Report on the Assessment for Learning and Development Project 2012

Transforming practice in the early years

**A report produced by the
Assessment for Learning and Development Project Consortium**

VICTORIAN CURRICULUM
AND ASSESSMENT AUTHORITY

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Acknowledgements

Birth-to-three-years group

Gannawarra Shire, Cohuna (Children's services)

Gannawarra Shire, Leitchville (Family day care)

Golden Plains Shire, Bannockburn (Maternal and child health)

Kensington Community Children's Co-operative, Kensington (Long day care)

Leongatha Children's Centre, Leongatha (Long day care)

Melton Shire Council, Melton (Maternal and child health)

Migrant Information Centre, Box Hill (Supported playgroup)

Roscoe Avenue Children's Centre, Hamilton (Long day care)

Scope Victoria, Glen Waverley (Early childhood intervention service)

The Avenue Children's Centre and Kindergarten, Balaclava (Integrated children's service)

Wangaratta Family Day Care, Wangaratta (Family day care)

Wilson's Road Children's Centre, Newcomb (Long day care)

Wingate Avenue Community Centre, Ascot Vale (Enhanced maternal and child health)

Birth-to-eight-years group 1

Bannockburn Long Day Care, Bannockburn (Long day care)

Baranduda Primary School, Baranduda (Primary school)

Campaspe Community Children's Centre, Echuca (Long day care)

City of Melbourne Family Services, Carlton (Children's services)

Davis Street Kindergarten, Kew (Kindergarten program)

DEECD Specialist Children's Services, Glenroy (Early childhood intervention service)

Drouin Kindergarten, Drouin (Kindergarten program)

Gateways Support Services, Geelong West (Preschool Field Officer Program)

Geelong Grammar School Toorak Campus, Toorak (Independent early learning centre and primary school)

Golden Plains Shire Council, Bannockburn (Children's services)

Lumen Christi Catholic Primary School, Churchill (Primary school)

Park Street Child Care and Kindergarten Co-operative, Brunswick (Integrated children's service)

Shire of Campaspe, Echuca (Children's services)

Warrnambool City Council, Warrnambool (Family day care)

Birth-to-eight-years group 2

City of Port Phillip Vacation Care Program, St Kilda (Vacation care)

Dallas Brooks Community Primary School, Dallas (Primary school)

DEECD Specialist Children's Services, Wangaratta (Early childhood intervention service)

Horsham Community Child Care Centre, Horsham (Integrated children's service)

Iris Ramsay Kindergarten, Ballarat (Kindergarten program)

Jells Park Preschool, Wheelers Hill (Kindergarten program)

Kensington Primary School, Kensington (Primary school)

Lady Forster Kindergarten, Elwood (Kindergarten program)

Shifa Family Day Care, Braybrook (Family day care)

Southern Rise Children's Centre, Wodonga (Kindergarten)

Swan Hill Rural City Council, Swan Hill (Children's services)

Wallaby Childcare Early Learning Centre, Doreen (Long day care)

Waverley Meadows Primary School, Wheelers Hill (Primary school)

YMCA, California Gully Kindergarten, Maryborough (Kindergarten program)

YMCA, Y Kindergarten Cluster Management, Maryborough (Kindergarten services)

All names in evidence examples, participant quotes and practice reflections have been changed or de-identified to protect the anonymity of any children, families and practitioners. Where examples of practitioners' documentation formats have been included in this report, the VCAA has sought approval from individual participants to include their names and acknowledge their work.

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Assessment for Learning and Development Project Consortium

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The Project Consortium included:

Dr Anne Kennedy	Community Child Care (birth-to-three-years group)
Debbie Cole	Community Child Care (birth-to-three-years group)
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Executive summary

Context

The *Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework: For All Children from Birth to Eight Years* (VEYLDF) was released in November 2009 for implementation from 2010. The VEYLDF aligns with *Being, Belonging and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (EYLF; 2009), and links to the AusVELS curriculum in the early years of schooling. *My Time, Our Place – A Framework for School Aged Care in Australia* (FSAC; August 2011) builds on the EYLF and extends the principles, outcomes and practice to accommodate the contexts and age range of the children and young people who attend school-age care settings.

Support for implementation of the VEYLDF is a partnership between the Practice Quality Improvement Branch, Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) and the Early Years Unit, Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA).

About the Project

The purpose of the *Report on the Assessment for Learning and Development Project 2012: Transforming practice in the early years* (the Report) is to provide a detailed summary of the Assessment for Learning and Development (ALD) Project 2012. The Report describes the model of professional learning, the findings from the specific focus on assessment for learning and development, and the impact of this professional learning on assessment observations and practice that contribute to children's learning and development.

The ALD Project 2012 had a central focus on assessment for learning and development in a curriculum planning cycle. Assessment for learning and development in the project was defined as a process of observing, documenting and analysing what children do, say, make, write or draw in order to plan effectively for children's current and future learning. The specific project objectives were to:

- apply diverse methods to document and analyse evidence of children's learning,
- use the five outcomes to identify progress of children's learning,
- implement collaborative approaches to assessment for learning, and
- contribute to the development and trial of observation tools.

Forty-three early childhood professionals participated in the three project groups, two groups with representation across the birth-to-eight-years period and one group with a specific focus on the birth-to-three-years period. Early childhood professional representation in the project included maternal and child health, family day care, long day care, kindergarten services, early childhood intervention services, integrated children's services, early years of primary school, outside school hours care and early years management. Participants were representative of the nine DEECD regions (as at February 2012).

The ALD Project was implemented across a 10-month period in 2012. The professional learning model operated as a collaborative partnership with early childhood professionals, researchers and policymakers. The ALD Project model included five full-day interactive workshops with the three groups of practitioners who came from diverse early years services and settings across Victoria.

The ALD Project professional learning model built on the multidisciplinary practitioner research approach taken in the pilot Outcomes Project 2010–2011. The pilot focused on collecting evidence of children's progress in the five Learning and Development Outcomes and applying an Evidence Collection Tool to support documentation and describing children's learning and development.

Development of the Project

The ALD Project was developed in a collaborative partnership with the VCAA Early Years Unit and the project leaders:

Dr Anne Kennedy   Community Child Care   (birth-to-three-years group)

Debbie Cole   Community Child Care   (birth-to-three-years group)

Karen Glancy   Community Child Care   (birth-to-three-years group)

Dr Jane Page   University of Melbourne   (birth-to-eight-years groups)

Dr Kylie Smith   University of Melbourne   (birth-to-eight-years groups)

The partnership between the VCAA, the project leaders and participants created a lively culture of professional inquiry. The skills of the project leaders focused on supporting practitioners in bringing contemporary theory and practice together: the how and the why of practice connected to outcomes for children. The policy perspectives of the VCAA and DEECD supported practitioners in understanding the broader context of their assessment practices across the early years during a period of significant reform.

The project applied five key design features throughout the five workshops. These included inquiry-based learning, formal reflective practice, integration of theory frameworks and practice, documenting and analysing evidence of children's learning and development, and mentoring with project leaders within and between workshops.

Initial workshops focused on the development of individual inquiry questions related to assessment practices within participant settings. In the final three workshops, participants gathered evidence of children's learning and development that connected to their specific questions.

Project leaders supported participants to identify growth in their professional confidence and capacity to document multiple evidence examples of children's learning and development to inform practice decisions, including referral, intervention and transitions. Participants had the opportunity to collaborate on assessments that would contribute to progress in children's learning and development. Shared approaches to assessment for learning with families and with children were identified to strengthen relationships and to inform children's learning as well as programs and practices.

Methods

Report findings were generated from a range of evaluation strategies including:

- participant pre- and post-project online questionnaires
- the development and monitoring of individual inquiry questions
- formal reflective documentation records completed at the beginning and end of all workshops
- a final evaluation survey in the fifth workshop
- two facilitated evaluation forums at the end of the workshop series.

Professional learning content for each workshop was refined and shaped by the VCAA and project leaders through progress reports and in VCAA and project leader planning meetings between each workshop.

What did the Project identify?

Project leaders identified greater understanding by the 43 participants about the dynamic nature of children's learning and development and a progression towards a more systematic review of children's progress in learning. Participants reported an increase in their knowledge of:

- the VEYLDF practice principles and the learning and development outcomes
- the complexity and diversity of the early years workforce
- other models of educational, care and health services for families, particularly in the birth-to-three-years period.

Project leaders identified strengthened leadership skills in individual participants, regardless of qualifications and position. This included an increased capacity to trial and adapt assessment tools and resources. Stronger links were identified between evidence of children's learning and decisions about curriculum and planning. They described this as a maturing process for participants working in early childhood services and across early years.

Participants came to see themselves as both researchers and practitioners. The workshop design provided a supportive environment for the trial of assessment for learning and development tools and resources.

The partnership between policymakers, researchers and practitioners provided a contemporary professional learning environment, that linked to current issues in early years reform and accountability requirements. Participants and project leaders described highly motivated engagement with the professional learning and active engagement to support the work of colleagues back in services.

Assessment for Learning and Development Practice Change

Six key themes have been identified that connect to outcomes for children and define practitioner changes in assessment for learning and development practice. These include:

- focusing on children's strengths and capabilities
- broadening perspectives about infants, toddlers and young children's learning and development
- tracking children's progress in learning and development
- initiating conversations about children's learning and development with children and families
- strengthening collaborative partnerships and approaches to assessment for learning and development with families, children and other early childhood professionals
- leading and supporting colleagues.

What evidence informed the ALD Project?

Research and international evidence from both the VEYLDF and EYLF informed the ALD Project. A key purpose of assessment is to measure progress in learning and development against the frameworks. This begins with the VEYLDF and links to the AusVELS curriculum.

The VEYLDF identifies eight Practice Principles for Learning and Development, which describe the most effective ways for early childhood professionals to work together with children and families to facilitate learning and development.

Recording rich evidence of children's learning in the five Outcomes leads to analysis and interpretation. This supports practitioners in making meaning of what children are learning to inform program planning and practice. This documentation helps early childhood professionals share information that is a foundation for partnerships and collaboration between families and early childhood professionals.

When working with children, the focus should be on what children are learning as well as on early childhood professionals' practice. The VEYLDF supports all early childhood professionals to consider principles, discuss what they mean for daily practice, and review and adapt programs to support progress in learning.

The *Outcomes Project Report 2010–2011*, an earlier practitioner inquiry project, outlined the importance of looking at what children are indicating that they are learning. This is different from describing what children are *doing*. The evidence of babies and toddlers' learning is often subtle and is evident in everyday routines and experiences. These findings supported the birth-to-three-years research in the ALD Project.

Parameters of this Report

The ALD Project Report has gathered qualitative insights and evidence from early childhood professionals and is intended as a formative summary of this sample of practitioners. The ALD Project included participants from services including maternal and child health, supported play groups, family day care, early childhood intervention, kindergarten, long day care, outside school hours care and the early years of primary school.

This Report draws on data from the pre-project online questionnaire, data from workshop evaluations and project leaders' progress reports, and provides snapshots of participant perceptions of their learning and practice change. The findings from the post-project online questionnaire and the evaluation survey are used to describe the movement in practice change across the three participant groups as a result of the professional learning over a 10-month period.

These perceptions are combined with the views of project leaders to provide analysis of key themes and trends in assessment for learning and development practice change. The assessment for learning and development practice changes are linked to a sample of practitioner practice reflections at the level of service type. Along with participant quotes, these have been used throughout the Report to describe examples of specific practice change and key themes in the birth-to-three-years group and the two birth-to-eight-years groups.

Examples of evidence and formats are used in the Report to demonstrate adaptations in assessment for learning and development documentation, evidence of children's learning and development, and practice change in a range of settings and services.

What are the next steps in VEYLDF multidisciplinary research?

In 2013, the ALD Project model of practitioner research has been extended to the Inquiry into Implementation Project (IIP). The IIP operates in nine networks across regional, rural and metropolitan Victoria with a total of 155 multidisciplinary practitioners (as at June 2013). The IIP relates to two specific early childhood reform recommendations from the Griffith University Evaluation of the Implementation of the VEYLDF:

- **Recommendation 3** To facilitate professional learning activities and workshops that are large scale and then follow up with smaller local networking opportunities.
- **Recommendation 4** To coordinate with service and industry bodies to organise local and integrated professional learning that may include elements of support that are service specific.

The IIP is investigating directions for assessment in the early years within local and regional multidisciplinary networks. It reflects the Victorian Government's education reform agenda, as outlined in *Towards Victoria as a Learning Community 2012,* and the aim of its *2012–2013 Victorian Families* statement, which outlines a vision for supporting Victorian families to 'reach their potential'.

A review and evaluation of the IIP from 2013 to 2014 will inform the development of a VEYLDF Assessment for Learning and Development Training Manual. This will be available to support ongoing VEYLDF implementation across Victorian early years networks and communities.

Section 1 The ALD Project: Context and background

The Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework: For All Children from Birth-to-eight Years (VEYLDF) was released in November 2009 for implementation from 2010. The VEYLDF sets out a program of learning and development for children aged from birth to eight years.

Ongoing support for implementation of the VEYLDF is occurring in a government policy environment with a strong focus on the early childhood sector. This includes a government commitment to prioritising the protection and support of vulnerable children. In its *2012–13 Victorian Families* statement, the Victorian Government set out its vision of 'supporting Victorian families to reach their potential, even during challenging times'. The focus is on providing better-quality services that are more responsive to the diverse needs of Victorian families and will improve long-term outcomes for vulnerable children. The VEYLDF aligns with the Victorian Government priorities by supporting early childhood professionals to implement quality practices that improve outcomes for all Victorian children.

Implementation initiatives that informed this Project

Since 2010, key evaluations have been undertaken and the data collected has provided evidence to support ongoing review of implementation activities and initiatives. Evidence includes the evaluation of the implementation of the VEYLDF; data from the VEYLDF modules; feedback from Bastow professional learning; findings from the VEYLDF Coaching program report and from the VCAA's *Outcomes Project Report 2010–2011*. This evidence contributes to understanding the level of awareness, engagement and impact of the VEYLDF across the early years sector.

The ALD Project built on the pilot Outcomes Project and provided a specific focus on the VEYLDF Practice Principle: Assessment for Learning and Development. The pilot Outcomes Project supported participants in an earlier phase of reform: getting started with, and understanding, the detail in the VEYLDF Learning and Development Outcomes and Practice Principles. The ALD project extended this and supported participants to apply the VEYLDF Practice Principles to broaden their perspectives and approaches to assessment for learning and development, including collaborative approaches.

The impact of reform and the model of continuous improvement

From 2012, Council of Australian Governments (COAG) reform has further defined a national quality agenda for early childhood through the introduction of the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care (NQF). This includes the new National Quality Standard (NQS) linked to approved learning frameworks. The NQS outlines seven quality standards to inform and guide early childhood professionals in the delivery of nationally consistent and high quality experiences and programs for children and families.

The ALD Project operated during this significant phase of national early childhood reform with the introduction of the NQF and the accountability requirements for a range of early childhood service types, including long day care services, family day care, kindergarten, and outside school hours care. The introduction of NQF assessor visits from June 2012 created a strong impetus for early childhood participants to trial and incorporate theories, resources and tools and to support the work of their colleagues and teams as part of their assessment for learning and development practices.

