Welcome to the ninth edition of the Early Years Exchange (EYE), designed to support implementation of the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF). The EYE is intended for everyone who works with children from birth to eight years. This edition has a focus on the Practice Principle of assessment for learning and development.

The VEYLDF emphasises the importance of assessing children’s learning and development to inform curriculum decision-making and pedagogical approaches.

Children’s learning and development from birth to eight years is one of very rapid change and growth. Young children benefit most from one-on-one assessment in familiar settings, which involves close observation, and assessment over time with people they know. Multiple assessments across a range of experiences and settings provide a comprehensive picture of children’s learning and development. The younger the child, the more important this is.

Ideas to incorporate the Practice Principle of assessment for learning and development in your practice:

• Use Practice Principle 7 Evidence paper: Assessment for learning and development to deepen your knowledge and understanding.
• Share ideas about how you currently assess children’s learning and development with staff at your service or in a local network.
• Participate in face-to-face professional learning opportunities or go online and view Module 4: Assessment for Learning and Development: The Early Years Planning Cycle.

This edition also continues the series of interviews with early childhood professionals from the pilot Outcomes Project 2010-2011.

‘Assessment is designed to discover what children know and understand, based on what they make, write, draw, say and do.’

(VEYLDF, p. 13)

Guest appearance

Greg Bowen, Principal at Strathfieldsaye Primary School, and his teaching colleagues, Prep coordinator/teacher Lisa Howard and Prep teacher Danielle Osborne, talk about how they continue to strengthen connections with early childhood services to support children’s transition and learning in the early years of primary school.

At Strathfieldsaye Primary School, early years staff:

• use changing demographics to inform whole school planning and to shape curriculum approaches and pedagogy
• demonstrate leadership in developing a common understanding and knowledge for all staff to scaffold thinking and programming
• use the VEYLDF to gather evidence and plan for children’s individual interests and capabilities.
Snapshots
Early Learning Program

Context
Dodge Bean Bag
Date: March 2012

An example of evidence from Margie Cohen, working as a kindergarten teacher in the three-to-five-years room in a private long day care service.

This snapshot begins with a program overview of a popular learning experience and includes three examples of evidence of children’s individual learning.

1. Program Overview
Dodge Bean Bag has been a popular game with the children, played at some point almost every day. Children have been involved in planning the game – considering what time of day we will play, when children will have opportunities to use the space for other activities such as climbing and building games, preparing the space by clearing equipment, finding the bean bags, counting the bean bags and placing them in the starting position.

The game is played by grouping the children into two teams with randomly selected coloured sashes. Children stand behind the back line at opposite ends of the playing area. Once the referee calls ‘go’, children rush forward to the centre line, grab a bean bag and throw it towards a player in the opposing team. If a player connects with the bean bag, they are out, and sit at the side of the playing area to cheer their team on. If a player catches a bean bag, any of their team mates who are out can be called back into play. The game is over when one team has all players out.

Practice Principles:
• High expectations for every child.
• Integrated teaching and learning approaches.
• Assessment for learning and development.

Learning Outcomes:
• Identity
• Community
• Wellbeing
• Learning
• Communication

‘Assessment for learning and development acts as a tool for staff to discover and learn about the child, their family and about our values and practices. Assessment is not used to compare and rate but rather to see the learning and then to extend.’

(Early childhood professional, Assessment for Learning and Development Project 2012)
2. Individual evidence of children’s learning

Note: Both the program overview and the individual evidence can be stored in the child’s assessment for learning file

Will
Will is very keen to play Dodge Bean Bag. He has had frequent opportunities to play and we have seen a huge development in his emotional resilience. When he first played, Will would cry when he was out, and his whole body would crumble with disappointment. With reassurance and repeated games, Will has gained confidence and security in his understanding that the game will go well for him sometimes, and that he will have plenty of chances to play again. Now when Will is out, the look of disappointment is fleeting. He is developing an understanding of the game.

