatima, University of Melbourne Early Learning Centre May 2009.

‘A child’s imagination needs food: a garden is a place where the imagination grows!’

(Anon.)

Royal Botanic Gardens website:
I don’t know what all the fuss is about with the early years frameworks and all these new words like outcomes and dispositions. In my program, I’ve replaced the developmental domain areas with the five outcomes. Now I’m just getting on with my work with the children.

**Mythbuster**

Two evidence-based messages in the early learning frameworks that relate to practice emphasise:

- children as active, capable contributors to their own learning
- educators as joint researchers with children to support children’s learning in new areas and lead their thinking to deeper levels.

While discovery through play is important for children in the early years, some learning requires instruction, support and challenge.

Evidence indicates that successful learners are:

- curious
- adaptable
- persistent
- resilient
- seek help when required
- creative – understanding that there are different learning styles.

These characteristics in the frameworks are described as dispositions.

Early childhood professionals introduce materials and experiences to spark children’s ideas, make learning visible, help children see how learning unfolds, show them the steps in their learning and allow time to practice skills.

Some of the ways early childhood professionals support these dispositions for learning occur when we:

- ask open-ended questions,
- provide feedback on children’s actions
- clarify and challenge children’s ideas.

Communicating with children in this way is dynamic and strengthens children’s language development and thinking.

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**Exchanges and changes**

The Early Years Unit is keen to hear from you regarding:

- questions about implementation
- changes and adaptations you have made
- interesting discussions in your workplace about the Framework
- what’s happening in your community.

We would also like to invite comment regarding:

- feedback about the EYE
- suggestions/requests for articles that will support your team.

Simply email: veyldf@edumail.vic.gov.au

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‘Children learn best with the support of others through telling, showing and modelling, talking and doing it together. However, it is the reciprocity between all three dimensions that makes the richest learning possible.’

(Fleer and Raban 2005)
Action Plan to strengthen integrated teaching and learning approaches

As a team, consider the many different ways that you engage with and plan experiences for children.

Consider the strategies you use to support sustained and shared interactions to support children’s learning.

Identify areas of strength and areas that need development.

Think about and discuss what practices you would like to rethink, for example:
- how learning environments are based around children’s interest
- how you create learning opportunities out of the daily routines
- how you extend children’s learning through sustained discussions and active engagement
- how you identify and act on opportunities for more focused experiential learning with individuals and groups
- what connections you have or could make with cultural organisations to support and expand both your creativity and children’s learning.

The reference list below suggests some material to guide discussions on integrated teaching and learning opportunities.

- Consider your practice in light of what you have read.
- Participate in a facilitated discussion with your team/network.
- How could practices be reshaped or replaced and why?
- As a group, begin to identify realistic goals, priorities and timelines for changes.
- Communicate your change – to your colleagues, to children and to families.
- Identify one change, plan it and make the change. Twenty-one days is a useful measure of time to consider.
- Notice the impact on children and colleagues and talk to families about it.
- Begin to review.

References


Fleer, M and Raban, B 2005, Literacy and Numeracy that Counts from Birth to Five Years: A Review of the Literature, Department of Education Science and Training Early Childhood Learning Resources, Department of Education Science and Training, Melbourne, Australia


Raban, B, Margetts, K, Church, A, and Deans, J 2010, The Early Years Learning Framework in Practice, Teaching Solutions, Albert Park, Victoria, Australia