The implementation of the AusVELS curriculum in schools provides a new opportunity to forge effective implementation links. This extends on children's learning in early childhood, connecting curriculum and practices within the early years of school.

In Victoria, the AusVELS provides a single curriculum for Foundation to Year 10. It incorporates the Australian Curriculum as it is progressively developed, within a framework that reflects particular Victorian priorities and contemporary approaches to teaching and learning. The VEYLDF Learning and Development Outcomes have been mapped to the AusVELS curriculum in the early years of school to support a continuum of learning for children. These illustrative maps are available on the VCAA website and are designed to support continuity of learning for children. They can be used to support early childhood professionals and teachers to design experiences and opportunities that link the VEYLDF Learning and Development Outcomes to the AusVELS in the early years of school. School teachers are able to see the learning that children bring with them from early childhood, as described in the VELYDF, and so can plan to build on that learning and development in the early years of school.

The VEYLDF emphasises the importance of supporting children's and families' transitions as they move within and across services, and to school throughout the early years period.

This sets the scene for further progress in professional knowledge and identity across the early childhood education and care sector. It moves from a focus on education and care to a new focus on assessment for learning and development from birth onwards, and includes an integrated focus on collaboration across systems and services to support all children and families.

The Educational Change Model

The Educational Change Model (ECM) developed for the early years sector as part of the Griffith University's *Evaluation of Implementation of the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework: For all Children from Birth to Eight Years* was used in ALD Project workshops to conceptualise practice change. The Evaluation report is available on the VCAA website.

The ECM outlines three distinct phases of implementation in a period of reform linked to an indicative time frame: Initiation Phase (one to two years); Development Phase (two to five years); Consolidation Phase (five to 10 years).

Initiation Phase (1–2 years)
• To engage or not to engage
• Getting started
• Introducing new language and practices (VEYLDF)

Development Phase (2–5 years)
• Discovery
• Creating opportunities to network, discuss and reflect in communities of practice
• Practice change
• Emerging leadership

Consolidation Phase (5–10 years)
• Refining practice
• Leading and supporting others
• Building capacity and ownership — implementation through local networks

Figure 1: The Educational Change Model for early years

The ECM was introduced to ALD Project participants in the workshops to help them identify strategies and resources that could strengthen their understanding and engagement with the VEYLDF as part of a continuous improvement model. Being able to identify the chronological phases of individuals and teams meant that participants could help lead and influence colleagues' practices back in their services.

During 2012, the third year of VEYLDF implementation, ALD Project participants identified a progression in their knowledge as they developed and adapted formats to document their assessment for learning. This occurred in their settings and across services as part of collaborative work with families and other early childhood professionals. This progression can be compared with Outcomes Project participants, who used the Evidence Collection Tool (ECT) to help them start collecting evidence in the five Outcomes. These practices can be mapped to the Initiation phase in reform, which covers the early stages of the first and second years.

An ECM Action Plan to support discussion about practice change in an environment of continuous improvement is included in Appendix 1 of this Report.

Which Practice Principle underpins this Report?

The VELYDF recognises the importance of early childhood professionals undertaking assessment as a core part of effective practice.

The implications for assessment practice are informed by research. This is outlined in the Assessment for Learning and Development Practice Principle Evidence Paper [1] and connected to implications for achieving the best outcomes for children:

- Early childhood professionals require the knowledge and skills to undertake non-judgmental assessments of children's learning and development.
- Assessment is undertaken collaboratively with children, families and professionals.
- A culture of evidence-based program and practice decisions is promoted.
- Effective assessment is dynamic and ongoing, as is children's learning and development.
- A systematic and rigorous approach supports cumulative assessment of children's learning and development across services.

Interrelated Practice Principles to support collaboration

In the VEYLDF, the eight Practice Principles for learning and development are arranged into three categories: collaborative, effective and reflective, and are interrelated and designed to inform each other. The assessment for learning and development Practice Principle sits within the effective category to advance assessment practice in the early years.

The six key themes of assessment for learning and development practice change identified in the Project are underpinned by the Practice Principles. These themes are described in Section 5 of this Report. Progress and change in collaborative, effective and reflective approaches to assessment for learning and development have been identified by project leaders and by ALD Project participants from a range of services across the birth-to-eight-years sector.

A culture of practitioner inquiry in the ALD Project supported participants to research aspects of their practice to improve what they do and to generate new understandings about their practice[2]. A commitment to strong and equal partnerships with families was described in their reflections and was evident in practitioner evidence developed in the ALD Project. There were increased conversations in workshops about children leading their learning and early childhood professionals responding more to children's ideas and aspects of their world.

Practitioners described how working as a team helped them to reconsider their practices and relationships with families and engage with colleagues to support high expectations for all children. In Victoria, the opportunities for early childhood professionals from all sectors to come together over an extended period of time has helped them to examine their beliefs and practices, and how they can work together to improve their assessment practices.

1 Flottman R, Stewart, L & Tayler, C 2011, 'Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework Evidence Paper Practice Principle 7: Assessment for learning and development', Victorian Government and University of Melbourne, East Melbourne, viewed 31 July 2013 <www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/earlylearning/prac-assessment.pdf> (p. 5).

2 Educators belonging, being and becoming: Resources CD
    Material drafted by Charles Sturt University (CSU) Early Years Learning Framework Consortium, 2009.

Section 2 Assessment for learning and development: A practitioner inquiry approach

Introduction

This section outlines the Project purpose, processes, design features and key tools and resources applied in the ALD Project. Six key themes of assessment for learning and development practice change are identified from the professional learning partnership between practitioners, policymakers and researchers.

How did the Project nomination process work?

The VCAA Early Years Unit worked closely with DEECD regional staff from August to November 2011 to identify participants and services. Regions were contacted by the VCAA to provide nominations from professionals working with children aged from birth to three years and from birth to eight years. In addition, joint nominations were also sought from early childhood professionals working together in the same early years service, school or local network.

The nomination process ensured that early childhood professionals from a broad range of service types were involved and was strengthened by the inclusion of participants such as local government managers, principals and project coordinators.

Scope

The purpose of the ALD Project was to apply a practitioner inquiry-based model of professional learning with a diverse range of early childhood professionals to:

- use the five Outcomes (refer Figure 2) as outlined in the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF) as key reference points to identify children's progress within a curriculum planning cycle
- apply a diverse range of methods to document and analyse multiple and systematic examples of evidence of children's capabilities and milestones
- implement collaborative approaches to assessment for learning with children, with families and with other professionals
- contribute to the development and trial of tools and resources that support early childhood professionals to plan for children's current and future learning.
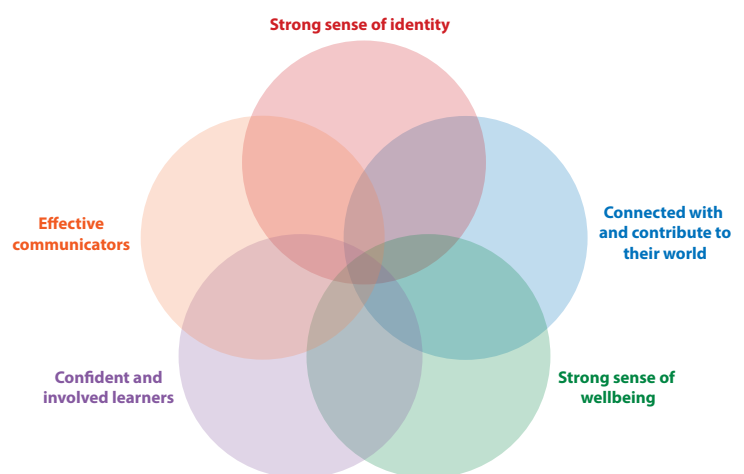
Figure 2: Interconnected Learning and Development Outcomes

What were the key design features?

Key design features of the ALD Project included inquiry-based learning, reflective practice, integration of contemporary theory, frameworks and practice; documenting and analysing evidence of children's learning and development, collaborative conversations with other professionals and mentoring with project leaders within and between workshops.

These design features were interconnected and reviewed as participants moved through the workshop series and built up their knowledge.

Design features and impact on learning

Implementation of the VEYLDF is supported when communities of learners are actively engaged in collaborative learning environments. Both individual and group changes were noted in ongoing reflections and final evaluations, described as increased participant capability, acuity and confidence in assessment for learning and development practices.

A key element of the ALD Project was to build a professional learning community of participants and for them to connect the learning back to their services. Throughout the course of the five workshops, participants were encouraged to engage actively in group discussions, and build partnerships with other professionals not in their immediate service. Participants explored ways to integrate the idea of community into the children's learning programs. To support collaboration the VCAA provided all participants with contact details for participants in their group and a contact list for participants across the groups from their specific regions. The ALD workshops were held in Melbourne, backfill was provided for participants working directly with children, and rural participants were provided with travel support where necessary.

A Statement of Commitment was provided to all participants to describe the Project's methodology: the time commitment, mentoring support available within the Project, time for critical reflection and a specific focus on the development of an individual inquiry project. **The ALD Project Participant Statement of Commitment is included at Appendix 2.**

Inquiry approach

A **practitioner inquiry model** of professional learning was used to support the application of assessment for learning and development in participants' settings. Participants developed individual inquiry questions (refer to Appendix 3) and used reflective questions to deepen understanding of practice. Participants identified actions that would support the implementation of inquiry questions, including documenting evidence, engaging in ongoing reflection and using a reflection journal and developing strategies to measure their individual progress. This practitioner inquiry approach is supported in research as Reid (2008) says:

'Educators need to be inquirers into professional practice who question their routine practices and assumptions and who are capable of investigating the effects of their teaching on student learning' (p. 142).

Individual inquiry questions had a specific focus on assessment for learning and development. The inquiry themes included:

- how to connect observations and documentation to assessment for learning and development
- how to monitor children's learning and development progress using the five Outcomes as key reference points
- how to strengthen the links between assessment for learning and development and curriculum decisions
- identifying children's approaches to learning and dispositions for learning
- including children's views of their own learning
- understanding the early childhood professional's role in children's learning
- collaborative approaches to assessment for learning and development and making learning visible to children, families, educators and other professionals.

A full list of practitioner inquiry themes is included in Appendix 4.

Reflective practice – written reflection and analysis

Workshop reflection: Birth-to-eight years group.

Critical reflection and professional inquiry were key features of the project design. This approach was used with participants to understand the impact on curriculum decisions and practice change.

This connects with a new way of professional being in early childhood that can be associated with the introduction of the national EYLF (2009). As stated in the EYLF (2009, p.13):

'A lively culture of professional inquiry is established when early childhood educators and those with whom they work are all involved in an ongoing cycle of review through which current practices are examined, outcomes reviewed and new ideas generated. In such a climate, issues related to curriculum quality, equity and children's wellbeing can be raised and debated.'

The methodology and structure of the Project created opportunities for practitioners to reflect on their current assessment for learning and development practices and their evidence, and to share experiences and identify ways to work differently.

This involved three components of reflection: **technical**, **practical** and **critical**.

Project leaders supported participants to systematically review these components.

- What works as a result of developing and implementing an inquiry question? (Technical)

- Why are things happening as they are now and how can I use the Learning and Development Outcomes to develop new insights? (Practical)

- How can we ensure that planning is based on high expectations that all children can be successful learners? (Critical)

- How can we develop strong and equal partnerships with families to support children's learning? (Critical)

- How can my knowledge of other professionals generate new partnerships to support families and children's learning? (Critical)

Project leaders built formal written reflection time into all workshop sessions. Reflection sheets were developed to support participants to review their current practice, to consider the trial of tools and resources they were provided in the workshops and to identify challenges.

These reflections were used as part of the formal project evaluation process. Project leaders noted the significant impact this written reflection had on the capacity of participants to write about their own experience, develop their inquiry questions, analyse the evidence coming from this and review how analysis of learning informs their planning decisions. The power of the written process was surprising for participants and reflected realistic time available in the workplace – finding 10 minutes at the beginning and end of the day to pause and reflect.

Copies of the reflection sheets are included in Appendix 5 and Appendix 6.

Mentor support

Mentor support: Birth-to-eight years group.

Personalised support in the form of coaching and mentoring was available throughout the Project. Project leaders and VCAA staff supported all participants with goal setting and the development of their individual inquiry questions. Time was allocated for coaching and mentoring during workshops as well as structured discussions between the third and fourth workshops and the fourth and fifth to support ongoing engagement and evidence collection.

An increased capacity to think critically and apply the inquiry question was an outcome of the mentoring. This was evident in small group discussions during workshops. Project leaders and participants also reported that mentor support between workshops helped participants to focus. Early childhood professionals work in complex environments. The one-to-one mentoring supported participants' learning and commitment to continue in the Project despite obstacles and competing demands.

Tools and resources to support practice change

A key feature of the ALD Project was the design and use of a range of tools and resources to support assessment for learning and development. Participants were supported in trialling, reviewing and adapting tools and resources for their individual inquiry questions. Project activities in workshops were designed to refine and/or replace workplace documentation and assessment practices that participants currently used. Greater precision was evident in how children's learning was described over time and how documentation was used to support this. A key challenge for early childhood practitioners was using evidence of children's learning in documentation that provided an up-to-date, strengths-based picture of children's learning and informed their planning and practice decisions.

Documentation and the VCAA Evidence Collection Tool

Discussions about documentation of children's learning and development were ongoing over the course of the workshops. Participants described increased confidence in applying new knowledge to support connections back in their services and settings.

The Early Years Planning Cycle (EYPC; Figure 3) outlines the process early childhood professionals use to collect and interpret evidence. This contributes to a detailed up-to-date, strengths-based picture of children's learning and development to inform planning and practice decisions. It is used to support assessment for learning 'which is designed to discover what children know and understand, based on what they make, write, draw, say and do.' (VEYLDF, p.13)

Project leaders noted that participants came to the ALD Project with greater understanding and application of the planning cycle and with deeper knowledge of the Learning and Development Outcomes than participants in the Outcomes Project in 2010–2011.

Figure 3: The Early Years Planning Cycle adapted from the Educators' Guide to the EYLF (2010)

The Evidence Collection Tool (ECT) that was developed in the Outcomes Project was further refined and adapted by participants in the ALD Project.

The ECT was updated based on feedback from Project leaders and participants to include:

- a strengthened focus on learning
- the inclusion of prompts that highlight children's skills in play, and their capabilities and involvement in experiences
- a focus on assessing children's learning over time, and in everyday experiences
- prompts to initiate and extend conversations to support learning with children, families and other early childhood professionals.

The context section has an expanded series of prompts that support considerations including:

- sustained and shared interactions with children
- practice in the light of analysis, interpretation and critical reflection
- further conversations with children, families and other professionals about children's learning and development.

The documentation template was expanded to include a fourth column. The updated ECT suggests beginning with a proposed program that includes outcomes for children and outcomes for early childhood professionals. A space for critical reflection is noted on the template, using all elements of the EYPC. **A copy of the updated Evidence Collection Tool is provided in Appendix 7 of this Report** and is available on the VCAA website.