Michael
Playing Dodge Bean Bag has been a great way to help Michael develop greater personal awareness of how he moves his body. He really enjoys the game, and as he plays he hears the teachers describe his movements – fast, slow, forwards, move back, watch the line, etc. After he has engaged in physical activity with focus, Michael seems to move around the room and engage with friends with more awareness of his impact on others. He is beginning to walk around other children’s activities and engage in more conversations about sharing spaces.

Stella
Stella thoroughly enjoys playing Dodge Bean Bag and puts great effort into the game. She uses all her strength and determination to retrieve the bean bags and throw them towards the opposing team. If Stella is hit by a bean bag from the other side, she understands the rules of the game and joins others on the steps, waiting to rejoin play. She expresses her understandings clearly: ‘It’s OK, I can play again in the next game.’

Stella is a great one for keeping track of the bean bags, which sometimes become lost in the bushes. Several times throughout the game she counts to see how many bean bags are on each side of the line.

3. Program Reflection

Dodge Bean Bag has been a game that has promoted several types of learning. Some of the children were taught this game by older children during orientation visits last year. These children have now become the teachers themselves by showing other children and new teachers how to play.

Through playing Dodge Bean Bag children are becoming more aware of their physical health and wellbeing. They are developing physical coordination skills and incorporating vigorous exercise into their day. After a couple of games, children are reminded that they are putting their bodies to work and may need to refresh and energise themselves with some water or a snack.

This game has also been a great way to promote social learning as children are guided in considering opportunities for including a wide range of friends and peers in their games. Team spirit and mutual encouragement is promoted.

As well as the strong social component of the game, Dodge Bean Bag is a place where we see children developing their personal resilience and confidence. With frequently repeated opportunities to play, children are shown that sometimes the game will go well for them and other times it may not. There are many opportunities to play again. The children are developing an understanding of the rules of the game.

4. Future Plans

Continue to respond to children’s interests, and their engagement with Dodge Bean Bag. It is likely that the game will continue to be played for several weeks to come. This gives us an opportunity to continue to observe and support individual learning and development.

All names have been changed to protect the anonymity of children and families featured in Snapshots.
Interviews with early childhood professionals

Three early childhood professionals provide insights into their experiences in using the VEYLDF Outcomes to describe children’s learning. Here they talk briefly about their changing work with the Outcomes to:

- collect evidence across the year and synthesise evidence of children’s learning in the transition statements
- be ready for children entering school and to identify children’s strengths and build on children’s learning
- support learning and strengthen relationships with children and families.

Taking part in the Outcomes Project has strengthened my ability to record evidence of children’s learning.

I was confident with the concepts of ‘document and record’ and planning the next ‘action’. The challenge was separating the ‘analysis and interpretation’ into its own section. I tend to be quite wordy, and would describe an event and discuss the learning simultaneously. Being challenged to separate these two areas has meant I now write in a more succinct way, and can quickly go back to review significant learning more easily. This is useful when preparing overall summaries for parent-teacher meetings and for writing transition statements.

I began the project with a passion for recording children’s contributions in program planning formats. Over the course of the project, as well as looking at outcomes, I was encouraged to consider pedagogical practices. I eventually came to a new realisation that the acknowledgement I give to children personally, through their play and discussions, is of far greater meaning and promotes further learning in a way that having their name written in a document can not.

I moved away from creating lists of activities or events that children had contributed to planning. This has freed up time to write more learning stories with greater depth. I certainly do not document every contribution a child makes. I now record a handful of the more significant contributions in greater depth.

My relationships with children are more spontaneous and probably more respectful: I celebrate their contributions immediately, which then promotes further learning. Families have commented on the amount of thought that goes into documenting learning; they see the intentional teaching they had no idea was so much a part of what I do.

I find the frameworks, My Time, Our Place, the Framework for School Aged Care in Australia (FSAC) and the VEYLDF, inspiring. The outcomes that are common to both frameworks provide a holistic way to support children’s play and leisure activities and focus on the things that OSHC does really well.

Learning happens all the time – and the emphasis on play-based approaches and a particular focus on wellbeing, identity and community is very relevant to OSHC services.