The child involvement scale

Participants in the ALD Project explored the child involvement scale as a powerful way to evaluate children's involvement in experiences.[3] The application of this tool provided opportunities for practitioners to see more clearly what might be happening for a child (for example, as part of daily transitions), and the practice changes that should be activated to support engagement and involvement. Participants described their observations using the five-point scale as giving them greater confidence in conversations with families, and in intervening earlier to support children.

Exploration of this tool supported practitioners to develop more active and responsive relationships with children. In considering the evidence in the context of the Outcomes, they were able to develop greater confidence and clarity in practices that support children's learning, wellbeing, joy and satisfaction in learning.

Practitioner stories about documentation and evidence collection

In the Early Years Exchange No. 11, ALD Project participants describe how they are documenting and assessing children's learning. In a series of ongoing conference co-presentations (VCAA Early Years Unit and ALD Project participants), early childhood professionals describe their experiences as practitioners and researchers.

Practitioners describe how they continue to adapt and apply the ECT to support assessment for learning and development in their settings, what this means for practice and the impact on outcomes for children. Evidence example 1 describes a toddler's experience in challenging limits and boundaries and the educator's analysis and plans for further challenges using the Evidence Collection Tool.

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3 Bertram and Pascal <www.decd.sa.gov.au/farnorthandaboriginallands/files/links/link_104984.pdf>

Evidence example 1: Evidence Collection Tool

| Child/Children's Name/s: B | Date: 27 April 2012 |
| | Time: 10.20 AM |

Observe and Collect Information	Question and Analyse	Plan, Act and Do
B was in the room playing and saw me get some soya crisps from on top of the bench. He put his arms out to me while making a sound so I gave him a piece. After eating the piece I had given him, he looked towards the bench and crawled over to it. He then picked himself up with the support of the cupboard and stretched out his arms towards the top of the bench. He did this for a few moments. He then dropped to his bottom and started crawling over to the table with the chairs. Once again he picked himself up while holding on to the chair. B started to push the chair over to the bench where the soya crisps were. When he got there, he climbed onto to the chair, stood up and reached his arms out to the container, which had the soya crisps, but it was too far out of his reach. I was watching B through this whole time and I walked over to the bench and said, 'I can see that you want those crisps don't you B? Let's get down and I'll give you one.' I then helped B back on the floor and gave him a piece of the soya crisp, which he quickly munched on.	B is a very adventurous person who likes to test his abilities any chance he gets. This has resulted in lots of climbing practice on different obstacles including furniture. This also means he has very good climbing abilities, which he is constantly testing out. We had noticed B's enjoyment of climbing and as a result we had set up an indoor obstacle for him to climb on, which he engaged in for quite some time. We took it away after a few weeks, transferring it for outdoor play. This particular incident was very fascinating for me to observe because I had never observed a 13-month-old child problem solve as B had done in this incident. He knew what he wanted and worked out how he could achieve his goal. Previously when B climbed onto a piece of furniture, we would instruct him to either get off, if it was a table, or to sit, if he was standing on a chair. In this particular incident I didn't say anything to B because I could see what he was trying to do. B was working through the process of problem solving, which he thought about and acted on (Outcome 4b: Children develop a range of skills and processes such as problem solving, inquiry, experimentation and investigating). He was able to collate different ideas and bring them together to achieve his goal. Someone who may not have observed what was happening would have thought B was just climbing onto the chair and would have stopped him from doing what he was doing. Sometimes, we, as adults, jump to conclusions about what children do without seeing what's really happening. We should be supporting children's learning processes, and this will sometimes include risk taking, but we should allow for this trial-and-error learning to occur.	B enjoys challenging his limits and boundaries, because of this, I want to create a climbing obstacle course that will encourage B to use his problem-solving skills as well as test his physical abilities. Of course this obstacle course will have elements of risk-taking, which I believe will appeal to B. This obstacle course will be built outside. I will introduce B to the obstacle course and allow him to attempt the course on his own initially. If I observe B requiring assistance, I will provide it.
Context: B is a 13-month-old child. He has been attending our centre for about two months. B tends to get involved in every little thing and not much seems to faze him. He seems to be emotionally well adjusted and not a lot upsets him. Although B has great climbing abilities, he doesn't walk and can't quite support himself standing up.		

Evidence Example 1: **Evidence Collection Tool**

Adapting evidence collection formats

The project leaders reported increased practitioner confidence in applying and adapting assessment tools and resources. This trend can be mapped to the Development phase in a period of reform, during which practitioners describe greater knowledge of frameworks and changes to practice.

ALD Project participants have adapted the ECT to report on children's learning. Following are four examples of documentation templates adapted by early childhood professionals in the ALD Project. The greater focus on assessment for learning and development is reflected in inquiry questions, which in turn, have an impact on the precision and quality of the evidence. There is evidence of a strengthened link between adapted examples that broaden perspectives of children's learning and track children's progress.

This is important to note in the work of early childhood intervention services, where the language of the VEYLDF can support specialist practitioners to assess and advance children's learning and development in a range of settings.

Documentation template 1: Linking VEYLDF to AusVELS to support investigations planning in primary school

The following sample describes an overarching document used to plan investigations and assess the progress of students in learning. The participant's inquiry question focused on supporting staff in the early years of school to assess the wellbeing of children and link these assessments to their practice and pedagogy.

Britt Hartley (primary school teacher) developed this format to link the work of the school community, which had mapped the VEYLDF/AusVELS to the broader school values. She described the Learning and Development Outcomes as providing depth to work with children and families:

'The ability to report more clearly and with more detail around the whole child has been an effective growth in our program – helping make links between school and home. The VEYLDF has supported us to be more flexible in our planning for learning centres that promote children's social learning and communication, and not just formalised literacy and numeracy lessons as has been our focus in the past.

Our work as a unit (a team of six teachers) on this project has allowed us to develop consistency among our grades. We have a clearer focus for our learning centres and are able to link the learning we observe more effectively with future goals and objectives.

My ability to lead change around the framework was supported by my ability to spend time coaching and working alongside teachers for half of the year setting up these processes. The more we worked with and got to know the framework, the better and more precise our planning and student reflections have become.

Parents can also see that it is 'not just play' and that this is a valuable way to engage children in their learning and that they are being held accountable for what they do in this time. It is also great to see them valuing the notion that learning is not just reading and writing but that thinking, planning, reflecting and designing are all important elements of the learning cycle as well as the end product.'

Investigations Planning	Term: 1	Weeks: 7-8	Room: 11	
Victorian Early Years Learning & Development Framework VEYLD				
Identity	**Community**	**Wellbeing**	**Learning**	**Communication**
*interact with their peers, teachers and other adults in a range of contexts *explore their responsibilities and rights and those of others in familiar contexts such as the family, the classroom, the school playground and local recreation areas **Civics and Citizenship** *identify the qualities of a friend and demonstrate care for other students Interpersonal Development *with support, learn to manage time and resources to complete short tasks **Personal Learning** *begin to understand how their actions affect others **Interpersonal Development**	*develop a sense of belonging to the school community **Civics and Citizenship** *develop the skills to work in a group, including taking turns, sharing and caring for equipment *use appropriate language and actions when dealing with conflict **Interpersonal Development** *explore possible actions and responses to social situations through dramatic play **The Arts** *learn that materials can be recycled and reused to produce new products **Design, Communication and Technology**	*start identifying new things they can do and the responsibilities associated with these – as a learner, being responsible and respectful *describe basic skills required to work cooperatively in groups **Interpersonal Development** *explore their emotions and identify the different ways in which people express and respond to emotions *learn to consider, support and encourage others to share equipment and to adhere to rules that aid participation and cooperation **Health and Physical Education**	*learn to manage their time and resources to complete tasks *participate in different types of guided investigations to explore and answer questions … **Science**, **ACSIS025** *use simple pictures and models to represent design ideas **Design, Communication and Technology** *with encouragement and support, wonder, question and become adventurous in their thinking about familiar contexts **Thinking Processes** *play with and manipulate materials/ ingredients in both a free and focused manner to foster development of their design and technical skills *begin to understand that listening to the responses of others can assist them to make sense of new experiences and provide useful cues for learning **Personal Learning** *model and describe daily activities and familiar events using physical materials, diagrams and maps **Design, Creativity and Technology**	*use interaction skills including listening while others speak, using appropriate voice levels, articulation and body language, gestures and eye contact **English**, **ACELY1784 (SL)** *engage in conversations and discussions, using active listening behaviours, showing interest, and contributing ideas, information and questions **English**, **ACELY1656 (SL)** *engage in discussions about observations and use methods such as drawing or writing to represent ideas **Science**, **ACSIS233** *create two- and three-dimensional visual artworks based on imagination and fantasy and in response to everyday occurrences **The Arts** *measure and compare the lengths and capacities of pairs of objects using uniform informal units **Maths**, **ACMMG019** *explore different ways of expressing emotions … **English**, **ACELA1787 (SL)** *understand that texts can take many forms, can be very short or quite long, and that stories and informative texts have different purposes **English**, **ACELA1430 (RV)**

Documentation template 2: A share tool developed in long day care

A long day care director, Paula Holt, developed a Share Tool with key observations and assessments that families could use elsewhere, for example as part of their maternal and child health Key Age and Stage Visits, and with early childhood intervention specialists and medical practitioners.

This initiative built on this participants' inquiry question to support connections between multidisciplinary services in regional areas. This form was developed during the Project as part of integrated meetings between a range of local agencies working directly with children in the birth-to-eight-years period and their families.

SHARE TOOL

Child's name: _____ Child's date of birth: _____

Parent/Guardian names:_____

Name of educator completing share tool _____ Date _____

AIM OF SHARE TOOL:

To provide consistent, concise assessment information, about the child's learning and development, that involves educators, families and other early childhood professionals.

Your educator has completed this Share Tool, based on their observations and assessments and information your family has provided to us.

Please feel free to share this information with any other early childhood professionals or specialist connected to your family. For example your GP or maternal and child health nurse.

We welcome their contribution, as we welcome yours, about your child.

SUMMARY OF WHAT YOU HAVE TOLD US ABOUT YOUR CHILD

WHAT WE HAVE DICSOVERED ABOUT YOUR CHILD

(Our discoveries link to the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework)

Early Years Learning and Development Framework Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity.

- Children feel safe, secure and supported.
- Children develop their emerging autonomy, inter-dependence, resilience and sense of agency.
- Children develop knowledgeable and confident self-identities.

Early Years Learning and Development Framework Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world.

- 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.

SHARE TOOL

Early Years Learning and Development Framework Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing

- Children become strong in their social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing.
- Children take increasing responsibility for their own health and physical wellbeing.

Early Years Learning and Development Framework Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners

- Children develop dispositions for learning such as curiosity, co-operation, 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 investigation.
- Children transfer and adapt what they have learnt from one context to another.
- Children resource their own learning through connecting with people, place, technologies and natural and processed materials.

Early Years Learning and Development Framework Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators

- Children interact verbally and non-verbally with others for a range of purposes.
- Children engage with a range of texts and get meaning from these texts.
- Children begin to understand how symbols and pattern systems work.
- Children use information and communication technologies to access information, investigate ideas and represent their thinking.

WHAT DO OTHER EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFESSIONALS/SPECIALISTS ADVISE ABOUT YOUR CHILD'S LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT?

HOW ELSE CAN WE HELP DEVELOP AND EXTEND YOUR CHILD SO THEY CAN ACHIEVE THEIR BEST?

CONSENT

Do you consent to the early childhood educator discussing the information in this Share Tool with the following?

_____

(please insert professional's name)

☐ Yes ☐ No

Parent/Guardian signature [   ] Date [   ]

Documentation template 3: Wellbeing observation record used in early childhood services and primary school

In this example, Fiona Zinn (early childhood educator and primary school teacher) has adapted an evidence collection tool based on Professor Martin Seligman's 'PERMA' definition of wellbeing, to include prompt questions for colleagues looking for evidence of children's wellbeing.

This format uses the language of the child involvement scale to support anecdotes and observations linked to elements of wellbeing. When used in the early years of school, this format informs curriculum content and supports ongoing discussion and review in staff meetings.

Prompts to support visible learning include looking for the level of relationship between children and the teachers, seeing children's varied accomplishments as significant and important, for example, finding opportunities to talk and connect their learning with feelings.

The development of this format linked directly to the teacher's inquiry question: How can I support staff to assess wellbeing authentically so they can use these assessments to shape their pedagogy and practice?

Child's Name: Observer's Name: Date/s of Observation:	Contextual Notes: *These notes are general reflections on the observation tool for wellbeing offered by the early learning centre staff.*
PROMPT QUESTIONS	**EVIDENCE AND OBSERVATION**
(Review these questions if you need guidance in the sorts of things to look for)	(Write down anecdotes, observations or links to documentation samples that illustrate the elements of wellbeing)
POSITIVE EMOTION What interests, situations, experiences or people trigger the child's positive emotions? Which positive emotions do they express? How is this observed? How does the child express positive emotion? (What behaviours do they exhibit when they do so?) How do they regulate their positive emotions? What effect does this positive emotion have on others around them? Are there any trends or changes in positive emotion that are becoming apparent in the child? When things are not going well for the child, how do they cope? What sorts of resilience strategies are observed in the child to re-establish positive emotion in difficult circumstances?	Positive emotions can be linked to the relationships children establish with their teachers and peer friendship group. Positive emotions could be observed through the physical interactions children have with each other, and through their actions, for example smiling, hugging, doing something for a friend. Positive emotions affect others by them also being happy themselves. When a child is proud of themselves or their work then their positive emotions increase and can create change in how they see themselves or work.

ENGAGEMENT (FLOW)	When does the child find situations of flow and genuine engagement?	The surrounding environment, teachers and peers could support a child's flow and inspire their learning.
	What are the situations, elements, people that support the child to find flow?	When in a flow, children are focused, concentrate, are creative and are stimulated in their learning.
	What do they do when they are in flow?	To engage deeply, the teacher needs to clearly know the children to provide experiences or situations that will challenge, inspire or engage them deeply.
	What needs to be in place for this child to engage deeply?	
	Are they able to create situations for flow and engagement independently?	Children are able to create situations for flow and engagement in a supportive learning environment.
RELATIONSHIPS	What relationships are working for this child at the moment?	The relationships for the child can include the learning environment, teachers and peers.
	Who do they seek out? How do they enter these situations? Are they able to collaborate with others in these relationships?	Children will seek out who they feel comfortable with and enjoy spending time with, for example peers who have similar interests.
	Who do they choose to be in 'flow' with?	Children may also choose other children who are like-minded to be with them in the flow or assist them to stay in the flow.
	Who contributes to these relationships?	All parties would contribute to these relationships in some manner.
	Are there observable patterns in these relationships?	There would be observable patterns in these relationships.
	How do they interact with each other when things go well?	When things go well they would be assisting each other and working in partnership. When things don't go so well they might separate appropriately and work independently. Children will reach out for help when needed and seek support when in situations of difficulty.
	How do they interact with each other when things don't go well?	
	What roles do they take in these relationships?	Some children would be equal in their roles and some would take the lead or some would learn from each other. Some children may play the role of an expert when working in a particular interest area.
MEANING & PURPOSE	What experiences give this child genuine situations of meaning?	Experiences that are connected to their interests and learning give children situations of meaning.
	How do you know?	This is evident in the way they interact in the experience and what questions they may ask.
	How do they talk about these experiences?	
	In reflection are they able to re-connect with the feelings/experiences that gave them meaning?	Experiences of 'service to others' would build a deeper connection to self and therefore create meaning.
	How do they connect with shared experiences of the group?	Children can be observed to talk with enthusiasm about these experiences and demonstrate their connection to a deeper meaning within the experience.
	Do they join in during situations of shared purpose?	Children can reconnect with feelings and experiences that give them meaning or new experiences that give them the same feelings.
	Do they give/contribute to others or class groups in any way? (Pro-social behaviours)	If the children are connected and feel safe and supported, they will be more likely to share and contribute to a shared purpose.
ACCOMPLISHMENTS	What sorts of accomplishments has the child experienced recently?	Children's accomplishments and personal expressions of accomplishments are many and varied.
	What observable impact did these things have?	All accomplishments are viewed as equal regardless of the type of achievement they are.
	Do you notice any trends or patterns in their recent accomplishments?	No accomplishment is insignificant in the life of a child; all contribute to the adult that the child will become.
	Which accomplishments are they most proud of?	
	How do they express this pride?	
	How do they respond when others celebrate their accomplishments?	

Documentation template 4: Observational assessment tool developed for vacation care

This example by Clare Prodan (vacation care team leader) demonstrates the work of staff in further developing observational assessment tools to include all elements of the Early Years Planning Cycle. The format has supported staff in their analysis of children's learning and informed current and future planning and actions.

Learning and Assessment Tool

Child/Children's Name/s:_____Date: _____

Observation – Who, What and Why?

Question and analyse: What new insights and knowledge do I have about children's learning and my practice decisions? Unpack the observation.

Consider what learning took place and where it might relate to the FSAC Learning Outcomes?

Children have a strong sense of identity. ☐

Children are connected with and contribute to their world. ☐

Children have a strong sense of wellbeing. ☐

Children are confident and involved learners. ☐

Children are effective communicators. ☐

Comments:

Where to from here? Plan, Act, Do

Companionable learning approaches

An emphasis on children's wellbeing was a feature of definitional work early in the ALD Project workshop series. The focus was on building knowledge and understanding of wellbeing with all participants and included a particular emphasis in the birth-to-three-years period.

Companionable learning[4] was described in communication terms as both verbal and non-verbal, and supporting the adult and child learning together.

This was particularly powerful in family day care environments, where participants described learning alongside children through exploring everyday environments and experiences, such as collecting the mail, gardening, going for walks. This strengthened participants' appreciation of the unique value of family day care as an educational service option for families.

Practitioners described being more mindful and aware in their interactions with young children and infants, paying closer attention to gestures, following the lead of the child and experiencing the satisfaction and closeness of exploring things together.

Further information on wellbeing is available in the VCAA Early Years Exchange No.10 (July 2012), which includes a video interview with Dr Rosemary Roberts and a series of interviews with early childhood professionals from the Outcomes Project talking about how they support children's wellbeing and the impact of this on conversations about children's learning and development.

Assessment for learning and development approaches and tools: Trial and review

The ALD Project focused on providing structured opportunities to bring theory and practice together, and participants trialled and adapted tools and resources to support their inquiry questions. Exploration of different early childhood and education theories assisted participants to understand new constructs and contemporary ideas about assessment for learning and development. Workshops were structured to include theory and practice with a substantial part of the day dedicated to supporting conversations among practitioners. This was underpinned by an exploration of the VEYLDF Practice Principles as a core part of effective practice. The ALD Project Report includes practitioner examples of evidence of children's learning, their experiences and adaptations in working with tools and resources, and a series of practice reflections. All participants described progress and changes in practice along with evidence of children's learning.

Talking about practice within a multidisciplinary frame is a relatively new expectation and uncovers new ideas about practice in an environment of accountabilities (such as the National Quality Framework).

Dialogue and focused discussion with a range of participants from different services and settings was energising and supported further connections and continuity between participants.

Participants in the Project described a sense of accomplishment and knowledge in building up their assessment capacity to work with children, families and other colleagues.

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4   Roberts, R 2010, *Wellbeing from Birth* video, *Early Years Exchange No. 10*, <http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Documents/earlyyears/eye/EYE10.pdf>

Section 3 Findings

An overview

This section provides an overview of the findings and analysis of the themes of practice change identified by practitioners and project leaders across the three multidisciplinary groups.

The ALD Project was designed to support early childhood professionals who work with children aged from birth to eight years to implement the VEYLDF. Focusing on assessment for learning and development, the specific objectives of the ALD Project were to:

- apply diverse methods to document and analyse evidence of children's learning
- use the five outcomes to identify progress of children's learning
- implement collaborative approaches to assessment for learning
- contribute to the development and trial of observation tools.

The methodology and structure of the Project created opportunities for early childhood professionals to reflect on their practice, share experiences and identify ways to work collaboratively.

A central approach in the workshops was practitioner inquiry, with reflection as a critical element for informing professional practice. Reflective practice was an effective way of encouraging and modelling critical reflection both individually and with others. This supported challenging practices that are taken for granted, and led to change and transformation.

Project data and evidence was gathered to better understand the broad impact of the ALD Project on participant's assessment for learning and development practice. The perspectives are wide ranging and reflect the diversity of early childhood professionals who participated in the project. Information from evaluation data is used to inform communication messages and the development of professional learning resources to shape and influence ongoing implementation of the VEYLDF.

Project evaluation evidence included:

- participant pre- and post-project online questionnaires
- a participant project evaluation survey at the final workshop, and participant reflection sheets across the duration of the project
- project leader progress reports, project coordination meetings with the VCAA and project leaders
- post-project reflection meetings between project leaders (researchers), VCAA Early Years Unit staff and DEECD Practice Quality Improvement Branch staff (policymakers).

Evidence presented in this report shows that all participants reported their overall involvement in the ALD Project as being useful. The majority of respondents in the final workshop evaluation survey rated their overall involvement as 'very useful' (65 per cent) followed by 'quite useful' (21 per cent).

Comparative quantitative data gathered across the duration of the project indicated noticeable shifts by participants in levels of engagement with the VEYLDF. Participants also reported increased confidence in applying four key dimensions of the EYPC to support assessment for children's learning and development. In each of the four dimensions, the majority of participants self-reported a shift in confidence in applying elements of the EYPC from 'moderately' (mid-point in a five-point scale) in the pre-project phase to 'quite a lot' (point four) post-project phase.

Participants responded to open-ended questions that provided rich qualitative data to inform descriptions of practice change. During the ALD Project period, Project leaders also reported a shift for many early childhood professionals in their assessment approaches.

The data has informed six assessment for learning and development practice approaches or themes. They describe aspects of practice change demonstrated by early childhood professionals as a result of participating in the ALD Project:

1. Focus on children's strengths and capabilities
2. Broaden perspectives of children's learning and development
3. Track children's progress
4. Initiate conversations about children's learning and development
5. Strengthen collaborative partnerships
6. Lead and support colleagues.

Figure 4 illustrates the practice-change approaches. It positions outcomes for children as central to early years quality improvement and illustrates the connections between the project design features and practice change. These practice change approaches are strongly influenced and informed by the ALD Project design features: inquiry, knowledge, reflection, mentoring and evidence collection.
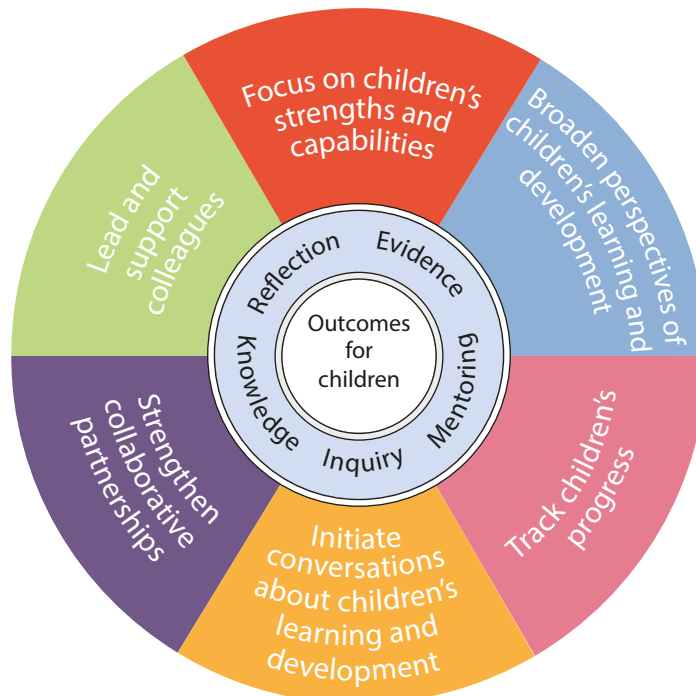
Figure 4: Assessment for Learning and Development Practice Change

Following is a snapshot of the six key practice-change themes. **Further details can be found in Section 5.**

1. **A greater focus on children's strengths and capabilities, including a specific emphasis on children's views of their own learning**:
   - including children's views of their own learning in documentation and rich assessments
   - documenting learning with children and providing opportunities for children to lead their own learning.

2. **Broadening perspectives that focus on looking for children's learning**:
   - deeper knowledge about children's learning and development as a result of integrating new knowledge about contemporary theories, frameworks and practices
   - including children's and families' perspectives in their practitioner analysis of learning.

3. **Using evidence of children's learning to track progress**:
   - more deliberate and purposeful practice in noticing children's learning prior to documenting connected to a shift in layering developmental milestones with learning outcomes
   - increased confidence, and skills in analysing and questioning children's progress in learning and development linked to planning decisions.

4. **A focus on gathering evidence, which is used to form the basis of conversations about children's learning and development**:
   - adapting the Evidence Collection Tool to inform discussions with children, families and colleagues
   - an increase in both the quality and frequency of practitioner conversations to extend children's learning.

5. **Taking action to incorporate collaborative approaches to assessment for learning and development**:
   - creating time for joint opportunities to document, analyse, plan and reflect with other early childhood professionals strengthened collaboration in services and settings
   - completing multidisciplinary assessments, for example between MCH and long day care services, and between early childhood and early childhood intervention services.

6. **Demonstrating leadership and proactively supporting colleagues with implementation of the VEYLDF**:
   - responsive relationships with early childhood professionals and families were further supported with the inclusion of participants with management responsibilities and project coordination roles
   - using project tools and resources back in services to model and adapt with colleagues, supported active engagement with the National Quality Standards: for example kindergarten teachers developing shared approaches to documenting evidence of learning with educational assistants
   - knowledge of the phases within the Education Change Model supported participants in their ongoing work and in supporting colleagues. It enabled participants to slow down and reflect on the journey, acknowledging that programs of reform often span across a number of years.

This summary of evidence indicates that the ALD Project addressed important features of professional learning that positively impact on practice change in assessment for learning and development. It is clear that practice change is influenced by using an inquiry approach that includes formal reflective practice. The central focus on definitional knowledge of contemporary early childhood theory, mentor support and using observational tools, supported practitioners to collect multiple and systematic evidence to inform rich assessments for children's learning and development.

Section 4 Project data and evidence

Who participated?

Forty-three early childhood professionals took part in the ALD Project (Figure 5). Participants came from a range of early years services with professionals from maternal and child health (MCH), family day care (FDC), long day care (LDC), kindergarten services, early childhood intervention services (ECIS; including preschool field officers, PSFO), integrated children's services, primary school, outside school hours care (OSHC) and early years management. Service settings were located in metropolitan, regional and rural areas across Victoria.
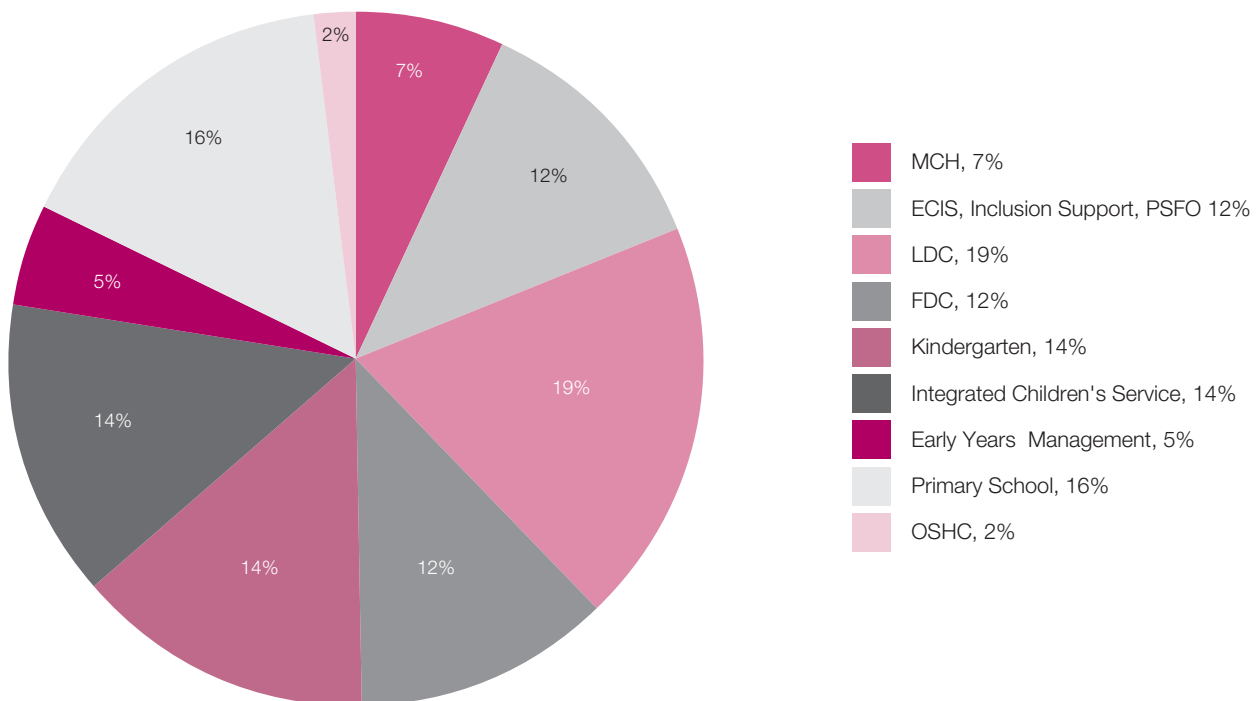
Figure 5: The proportion of participants by service type

The **birth-to-three-years group** comprised 12 participants. The group profile was diverse, representing services for children aged under three years across the sector. Three participants were from family day care, three were maternal and child health nurses, five worked in long day care and one in early childhood intervention services. There was also diversity within service types; for example, maternal and child health included participants from both the universal and enhanced maternal and child health services. Within long day care, four participants worked across the range of roles including coordinator, pedagogical leader and educator.

The birth-to-three-years group commenced with 15 participants; as a result of personal and professional opportunities and challenges, 12 participants completed the project.