Since being involved in the Outcomes Project, my conversations with children have changed. I focus on relationships and interactions with children and the importance of listening carefully and understanding. This has helped our OSHC team to reshape our program to meet the interests of children. I have been reminded to focus on both the learning opportunities and enjoyment in group experiences.

The confidence of our OSHC team during our regular, informal discussions with families about children’s capabilities and interests has increased.
The VEYLDF provides a holistic view of young children and gives much greater depth in key areas of the early years, which are not covered fully in the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS).

Outcome 1 (Children have a strong sense of identity) and Outcome 4 (Children are confident and involved learners) have been important in expanding my understanding of children’s learning.

The VEYLDF helps to focus on building relationships with children and families right from the start. This is the first time primary schools have actually had a ‘where they’ve come from’ guide to learning and development. With the evidence from the transition statements, I feel I know the children almost as well as if I had made a home visit. The Prep classroom environment reflects children’s interests and strengths (building on evidence in the transition statements).

The VEYLDF can enhance and expand what primary teachers know about curriculum. The titles of the outcomes provide a clear focus for our thinking about children’s learning. For me, they are like broad ‘classifying’ labels for children’s learning.

Along with professional learning in Maths and through using the material in Outcome 4 in the VEYLDF, we have raised the bar for our teaching content in this first eight weeks at school. We have investigated pattern (talked about parts of pattern being a ‘chunk’), classifying and sorting, and, most recently, location. Prep children know about right and left, and full, half and quarter turns (beginning of geometry).

Mythbuster

Myth: Children’s learning starts at school

Children entering school have been learning since birth. What children bring to school learning, how they will learn at school and their sense of themselves as learners is influenced by the nature and the quality of their early learning experiences, both at home and in early childhood settings.

Transition to school is a key milestone event in both children’s and families’ lives, with significant impact on children’s learning and wellbeing.

The foundations for literacy and numeracy and other content knowledge and values are formed well before children begin school. There can be a great range of capacity across children’s learning and development by the time they start school. The research evidence is clear that when children experience continuity between services and settings, their learning is stronger and sustained.

Continuity of learning is supported through:
* authentic assessment strategies connected to programs and practice
* rich environments
* responsive relationships.

The VEYLDF and the transition statements focus attention on the importance of transition not only as a one-off event on the first day of school or in the orientation activities in the first few weeks.

Networks of schools and early childhood services working together provide families with strong messages about the importance of the early years and the key role that families play in children’s early learning. Collaboration between early childhood professionals and with families has been shown to support improved outcomes for babies, toddlers and children.

The VEYLDF is a useful teaching resource that supports classroom pedagogy, to build from early learning experiences, and to support all learners through a differentiated curriculum.

(Adapted from draft material developed by Dr Anne Kennedy, early childhood consultant and writer, 2010)
Resources

Professional learning resources


In 2010–2011, 50 early childhood professionals from a range of early years settings participated in the pilot Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF) Outcomes Project. A key activity supporting implementation of the VEYLDF, this project focused on collecting evidence of children’s progress in the five learning and development outcomes. The Report on the Outcomes Project 2010–2011 draws on findings from project participants. Recommendations from the report will support and inform ongoing implementation of the VEYLDF:

Since October 2011, a series of interviews with participants from the Outcomes Project feature in the EYE where they reflect on key learnings and experiences:

• **Edition No 7**: Early childhood professionals describe how they are using the five learning and development outcomes in their work with families in supported playgroup and enhanced maternal and child health settings.

• **Edition No 8**: Staff at Springvale Service for Children, an integrated children’s and families’ service, talk about how they actively promote inclusion for all children and their aspirations for all children to have a strong sense of self and to be confident learners.

Showcasing the digital capabilities of Prep students – Contemporary (Digital) Literacy Practices of Preps: What digital literacy means for Preps

In 2011, 20 primary schools and Prep teachers worked with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development’s (DEECD) Innovation and Next Practice Division to investigate the amazing capabilities of young learners to acquire the digital literacy skills they need in a digital environment.