The **birth-to-eight-years groups** comprised a total of 31 participants. This was made up of two groups: one group had 15 participants and the other 16. There was diversity within and across the two groups. Two participants worked in family day care, three in long day care, six in kindergartens, four in early childhood intervention services (ECIS) and inclusion support services (including preschool field officers), six in integrated children's services and settings, seven in primary schools, one in OSHC and two in early years management roles.

All three ALD Project groups were representative of the diverse qualifications and experience in the sector. The qualifications of participants included early childhood, education, health and disability and ranged from Certificate III in childcare to postgraduate degrees at the Masters level.

How was data collected?

Data was collected from documentation, observation and professional conversations between project participants, project leaders and VCAA staff. An overview of the data sources is given in the following sections.

Pre- and post-project questionnaires

The initial stage of the research process included a pre-project questionnaire used to gather participant information about current understanding of the VEYLDF Outcomes, the Practice Principle: Assessment for learning and development, and expectations of the project.

The questionnaire was completed by 46 participants (100 per cent response rate) prior to the commencement of project workshops in February 2012. Preliminary analysis of the questionnaire informed workshop content. A post-project questionnaire was completed by 30 participants (70 per cent response rate) in the final stage of the project, just prior to the fifth workshop in October 2012. The time span between the pre- and post-project questionnaires was seven months. The questionnaire response groups are not identical as only 30 respondents completed both the pre- and post-project questionnaire.

To support evaluation and measure knowledge and practice change over time, the pre- and post-project questionnaires contained the same questions. Pre- and post-project questionnaires provided important quantitative information to assist in assessing group learning and identifying trends about participant learning. Two additional questions were included in the post-project questionnaire to track participant perspectives on change.

Reflection sheets

Throughout the ALD Project, both during and between workshops, participants completed reflection sheets, which generated qualitative data on perspectives and insights. Reflection focused on the effectiveness of the ALD Project as a model of professional learning in supporting increased knowledge and understanding of the VEYLDF, and its influence on assessment for learning and development practice change.

Two formal reflective practice periods were built into each workshop. Designated time supported written reflection and critical thinking to capture participant evidence on challenges, achievements and learning. A reflection period at the beginning of each workshop supported participants in documenting their practice achievements, issues and changes since the last workshop. At the conclusion of each workshop, reflection focused on identifying any new learnings and challenges and how to incorporate these into the workplace.

Analysis of reflection sheets occurred as part of ongoing project progress reporting by project leaders and the VCAA.

Evidence collection

Throughout the ALD Project, participants collected evidence using different methods and tools to support assessment for learning and development. Participants were provided with the VCAA Evidence Collection Tool, *A resource to support documentation of children's learning* (refer to Appendix 7).

Final workshop evaluation survey

An evaluation survey was completed by 34 participants (79 per cent response rate) at the final workshop session in October 2012. Data generated from the final workshop survey was both quantitative and qualitative, and contributed to the evidence base of participants' reflections on key learnings and the impact of the ALD Project.

The evaluation survey provided quantitative data about participants' overall satisfaction with the project. Participants reflected on specific aspects of the model for professional learning, and this qualitative data identified changes in practice from adopting an inquiry approach, in which reflection and critical thinking are key elements.

Participants also reported on specific aspects of assessment for learning and development and identified changes in understanding and practice along with any challenges. This included describing collaborative approaches to assessment for learning with children, families, colleagues and other professionals.

Participants were also surveyed on how they planned to sustain changes in practice and how this learning could be shared more broadly across the early years sector.

Project leader progress reports and project coordination meetings

Project progress reporting was completed by project leaders following each of the five workshops. The purpose was to collect qualitative information about the progress and findings of the inquiry-based research project. Progress reports included an overview of workshop objectives and methodology, participant perspectives on approaches to assessment for children's learning and development, and findings that described changes in practice. In addition, reports noted opportunities and challenges for participants and informed content and structure for future workshops.

Project coordination meetings were held between project leaders and VCAA Early Years staff following each of the five workshops. In addition, two start-up project planning sessions were held in November 2011 and January 2012. These meetings planned and designed the series of five one-day workshops, which commenced in February 2012.

Post-project reflection meetings

Two post-project reflection meetings were held between project leaders, and staff from VCAA Early Years and DEECD Quality Practice Improvement Branch to review the contribution of the partnership approach involving policymakers, practitioners and researchers. These meetings facilitated a structured and focused opportunity to review emerging themes, confirm or challenge current understandings, and identify any additional findings.

The meetings supported an inquiry-based approach at all levels: workshop leadership, management and funding.

What did the data tell us?

This section outlines quantitative and qualitative data generated from analysis of participant pre- and post-project questionnaires, a final workshop evaluation survey, reflection sheets, project leader progress reports, and project coordination and reflection meetings. This section also includes participant quotes and practice reflections and project leaders' observations based on interactions between practitioners, researchers and policymakers over the 10-month period of the project.

Pre- and post-project questionnaire: Quantitative data

Using comparisons throughout the ALD Project, quantitative data indicated noticeable shifts in participants' levels of engagement with the VEYLDF. Participants reported increased confidence in applying four key dimensions of the EYPC to support assessment for children's learning and development. Participants self-reported along the range of a five-point rating scale.

Assessment for learning and development involved early childhood professionals applying an ongoing process of observing and documenting, questioning and analysing, acting and planning, and reflection and review. The EYPC outlines the process for collection of evidence of children's learning and development.

Figure 6 shows participant levels of engagement with the VEYLDF to inform work practice. Pre-project, the most frequently reported category was 'moderately' (30 per cent) whereas post-project, the most frequently reported category was 'quite a lot' (37 per cent). The proportion of practitioners specifying either 'quite a lot' or 'informs all aspects of my work' increased from 45 per cent pre-project to 60 per cent post-project. These observations, in combination with the general trend apparent in the graph, provide clear evidence of increased levels of engagement with the VEYLDF.
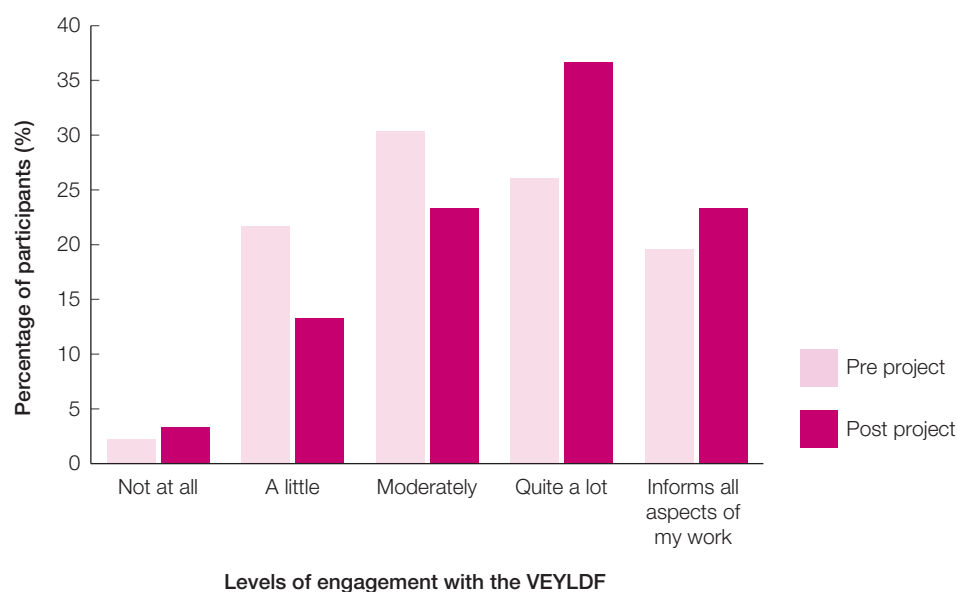
Figure 6: Participant pre- and post-project description of extent to which their work is informed by the VEYLDF

Participants described changes in levels of confidence in applying the EYPC to the five Learning and Development Outcomes across the period of the project in each of the following four dimensions:

1. Observing and documenting children's learning and development

2. Questioning and analysing what is observed and documented

3. Acting on and planning from documentation and analysis to support children's further learning and development

4. Using a reflective journal and critical reflection as part of planning and documentation.

Overall, participants believed that the project had a positive impact on their confidence across all four dimensions. There is a noticeable shift in each of the four dimensions. This shows an increased level of knowledge and understanding about the EYPC and the process elements that make up the cycle. Applying the cycle of planning encouraged early childhood professionals to think, question and analyse children's learning in ways that were more purposeful and meaningful.

'The Early Years Planning Cycle and assessment tool has been very valuable to assist with and to reflect on how we document and how we critically reflect individually and as a team. Instead of evaluating just how children have participated in the program, I have been reflecting on how my own participation has influenced learning outcomes and the level of children's involvement and participation.' (Long day care)

Figure 7 shows participants' increased levels of confidence in observing and documenting children's learning and development. Pre-project, the most frequently reported category was 'moderately' (34 per cent) whereas post-project, the most frequently reported category was 'quite a lot' (50 per cent). The proportion of practitioners specifying either 'quite a lot' or 'informs all aspects of my work' increased from 59 per cent pre-project to 86 per cent post-project. These observations, in combination with the general trend apparent in the graph, provide clear evidence of increased levels of practitioner confidence in observing and documenting children's learning and development.

Figure 7: Participant pre- and post-project confidence in observing and documenting children's learning and development

This demonstrates visible participant changes in the way they observe and document learning and development, leading to a deeper knowledge and understanding of the five Outcomes. Participants reported an increased focus on looking for and recording what children are learning in addition to developmental milestones. They also reported a greater focus on the quality of evidence rather than quantity.

'Assessment approaches are now more inclusive of children's learning. In the past, observations have been dominated by development. I now see the extensions to include learning.' (Long day care)

'I have changed how I do my observations and as a result I feel I have fewer observations but they are of a higher quality. I now use multiple methods of collection and they use the child's voice more often.' (Kindergarten program)

Figure 8 shows participants' self-reported increased confidence in questioning and analysing their observations and documentation of children's learning and development. Pre-project, the most frequently reported category was 'moderately' (39 per cent) whereas post-project, the most frequently reported category was 'quite a lot' (54 per cent). The proportion of practitioners specifying either 'quite a lot' or 'informs all aspects of my work' increased from 50 per cent pre-project to 79 per cent post-project. These observations, in combination with the general trend apparent in the graph, provide clear evidence of increased levels of practitioner confidence in questioning and analysing children's learning and development.
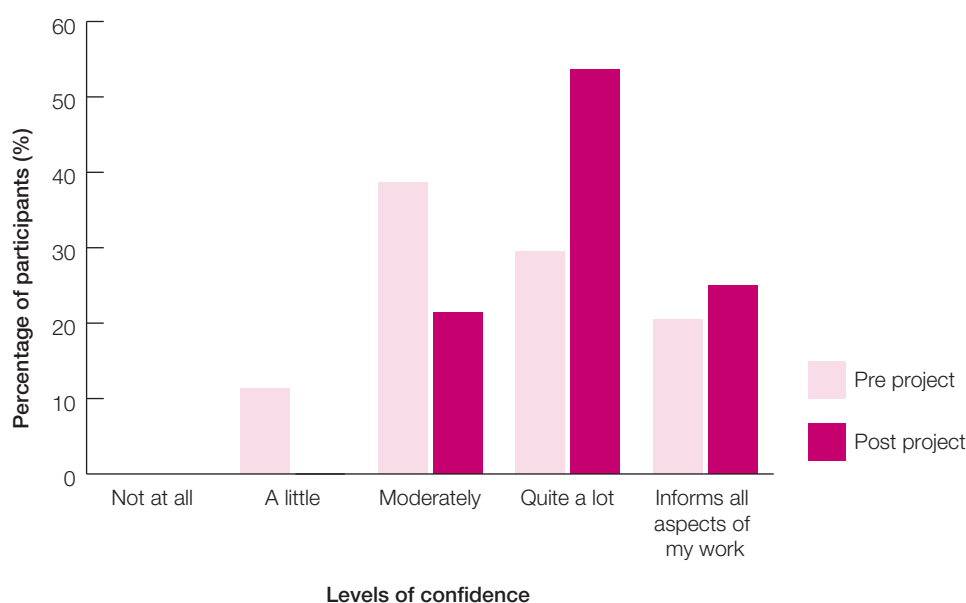

Figure 8: Participant pre- and post-project confidence in questioning and analysing children's learning and development

This shows participants' increased questioning and analysis of evidence. Participants reported using the prompts section in the Evidence Collection Tool to support analysis. Participant practice change was evident for some with increased engagement of children in their own learning and a broader perspective of children's learning.

'I focus on the "less is more" theory now that only meaningful documentation is captured. I use many methods for documenting e.g. photos, artwork, parents input sheets. I focus more on critical reflection and analysis of what has been observed and challenge my thinking on how to plan, act and do.' (Long day care)

'My approach has now become more holistic and involves the child's perspective. For instance, we now start the day talking about what we would like to do today and what we are interested in learning about. We finish the day with reflections and talk about what we have learnt.' (Kindergarten program)

'In my role working with leaders and educators I have been encouraged to build more supportive links around valuing the observations they make and contributing to the observations.' (Early childhood intervention service)

Figure 9 shows participants' self-reported increased confidence in acting on documentation and planning to support children's learning and development. Pre-project, the most frequently reported category was 'moderately' (34 per cent) whereas post-project, the most frequently reported category was 'quite a lot' (50 per cent). The proportion of practitioners specifying either 'quite a lot' or 'informs all aspects of my work' increased from 57 per cent pre-project to 75 per cent post-project. These observations, in combination with the general trend apparent in the graph, provide clear evidence of increased levels of practitioner confidence in acting on documentation and planning to support children's learning and development.

Figure 9: Participant pre- and post-project confidence in acting on documentation and planning to support children's learning and development

This shows how participants have adopted new approaches in how they act on documentation.This includes how they communicate their assessment for children's learning and development with families and how they are monitoring and tracking progress of children's learning and development.

'My documentation has gone from a lot of words to looking for the learning taking place …
I now have the confidence to show and document the learning and share this with families.'
(Family day care)

'I have incorporated self-assessment within writing … children set goals. It has focused
children on development of writing skills and has shown children their own progress …
empowered children … celebrated their success …' (Primary school)

Figure 10 shows participants' self-reported increased confidence in using a reflective journal and critical reflection as part of planning and documentation. Pre-project, the most frequently reported category was 'moderately' (32 per cent) whereas post-project, the most frequently reported category was 'quite a lot' (43 per cent). The proportion of practitioners specifying either 'quite a lot' or 'informs all aspects of my work' increased from 41 per cent pre-project to 64 per cent post-project. These observations, in combination with the general trend apparent in the graph, provide clear evidence of increased levels of practitioner confidence in using a reflective journal and critical reflection as part of planning and documentation.
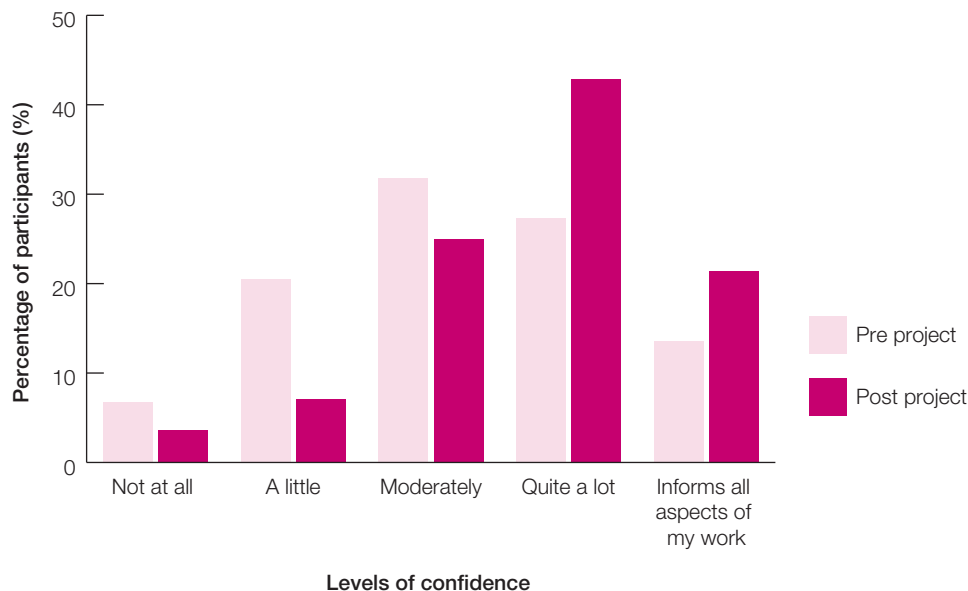
Figure 10: Participant pre- and post-project confidence in using a reflective journal and critical reflection as part of planning and documentation

'Change arises from reflection. Information is gathered from interaction with families and children. Reflection enables analysis that supports necessary change.' (Maternal and child health)

'By reflecting on our knowledge and understanding … and critically thinking … we have been able to develop and extend our understanding of assessment.' (Long day care)

Pre- and post-project questionnaire: Qualitative data

Qualitative data was drawn from a series of open-ended questions contained in the pre-project questionnaire and repeated in the post-project questionnaire.

In the pre-project questionnaire participants described using assessment for learning and development in their practice in the following ways to:

- gather and analyse data from a range of sources to inform program planning decisions
- inform and change own practice and support others in assessing children's learning and development
- show how children demonstrate their learning and development
- support conversations about learning with families and children.

*'I reflect on my own practices to further children's learning and improve my practice.'
(Family day care)*

'I incorporate aspects of the practice principle in communications with educators and parents.' (Long day care)

Significant practice change

The following key changes in assessment for learning and development practice were described as significant by participants in the post-project questionnaire:

- increased focus on observing what children are learning, recording more meaningful documentation informed by new knowledge, purposeful analysis, identifying explicit achievement goals, and tracking children's learning progress to inform program decisions
- a strengthened culture of inquiry and critical reflection to assess one's own practices and lead and support practice change
- more frequent, intentional and focused conversations with families about children's learning and development
- increased collaboration and sharing of ideas with colleagues and other early childhood professionals.

To gauge what, if anything, was significant for participants about their involvement in the project and to identify any differences in practice the following two questions were included in the post-project questionnaire:

1. What has been significant to you about your involvement in this project?
2. What, if anything, do you do differently as a result of your involvement in this project?

In their responses, participants reported the following as significant in their overall practice as a result of their involvement in the project:

- greater confidence, motivation and growth as an early childhood professional as a result of enhanced knowledge and skills about assessment practice informed by practitioner inquiry
- broader perspectives on learning due to involvement in a learning community with professionals from diverse backgrounds and across the breadth of early childhood services
- the importance of applying the EYPC to improve quality of evidence, inform authentic assessment for learning, support collaborative approaches to children's learning and strengthen conversations with families about children's learning linked to outcomes in later years.

Table 1 identifies differences in practice described by participants throughout the ALD Project, and outlines key influences contributing to practice change.

FROM	TO	INFLUENCE
Gather information to inform program planning decisions	Broader perspectives to inform assessment for children's learning and development	Integrating theory, frameworks (VEYLDF and associated) and practice New knowledge Professional conversations
Inform and change own practice and support others	Transforming a specific aspect of practice and leading and mentoring colleagues (leading by sharing and doing)	Applying a practitioner inquiry approach and reflective practice as a catalyst and tool for change Mentor support Education Change Model
Conversations about learning with children and families	Collaborative approaches to assessment for learning and development with children, families, colleagues and other early childhood professionals	Opportunities for multidisciplinary professional conversations Reflective practice individually and with colleagues
Show how children demonstrate what they are doing	Documenting children's learning, involving children in their own assessment for learning and tracking progress of learning and development	Using evidence collection tools, applying the EYPC with strengthened focus on analysis of evidence Reflective practice Knowledge of the VEYLDF (and associated frameworks)

Table 1: Practice change and influencing factors

Final workshop evaluation survey: Quantitative data

In a final workshop evaluation survey participants were asked to rate their overall involvement in the ALD Project. Using a five-point rating scale, participants from across all three Project groups reported that they had found the ALD Project useful.

The majority of respondents (65 per cent) rated their overall in the highest rating category of 'very useful'.

Table 2 shows participant ratings of their overall involvement in the project:

Very Useful	Quite Useful	Useful	Rather Useful	Not Useful at all
65%	21%	8%	6%	0%

Table 2: Ratings of their overall involvement in the project

Final workshop evaluation survey: Qualitative data

Open-ended questions in the final workshop evaluation survey provided qualitative data that generated information about participants' experiences and learnings from the ALD Project. Respondents described practice change in relation to approaches to assessment for learning and development. The two tables on the following pages present the key themes from analysis of qualitative data.

Information in these tables can be used to support ongoing implementation of the learning and development frameworks, with a focus on specific aspects of practice change to support assessment for learning and development.

Table 3 shows participant's descriptions of practice change in documenting and analysing evidence of children's learning and development, and the factors supporting these changes.

Practice change themes	Participant quotes	What supported the change?
A focus on the Early Years Planning Cycle: • more purposeful and concise documentation • an emphasis on deliberate and purposeful analysis and reflection • layering evidence and linking with intentional teaching. **Collaboration with families:** • more frequent conversations with families about children's learning using language in the VEYLDF • make learning visible with families using the Evidence Collection Tool. **Collaboration with colleagues:** • analysing and planning together with colleagues, viewing children's learning through the same lens • more frequent and in-depth conversations with other practitioners to inform rich assessments for children's learning. **Including children's views of their own learning:** • creating opportunities for children to lead their own learning, reflect on their progress in learning and set their own learning goals.	*'More focus on critical reflection and analysis of what has been observed and challenge my thinking and thoughts on how to plan, act and do.' (Long day care)* ………….. *'Focus on what learning is taking place as opposed to what is happening.' (Kindergarten program)* ………….. *This project has really helped me question some practices … is documentation meaningful … is there evidence of learning.' (Kindergarten program)* ………….. *'Educators understanding how they influence what is captured in documentation … using reflection rather than evaluation to ensure it is more meaningful.' (Children's services coordinator)* ………….. *A participant described using the VEYLDF outcomes and documentation to support joint discussions with educators in early childhood settings as 'viewing the child's learning through the same lens. I feel that I am now talking the same language – supporting their work not adding.' (Early childhood intervention service)* ………….. *'Conversations with children now include: Can you tell me what you have been learning about?' (Kindergarten program)* ………….. *'I support students to assess their own learning and set learning goals.' (Primary school)*	**Professional conversations:** • discussion and debate about assessment as part of a broader network and community of learners contributed to practice change • shared responsibility with colleagues for reflection and program planning. *'Using my learnings from the workshops as discussion starters with staff.' (Kindergarten program)* **Trialling and adapting the Evidence Collection Tool and resources:** • supporting reflection on own practice as well as progress in children's learning • visual evidence to share with colleagues and families. *'The space to talk, discuss and trial new formats has been vital.' (Primary school)* **Model of professional learning:** • inquiry question to provide focus on an aspect of practice • mentorship providing professional support • reflective practice. *'My inquiry question on parent collaborative partnerships has encouraged me to explore my own values and beliefs and to look more broadly at how I include parent assessment of their child's learning.' (Kindergarten program)* **Professional knowledge:** • becoming more familiar with the VEYLDF • access to research and professional readings. *'I have thoroughly appreciated the readings provided.' (Long day care)*

Table 3: Practice change in documenting and analysing evidence of children's learning and development

Table 4 highlights participant descriptions of practice change in five elements of assessment for learning and development: approaches to assessment for learning and development; collaborative approaches to assessment for learning; developing effective professional learning environments; understanding and demonstrating leadership; and conversations with children, families, colleagues and other professionals.

Practice	Practice change approaches	Participant quotes
Approaches to assessment for learning and development	Increased understanding of assessment Gather and analyse evidence from a wider range of sources Using reflective practice and critical thinking to inform practice	*'In baby bounce sessions … deliberate reflection and involvement in the project workshops has made me more mindful. Being able to observe the children (facing them, singing and reading) is invaluable … it's great to observe with part of my brain whilst singing with the other.'* (Maternal and child health)
Collaborative approaches to assessment for learning and development	Working collaboratively to share information with team members, families, other child and family service organisations Reflecting on evidence with colleagues to inform ongoing planning Talking more with families about progress in children's learning	*'My inquiry question directly involved working collaboratively. I have encouraged and supported educators and other professionals to share, discuss and inform one another. Families are thriving with their contributions to their child's learning and development.'* (Long day care)
Developing effective professional learning environments with colleagues and other early childhood professionals	Planning together with colleagues Developing materials and resources to support implementation Deeper knowledge about other services and their assessment for learning and development practices Partnerships with professionals	*'I have set up more frequent and regular staff meetings, which has increased dialogue between staff on how and what assessment looks like in our service.'* (Kindergarten program)
Understanding and demonstrating leadership in implementation of the VEYLDF	Initiating and leading professional conversations with teams and in networks Role modelling and mentoring colleagues in implementation of the VEYLDF	*'I will present the summary of my inquiry question to our MCH team and make linkages and reference to the learning and development Outcomes in the VEYLDF.'* (Maternal and child health)
Learning conversations with children, families, colleagues and/or other early childhood professionals	Sharing observations, formats and tools with colleagues to inform rich assessments and learning conversations Reflecting on practice and ideas for practice change with colleagues Greater focus on conversations about what children are learning	*'A few parents are younger and use social media options so I have started to chat with parents … about what they did on the weekend and how this can be included in our program.'* (Family day care)

Table 4: Practice change in five elements of assessment for learning and development

A series of 12 reflections on practice are included in Sections 4 and 5 of this Report. These demonstrate assessment for learning and development practice in a range of service settings.

Practice reflection 1: Leading and supporting colleagues in kindergarten programs

An early childhood adviser described how she supported and mentored a group of kindergarten teachers and their co-educators, who were dispersed over a number of services across a large region in rural Victoria.

Her inquiry question centred on ways in which she could support individuals in the regional group to document and analyse children's learning and development. Her challenge, given the distance between services, was meeting with each individual, once per term and in their own service. The kindergarten teachers' meetings were held once a term.

The early childhood advisor noted that there was so much to talk about at the face-to-face meetings – the VEYLDF, National Quality Standards and Regulations – that there was limited time to focus, reflect and plan for children's assessment for learning and development.

Using the Education Change Model, she identified that many of the teachers were in the Initiation phase – getting started with the VEYLDF. They were struggling to bring together the practice principles, especially Practice Principle 7, Assessment for learning and development, and the Outcomes for learning and development to inform their educational program and practice in the National Quality Standards.

During the ALD Project workshop reflections, she considered the following questions:

- What do I always do to support the teachers with assessment for learning and development?
- What do I never do and why?

With the project leader, she brainstormed new ways to support dialogue, information sharing and reflection between members of the regional group. They considered how the organisation's intranet might assist and they discussed the possibility of setting up a webpage that could be used by the early childhood services to:

- share new information about assessment for learning and development
- share examples of how to present, analyse and write about what children and learning.

Leading and influencing others

With support from IT in the workplace, the early childhood adviser set up a blog, which she described as an online Early Learning Forum for early childhood staff across the organisation. The early childhood adviser has ongoing oversight of the online forum and reviews all online discussions. This is an important aspect of her leadership role.

As a result of this initiative the educational adviser was able to report the following:

- Early childhood educators are sharing their experiences about the preparation for National Quality Framework assessments, posting useful articles and readings, and sharing practice examples that support assessment for learning.
- Relationships with other staff in different geographical locations have been strengthened.

The online forum has identified new opportunities for the organisation management team to connect with kindergarten teachers and educators and read about the assessment for learning initiatives views of those who are working directly with children and families.

Section 5 Practice change themes and approaches

The ALD Project supported early childhood professionals to adapt and adopt practices to progress implementation of the VEYLDF. Importantly, evidence indicated that a practitioner inquiry approach had a positive impact on assessment for learning and development practice. Participants reported increased confidence in their knowledge and understanding of assessment approaches. This in turn had a direct influence on practice and exploring practice change, which contributed to progress in children's learning and development.

What key themes or approaches were generated from data synthesis?

Findings across all data sources and methods were synthesised to generate themes about the influence of the ALD Project and implications for professional learning and development. The themes draw on the evidence and voices of early childhood professionals who participated in the project, and project leaders who designed and delivered project workshops.

Survey and questionnaire findings along with participant quotes and workshop reflections are included in this section and inform and support the practice change themes and approaches.

The following six assessment for learning and development practice approaches were identified. They describe aspects of practice change demonstrated by early childhood professionals as a result of participating in the ALD Project:

1. Focus on children's strengths and capabilities
2. Broaden perspectives of children's learning and development
3. Track children's progress
4. Initiate conversations about children's learning and development
5. Strengthen collaborative partnerships
6. Lead and support colleagues.

The six practice features are not linear – that is, one area of practice is not directly dependent on the preceding practice. However, analysis of participant reflections and evaluations indicate a trend towards beginning with an awareness of children's current capacities including children's views of their own learning.

What were the points of difference for the project groups?

Birth-to-three-years group

A feature of professional conversations in the birth-to-three-years group was the focus on the distinction between conversations about infants and young children's learning, and conversations about their development and participation in health, education and care programs. It was acknowledged that there is a place for both types of conversations with families.

This change in the quality and frequency of conversations directly impacted on the way participants connected and collaborated with families. This led to changes in the types of conversations they had with families. As part of their daily practice, participants created opportunities to talk with families about what they observed about children's learning and development, using the language from the VEYLDF. They noticed that this influenced families' expectations of the learning environment and what their child could achieve.

In professional conversations in the birth-to-three-years group, participants increased their knowledge of other early childhood services and settings, and the broad range of approaches to assessment for learning and development that are evident across the early childhood sector. There was a greater recognition of how each service contributes to building rich assessments to support progress in learning for children, in the context of their family and community.

Throughout the ALD Project there were noticeable changes in participants' thinking and ways of enacting leadership. Participants from the range of services working with children aged from birth to three years demonstrated increased confidence in leadership, and this was not specific to positions or qualification levels. During workshops, and back in their workplaces, participants initiated and led conversations with others to discuss practitioner inquiry, and to discuss and reflect on learning goals. They also engaged in role modelling and mentoring colleagues as a strategy to support integration of new knowledge, understandings and resources to continue to embed the VEYLDF in everyday practice.