In this project, participants considered the evidence in the five VEYLDF outcomes to support children’s learning and to connect this learning with families. One of the key outcomes reported from this project was enhanced oral language.

The Contemporary (Digital) Literacy Practices of Preps e-book presents 63 activities integrating a range of contemporary literacy skills into children’s learning and development.

This resource has a strong focus on safe and responsible use of technology and highlights how you can support sharing the learning with families to further support collaboration and communication in and beyond the Prep classroom.

To read more: https://fuse.education.vic.gov.au/?KY8W0K

For further information, contact Daphne Cohen at: cohen.daphne.e@edumail.vic.gov.au

The Report on the Outcomes Project 2010–2011, released in March 2012, is available online at:


A report produced by the Outcomes Project Consortium

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“The Outcomes Project helped me value and identify the different pathways that children take in their learning journeys.”

(Primary school teacher)


‘Children’s long term success in school derives from their learning experiences before school, and the ongoing learning environments in the early school years.’

(Linked Schools and Early Years Project Evaluation, Royal Children’s Hospital)

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**Linking Schools and Early Years Project Evaluation**

Networks within communities build local capacity and respond to children’s learning needs

Four key ideas:

- Working together to make the transition statement a meaningful and effective tool to support transitions for children and families
- Planning together and teaching together, to create shared plans and experiences to further support children’s learning
- Sharing professional practice: to support greater alignment across the early years
- Sharing local resources, for example musical instruments, story books and theme-related resources


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**Foundations for learning: Relationships between the Early Years Learning Framework and the Australian Curriculum**

Early Childhood Australia (ECA) and the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) jointly developed this paper, which describes key connections between the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) and the Australian Curriculum. The EYLF, VEYLDF and the Australian Curriculum provide an avenue for shared conversations between early childhood professionals and early years teachers in schools to support children’s learning.


The VCAA Early Years Unit is currently mapping the VEYLDF outcomes to the Australian Curriculum. This will be available on the AusVELS website from July 2012 to support a learning continuum.


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**EYE Professional Learning and Resources Organiser**

The EYE Professional Learning and Resources Organiser is designed to assist early childhood professionals to:

- explore in depth the practice principles and outcomes within the VEYLDF
- adapt ways of gathering evidence of children’s learning and development
- use the Early Years Planning Cycle (see page 3) to inform program planning through analysis, interpretation, practice, pedagogy and reflective practices
- organise team meetings using Action Plans to support discussion about contemporary early childhood theory, research, practice and pedagogy
- upload resources and access websites that are directly related to implementation of the VEYLDF, EYLF and FSAC.
The Research

Neuroscience research continues to inform policy and practice
Our regular feature focuses on compelling evidence in brain development with a particular focus on the importance of healthy brain development in the early years and the impact on later learning and general life skills. During the period from birth to eight years, children experience more rapid brain development and acquire more skills and knowledge than in any other period in their lives.

Children learn from birth and their early learning and development is shaped by the quality of relationships, interactions and experiences. These first years of life impact the success children experience later in school and across the life cycle.

What does the research mean for practice?
Using current research to influence our everyday practice ensures that the decisions we make in our work with children and families are robust and based on contemporary theories and evidence.

Basing our knowledge and understanding on evidence-based research supports our work in creating environments and conditions that have a positive impact for all children and families.

The following resources from the Royal Children’s Hospital are recommended reading.

Early childhood and the life course

Rethinking the transition to school: Linking schools and early years services

Have your say

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

We are keen to hear your ideas on:
- any challenges you are facing with documenting evidence of children’s learning and development in the five outcomes
- how you demonstrate you are using the Early Years Planning Cycle to inform programming and reflect on what is offered and why
- how you organise your program to maximise children’s learning opportunities in everyday routines.

The VCAA Early Years Unit welcomes your comments, suggestions and feedback about:
- the EYE
- any ideas for articles, resources and information to support you and your team or networks.

‘Meaningful play and leisure: a context for learning through which children organise and make sense of their social worlds, as they engage actively with people, objects, ideas and the environment.’

(FSAC, p. 4)