Birth-to-eight-years groups

Participants in the birth-to-eight-years groups described a greater emphasis in their practice on applying the EYPC. This was demonstrated in a range of ways, including the collection of evidence using a wider range of sources and methods, documentation of more meaningful information to provide rich evidence of children's learning, a strengthened focus on questioning and analysing children's learning to inform current and future program decisions, and using reflective practice and critical thinking to inform program planning, acting and doing. Overlaying these practices was a more authoritative view about the importance of the quality – rather than quantity – of evidence.

A noticeable shift in practice reported and demonstrated by participants in the birth-to-eight-years groups was greater involvement of children in documentation and assessment of their own learning. High expectations for all children was a feature in practice with participants creating opportunities for children to set their own learning goals, to lead their own learning and to monitor and reflect on progress in learning. It was evident in the early years of school that involving children and students in documentation and assessment contributed to strengthened relationships between children and teachers. This also contributed to teachers having a broader sense of how well they understood children and having a shared perspective on learning created a 'new relationship' between children and teachers.

In collecting evidence of children's learning, participants built on their previous practice of noticing and describing what children were doing, and the experiences and routines they were involved in. Their practice began to shift and focus on learning and progress in learning. This evidence informed and changed the types of conversations they had with children, families, colleagues and other early childhood professionals. Participants reported more frequent conversations focused on children's learning and progress in learning.

Leading and supporting colleagues was another key aspect of practice change in the birth-to-eight-years groups. Participants spoke about the many ways they were leading and initiating strategies to support implementation of the VEYLDF and associated frameworks in a period of significant change and reform. Participants created opportunities to share new approaches to assessment for learning and development, and to introduce new tools and resources. They also described engaging in professional conversations to broaden knowledge and understanding about the learning and development Outcomes and Practice Principles, and to plan and critically reflect together in order to progress children's learning and development.

Importance of the birth-to-three-years period

Across all groups, knowledge about the importance of the birth-to-three-years period for assessment for babies and toddlers learning strengthened during the ALD Project. This was directly informed and influenced by the *Outcomes Project 2011–2012* and associated publications and resources including the VCAA *Early Years Exchange* No. 7, No. 9 and No. 10, and *The more you know, the more you see: Babies' and toddlers' learning and the EYLF (2011)*, *Early Childhood Australia, Research in Practice Series.*

For ALD Project participants in all groups, there was also a strengthened understanding of the impact on children's learning now and the importance of early influences on later learning and outcomes.

1. Focus on children's strengths and capabilities
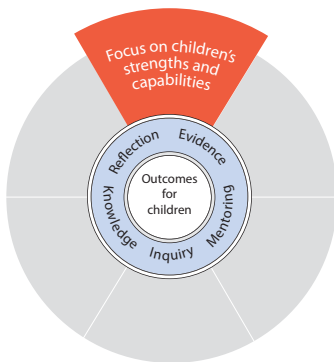
Evidence of practitioners' increased focus on children's strengths, capabilities and promoting children's agency is a key theme from the Project findings. Participants reported that they view children's capacity for learning differently as a result of participating in the project. More specifically they were committed to exploring learning with children and, as a result, had developed a greater understanding of children's capabilities and a renewed appreciation of the active contribution children make to their own learning.

ALD Project participants reported focusing their planning on children's own learning agendas, and there were many discussions about placing a high value on children's agency. This practitioner awareness of infants and children being able to make choices, to influence events, and to have an impact on their world, was a strong focus in the birth-to-three-years group. For example, participants discussed paying close attention to the cues and gestures of babies and toddlers as indications of choice, interest and preference. The presence and knowledge of MCH in group discussions provided an experienced view of how to tune in to the experience for the infant and young child, and how to share what they were seeing with families.

Participants identified changes in the way they viewed children's capacity to contribute to their own learning. This was evident when practitioners documented learning with children during an experience, rather than on behalf of them. Documenting with children is a new dimension in assessment for learning and was described as creating a more relaxed and reciprocal relationship between children and educators. Participants also described how they had created opportunities for children to lead their own learning and engage in reflection with children about their own learning. This shift acknowledges and recognises the many ways children resource their own learning.

In considering how they assessed children's learning, participants described including 'children's views of their own learning' (VEYLDF, p. 13). Documenting with children helped participants to notice the progress in learning from the child's perspective. Creating environments that enable children to lead their learning gives children a stronger voice.

> *'Educator now facilitates morning meeting with children to support and provide opportunity for children's voices to be included and inspire activities.'* (Children's services)

> I now *'involve children more in their own assessment, using their evidence (such as their drawings), and asking questions about what they have learned, and what else they would like to know. The impact of the changes has been the children's perspectives of their learning and the ability for children to understand and express their own learning.'* (Kindergarten program)

Participants commented on providing more opportunities for children to engage in conversations about their own learning. They described working with children to be more a part of the learning, and to describe the learning together. Children have been supported to contribute to rich assessments of their own learning and engage in conversations reflecting this.

> *A participant spoke of 'amazement of the capacity of children to engage in learning conversations, when time is created for these to take place.' (Kindergarten program)*

Reflective conversations with children were most evident in the primary school sector.

> *'With children, I have taken the time within the writing session to include reflection of their learning. I have had meaningful conversations with them about their progress and what their goal for learning is.' (Primary school)*

The following two examples of evidence demonstrate including children's views of their own learning in the early years of primary school.

Evidence example 2: Using 'Reflection Sticks' to support reflecting on learning in the early years of primary school

In Evidence example 2, the primary teacher developed an inquiry question on how to involve children in setting their own learning goals. Learners use 'Reflection Sticks' as a prompt to support reflecting and writing in the classroom and provide feedback in the early years of primary school to each other.

Evidence example 2: Reflection sticks

Evidence example 3: Using the VEYLDF to support a continuum of learning into the early years of school

In Evidence example 3, the primary teacher used the VEYLDF Outcomes to support a continuum of learning into the early years of school.

'The ability to have children reflect on their own learning has been an area we have continued to refine and develop in a more consistent and cohesive way. The positive framework of learning has empowered both teachers and students to see success in their work more readily and make plans for moving along the learning pathway at individualised levels.' (Primary school)

Evidence example 3: A child's reflection on their own learning

In services where there had been clear demarcation between the role of a teacher and the role of an assistant, participants described working more collaboratively to document children's learning. The challenges were in providing a phased approach to changes and innovation to give colleagues time to discuss their views about workplace practices.

'I am still looking at different ways of leadership to enable others – there is some resistance to this – some staff say that it's my role and don't see it as collaborative.' (Kindergarten program)

Practitioners working in early childhood intervention described connecting more with educators in early childhood services to discuss evidence of children's capacities. This was considered important information in itself that should be taken into account prior to observing and planning for any assessment interventions in the school environment.

'By incorporating more specifically the learning related to developing skills or goals of therapy, rather than just including it incidentally in conversations, may reinforce to others reading the notes (parents, other team members, other professionals at educational programs) the relevance of holistic learning in all activities and environments.' (Early childhood intervention service)

Involving children in assessment for their own learning and development has supported early childhood professionals to recognise and respond to children's strengths, capabilities and what they bring to the learning environment. Practitioners reported giving children a stronger voice in their own learning and development, which recognises children's capacities and demonstrates high expectations for all learners.

Evidence example 4: Developing physical and sensory capabilities with increasing skill and purpose

Self Portrait
July 2012

Outcomes: Identity & Communication
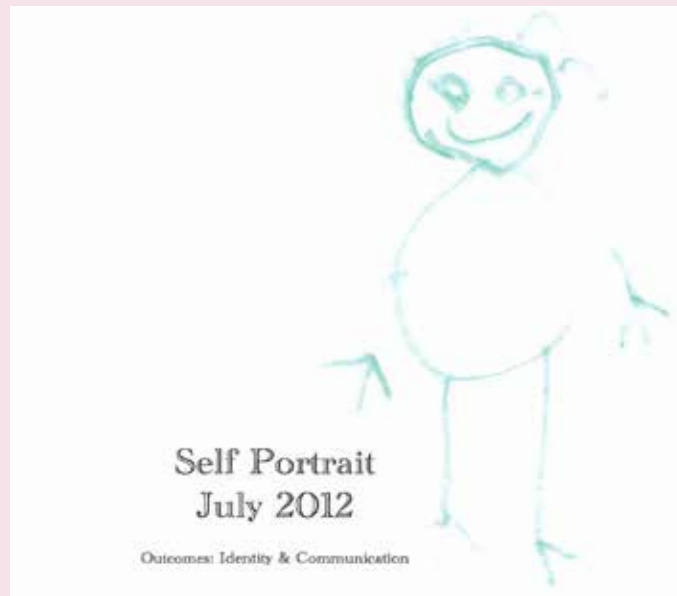
Evidence example 4 is from a kindergarten program where a child has shown evidence of increasing capability over time.

D Self-portrait   July 2012

D has shown great growth in this area. At the beginning of the year his drawings had meaning but were just beginning to be recognisable. D is now drawing with confidence with his figures having a body and head as well as toes and fingers. D's favourite things to draw are gardens; his drawings all have great attention to detail. (Communication)

D is developing a confident self-identity and knowledge by looking into the mirror and drawing a picture of himself complete with his curly hair, fingers and toes. I especially like the smile he has drawn as this indicates that he was feeling happy. (Identity and Wellbeing)

Where to from here?

Drawing is one of D's favourite activities. We will continue supporting his interest in this area by providing a range of different drawing materials such as texts, pencils, crayons, pastels, grey leads and charcoal as well as varying sizes and colours of papers. We will provide clipboards for drawing outside. The drawing area will be available at all times and staff will endeavour to offer varying inspiration on this table such as vases of flowers, natural materials and figurines such as animals, dinosaurs etc. Children are able to choose if they would like their work displayed in the room, placed in their portfolio or taken home immediately. D will be encouraged and supported for all of his efforts.

2. Broaden perspectives of children's learning and development
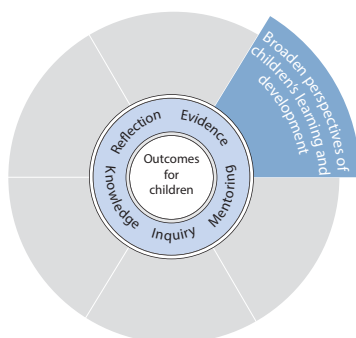
ALD Project participants indicated applying new insights from research, contemporary theories and learning and development frameworks to support practice change. Participants described a deeper knowledge and understanding of the Outcomes and Practice Principles in the VEYLDF. Along with an increased focus on children's capacities, participants reported greater awareness about the possibilities for broadening perspectives with input from families, colleagues and other early childhood professionals.

Building knowledge of theoretical perspectives highlighted the different lenses that can be applied when collecting and analysing evidence of progress in children's learning.

A focus on theories such as Malaguzzi and Rogoff … 'this has strengthened my views on how the environmental contexts influence children's learning … for example, the resources, my practice, educators and parent feedback are all part of the cultural and contextual tools that facilitate learning.' (Kindergarten program)

Later in the workshop series, project leaders noted that the impact of theory and practice were influencing participants' precision in documentation of children' learning.

A participant teaching in a school setting spoke about the opportunities to connect the VEYLDF principles to the school vision and philosophy. She described free play sessions as a new opportunity for gathering evidence of children's learning that can complement other forms of assessment and provide a fuller picture of the child. (Primary school)

Participants spoke of the value of focusing on the learning Outcomes and Practice Principles in the VEYLDF to enrich pedagogical discussions with colleagues. This supported changes in their perspectives of children and their understanding of children as active and competent learners.

Practice reflection 2: Broadening perspectives on children's learning in family day care

A family day care educator 'broadened her perspective on children' through participation in the ALD Project. This change in her perspective of the children, and their competency as learners, was evident in her response to a question asked about G, a two-and-a-half-year-old learner.

This educator was enthusiastic and excited in a way that hadn't been observed in previous workshops when she replied 'He knows everything! He knows everything about cows, tractors, milking and farming.' The educator's shared story about G as a learner highlighted, for project leaders, the positive change that had occurred in the family day care educator's professional identity.

When early childhood professionals have a deep understanding that children are capable learners from birth, and the implications of this, their practice and pedagogy changes. In this example, the educator's broadened perspective transformed the way she viewed herself as a professional, from a caregiver into an educator whose role is to care and educate children in partnership with families.

The family day care educator described the continuing challenge of influencing the perception of families who regard her as a caregiver rather than an educator. This change in perception is more likely to happen as a result of the educator's increased knowledge and confidence – a change observed over the course of the ALD Project.

A participant from early intervention spoke of 'the value of using the VEYLDF across services so that families had a continuity of language and experience in each setting their child was attending'. (Early childhood intervention service)

A participant from outside school hours care described the benefits that collaborative reflection made to building learning communities with staff, describing small steps towards reflecting on assessment practices as a team, which has had a profound impact on colleagues' sense of community, planning and practices with children. (Outside school hours care)

New and contemporary knowledge supported practitioner capacity to write and talk about children's learning as well as their own practice. This led to expanded professional conversations and more robust discussion in multidisciplinary groups. Participants discussed the possibilities that exist in learning more about children from parents and the possibilities for developing an enhanced picture of individual children's learning across multiple contexts.

Practice reflection 3: Focusing on children's learning in maternal and child health

A maternal and child health (MCH) nurse provided evidence in her reflections, workshop discussions and inquiry project about the changes that occurred when she focused on the 'language of learning' rather than the developmental discourse that she was familiar with in her workplace.

The visual images the MCH nurse shared in the workshops were evidence of how she had focused on babies as learners and how she talked about this learning with parents, supporting them to see their baby as a learner.

The MCH nurse identified that while she had always understood that babies were capable learners, the ALD Project legitimised that understanding and provided the language and the tools (for example, documenting for assessment using photographs) to incorporate this powerful knowledge into her practice. Her inquiry project was followed with great interest in her community, and the council she worked for indicated that they wanted to showcase her work as a way to raise awareness of the concept of very young children as learners.

Practitioners broadened their perspectives on children's learning and development through integrating new knowledge about contemporary theories, frameworks and practice gained along with including the multiple perspectives of children, families, colleagues and other early childhood professionals.

3. Track children's progress
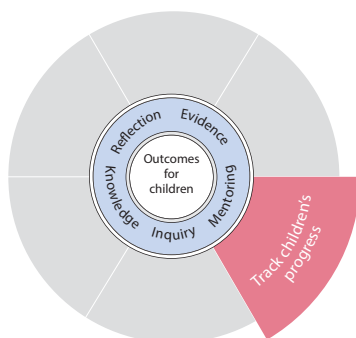
Early childhood professionals in the project tracked children's learning by gathering and documenting evidence to show progress over time. They reported an increased knowledge of the EYPC, which strengthened their focus on thinking about, questioning and analysing children's learning. Practitioners used evidence collection formats to document evidence that supported judgments about progress in children's learning. This is different from documenting opinion, which does not draw on evidence base.

Participants described looking for and noticing children's learning prior to documenting. This is a change in practice from gathering observations and then looking to understand the learning that has been occurring. This is noted as a more deliberate and purposeful practice and is described as a shift in layering developmental milestones with learning outcomes.

'In the beginning I was not documenting learning…. my biggest practice change has been asking myself what the learning is prior to documenting.' (Family day care)

A key aspect of the project has been a shift in practice by participants to focus on analysing and questioning evidence of children's learning to support a deeper understanding of what children know, understand and can do. This is a noticeable difference from the Outcomes Project, in which participants were more focused on getting starting with documenting evidence in the five Outcomes.

Practitioners reported increased confidence and skills, and an emphasis on analysing and questioning children's learning and development. This in turn had a greater impact and influence on planning and curriculum decisions. Early childhood professionals now describe linking evidence and data to decisions they made about practice and curriculum.

The influence of questioning and analysing is described as 'evolving to an external process, a change from previous practice, which had more of an internal thinking process, rather than documenting'. (Children's service)

'In my approach to assessment for learning and development I now identify the observation and in reflection … ask what this means for the child's learning now and their future learning. There are much clearer links between the observations and the ongoing planning.' (Preschool field officer)

Project leaders described how new theoretical knowledge learnt in workshops influenced how practitioners understood the children's diversity of learning. Layering the evidence of children's learning over time supported practitioners to slow down and focus on the meaning of the learning they were seeing.

Practice reflection 4: Using the five Outcomes to track children's progress in early intervention

An early childhood intervention specialist, who was not familiar with the VEYLDF prior to the project, could not initially see how the curriculum framework connected to her practice. This participant made a valuable contribution to her own learning and that of her colleagues in the ALD Project. She recognised that there was potential for tracking children's learning and progress using the Learning Outcomes in the VEYLDF. The ECIS specialist found the outcomes related to identity and wellbeing particularly helpful for supporting conversations with families. She identified that this enabled her to understand the assessment for learning discourse used by the educators in the centres where she was providing specialist interventions for individual children. She believed that having a shared language with educators would improve her collaboration with them.

Educators in early years are using the VEYLDF with growing understanding of integrated learning processes, rather than isolated milestone development, which means they can discuss the special needs of children with disabilities or developmental concerns and ways to stimulate their learning and development.

'By incorporating more specifically the learning related to developing skills or goals of therapy, rather than just including it incidentally in conversations, may reinforce to others reading the notes (parents, team members, other professionals in educational programs) the relevance of holistic learning in all activities and environments.'

Teachers in the early years of school specifically described using student reflections to plan for further learning and identifying goals with their students.

Practice reflection 5: Assessment planning to track children's reflections in primary school

A teacher in the early years of primary school described how she developed new assessment planning documents to track student reflection as part of joint assessment.

'Teachers were planning and assessing children in various ways. The documentation developed has given us consistency among rooms in the planning and assessing cycle. It has helped make a clear link between observations, knowledge of student needs and the role of intentional teaching and facilitation in sessions at the beginning of the day.

Teachers now use student reflections to plan for further learning and identify goals for continued work. This informs planning for learning centres and literacy and numeracy blocks later in the day, on top of our formal literacy and numeracy testing.'

The opportunity to trial and discuss different methods of documenting children's learning supported participants in applying a more systematic approach to documentation and assessment. Analysis of evidence, using prompts and questioning, supported planning for individual and groups of children, as well as sharing information about children's learning with families, colleagues and children.

Participants in the birth-to-eight-years group described inviting children to contribute to tracking their own progress in learning. The following quote from a kindergarten teacher highlights tracking children's progress in learning.

> In tracking progress, 'children's work is collected and reflected on in an ongoing way and can be used as a measure of growth over a period of time, to be revisited by children, families and staff'.
> (Kindergarten program)

Through their involvement in the ALD Project, participants reported being more familiar with using the EYPC to inform planning and practice decisions. Participants described greater attunement to children's learning and the importance of quality in documentation related to making meaning, analysis and tracking progress. This makes learning more visible and accessible for children, families and other early childhood professionals.

Early childhood professionals' practice of tracking children's progress is a progression from the pilot Outcomes Project, in which participants were more focused on 'becoming familiar with both seeing and responding to evidence of children's learning' (*Report on the Outcomes Project 2010–2011,* p. 8).

Evidence example 5: Documenting evidence of progress in children's writing and exploration of text to match with visual images in a kindergarten program

Tues 1st May.

is very interested in writing and was quite excited with the new name cards on the drawing tabl She carefully sorted through the cards until she found the photos of her best friends. She then used these cards to write their names as well as her own. She was very pleased with her efforts.

is showing excellent concentration skills & cognitive maturity to be writing clearly and with understanding of what she is doing Well done ...!

Where to from here?

We will support   interest in writing by providing her with a range of writing tools such as grey lead pencils, textas, coloured pencils and even a biro if she requests one. Name cards will continue to be provided at all times and alphabet charts displayed on wall or small ones placed on table for easy reference. All of   efforts will be acknowledged and she will be given positive encouragem

Outcomes: Learning & Communication.

4. Initiate conversations about children's learning and development
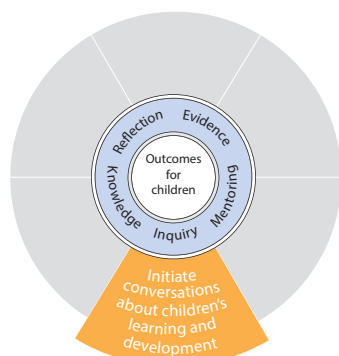
Initiating conversations about children's learning focuses on both what children are learning and how they are learning. Practitioners in the ALD Project described having a deeper knowledge of children's learning and development, which directly influenced the quality and frequency of conversations. With a heightened focus on gathering rich evidence of children's learning and development, practitioners also described using this evidence as a basis for discussions with children, families, colleagues and other early childhood professionals.

The Practice Principle of family-centred practice is the foundation of the early childhood professional's work in advancing children's learning, and is supported when they actively engage with families, provide feedback on children's learning and development, and make strong connections between learning at home and in the community. For those professionals working directly with families, including those in maternal and child health and early childhood intervention services, there was an increase in seeing the learning together with families. Increased knowledge of the Outcomes resulted in participants making time for different conversations with families, and seeking more feedback on what was happening for children at home and in other settings.

Participants reported focusing on greater specificity in their documentation of children's learning. This resulted in more shared experiences with families and was of great interest and excitement, particularly in relation to infants and toddlers where learning is so rapid.

A change in the nature of conversations about children's learning marked a distinct practice change and progression from the Outcomes Project 2010–2011. This was informed by an increased knowledge of the Outcomes and a focus on learning in addition to development. Participants reported being clearer about the different conversations they had with families, which helped them focus on children's development as well as what children were learning.

Participants in the birth-to-three-years group identified important distinctions in conversations with families about children. With young children in the birth-to-three-years period, participants began to differentiate between participatory conversations, which include vital information for families about children's dietary, sleep, health and wellbeing matters, and learning conversations, which include practitioners describing aspects of learning they had noticed and interactions with families.

Participatory conversations in the ALD Project were described as the more informal, daily conversations about the participation of infants and children in experiences. Practitioners used the evidence they had documented to talk with families and focus conversations on children's learning. This in turn strengthened the understanding for practitioners and families about what learning was happening both in the early childhood setting and at home. This was also the case where children were attending other settings.

Conversations with families about children's learning now included discussion about observations and describing learning using the language of the VEYLDF. Participants in the project described looking at learning from a different perspective and appreciating the value of using multiple perspectives for collecting evidence.

> *'I feel more confident in having conversations with educators, colleagues and professionals. I feel this has come from a greater knowledge about children's learning, especially in the birth-to-three-years age group.' (Family day care)*

Conversations about children's learning are strengthened when practitioners develop greater capacity to ask open-ended questions of children to challenge and extend their ideas.

The following practice reflection describes the work of a kindergarten teacher in strengthening learning conversations and documentation with children.

Practice reflection 6: Conversations about children's learning and development in a kindergarten program

This ALD Project participant works as a kindergarten teacher with a team of three kindergarten teachers and four educational assistants. Her inquiry question in the ALD Project focused on refining documentation of children's learning and adapting ideas from the Evidence Collection Tool. In particular she focused on involving children in documenting their own learning. She used the monthly team meetings to communicate with colleagues about ALD Project tools and resources. Over the 10-month period of the ALD Project she reported significant changes in her interactions and relationships with children, other professionals and families.

The kindergarten teacher described encouraging her colleagues to have more conversations with families about their children's learning, using a range of evidence examples including portfolios, drawings, art and learning stories. Focusing on the five Outcomes helped colleagues see children's strengths and capabilities and talk more confidently with parents about visible learning.

The team moved to involving children more in assessment of their own learning and development. During session time, the educators discussed with children the learning that had occurred and supported them to describe this using drawings and photos. Children were then encouraged to plan with educators what the next steps might be to progress their learning further.

In the daily program, time was allocated for each child to talk in a small group about their learning that day. To support discussions, educators used a series of photos of play experiences and materials equipment as prompts. This helped the children verbalise their learning.

The teacher described spending more time with the children and being less focused on moving around and documenting children's learning. She reported documenting in a more relaxed way with children and at group time by jotting down what the children were saying or recording. 'It has improved my relationships with the children as the program is more strength based and child driven.' (Kindergarten teacher)

Participants described the power of learning conversations with families to connect children's experiences and capabilities in other settings with what might be evident in the service. Participants reported that these conversations were new, that they were aware of the difference, and that the conversations were more precise and more meaningful. The Wellbeing, Learning and Identity Outcomes provide rich examples of evidence of children's learning, which is an important foundation for the emerging cognitive abilities of young children and infants from birth. The capacity for children to persist, to concentrate, to think things through and to make considered decisions is referred to as executive functioning. These learning dispositions are strengthened through responsive relationships with adults and stimulated play-based environments. Evidence-based practices best support and strengthen the ongoing development of executive functioning capabilities into the early years of school.

Evidence example 6 describes a reporting format developed by an ALD Project participant to support conversations with families and other early childhood professionals about children's learning and development.

Evidence example 6: Preschool field officer program documentation of centre visit observations

A preschool field officer (PSFO) applies an inquiry question: *How do I make children's learning visible in my reports to children, families, educators and other professionals?* The PSFO adapted a format to include using the language of the VEYLDF to support both the kindergarten teacher and the family in seeing ongoing learning goals to support children with additional needs.

Child's Name: Alice

Centre Name:

Visit Date: March 2012

To the family:

It was good to meet with you and have the opportunity to discuss Alice's development and consider ways that the kindergarten can help you in providing experiences to assist Alice.

When I arrived at the kindergarten for my visit Alice was seated with a small number of children who were having their morning snack. Alice spent a long time at the snack table before moving outside. Once outside she spent her time sitting at the drawing table and completed drawings with great detail before joining the group for mat time.

Identity (feeling safe, secure and supported, developing autonomy and resilience and confident self-identity)

Alice has settled into the kindergarten routine and has developed positive relationships with staff. At this stage Alice is exploring the indoor areas of kinder but is staying within the outside areas where she feels confident.

- Encourage Alice to continue building her positive relationships with both adults and children in the kindergarten.
- Acknowledge her achievements to encourage self-esteem.
- Encourage Alice to make choices in her play and to work to develop her independence in her play.
- Share her successes with her family and incorporate information from parents about Alice's achievements at home into her daily program.

Community (children are connected to their world)

Alice is developing her sense of being a member of the kindergarten community through working alongside her peers and joining them at snack and group times. As Alice gains more confidence moving around the kindergarten I am confident that she will begin to form more friendships and become more outgoing with the group. Today she showed interest in working with the children at the drawing table and at one stage followed them across the playground until she came to the bark and then stopped.

- Encourage Alice to have interactions with her peers every day at kinder in activities and during routine times.
- Encourage Alice to work at activities where there are small numbers of children and work with the group to stimulate discussion and sharing of ideas.

Wellbeing (social, emotional, spiritual, health and physical wellbeing)

As we discussed, Alice is still developing her toileting skills and it was good to see staff supporting her with regular trips to the bathroom today. Alice has developed great fine motor skills with her drawings and she was eager to share her drawing with me and tell me about her work. The teacher indicated that they are using bowls at snack time to assist Alice manage her snack independently.

- Alice is staying within her areas of confidence with her gross motor skill development and as she becomes more familiar and confident she will venture further into the playground and begin to experiment with the equipment. The goal is for Alice to move around the playground more confidently this year.

- Every day take Alice for a walk in the playground, hold her hand and look at the equipment and talk about the activities. Initially this may just be to the swings but gradually increase the area covered.

- When taking Alice close to the swings, trampoline and climbing equipment, hold her hand to give her more confidence.

- Allow her to watch the other children using the equipment and reinforce to her the fun they are having and how it is safe to be there.

- Use ideas for activities from the sheets I left with you, beginning with experiences that are more achievable.

- Continue taking Alice to the toilet regularly throughout the day and encourage her independence with hand washing and dressing and snack time.

Learning (curiosity, creativity, persistence, imagination, cooperation, problem solving, adapting knowledge)

Alice is using opportunities in the kinder environment to extend her learning, sitting next to her peers for table activities, sitting with them for group times, interacting with adults and children, and enjoying humour.

- Although today I did not observe Alice doing a variety of activities I am sure this happens when she is encouraged to move from the drawing into other areas.

- Parent has indicated on the referral form that Alice enjoys playing with Lego, singing and looking at books, so it is important to include these activities in Alice's daily program at kindergarten. As she becomes more confident she will be more open to try new experiences.

- Keep the activities offered to Alice open-ended so that she can work at her own pace and level, and experience success.

- Take photos of Alice's work as a record of the progress she will make over the year and so she can be reminded of her achievements and build her self-esteem.

Communication (interacting verbally and non-verbally for a range of purposes)

Alice quietly communicated with the adults in the group and confidently talked to me about her drawing, telling me in detail about her cat 'Puss': 'I'm colouring Puss in a bit more, he's colourful. He can step on mice. He can run very fast and then slow down.' This shows that Alice is developing her knowledge of concepts.

- Continue to encourage Alice to share her ideas and knowledge with her friends at kindergarten.
- Have small groups (as you did with the singing) outside and include Alice in these groups.
- Encourage Alice to contribute when sitting on the mat, by asking her to choose the song. If needed, use pictures related to the songs for her to choose. If you would like pictures about songs, please let me know as we have a good selection that are relevant to many familiar children's songs. I will include a few for you to try.

These observations have been written up to reflect the learning outcome areas from the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework, which now forms the basis for learning in early childhood settings. If you require further information about the framework, please contact the teacher or myself.

Evidence Example 6: Preschool field officer program centre visit observations

5. Strengthen collaborative partnerships

Collaborative approaches to assessment for learning and development occur when the broad range of multidisciplinary early childhood professionals working in early years services in settings come together and share evidence to inform rich assessments. Participants in the ALD Project reported that collaborative approaches were more powerful when they were multidisciplinary, and when they included children views of their own learning and family perspectives.

Participants described making new and stronger connections with services in their local area. By creating time for documenting, analysing, planning and reflecting together with other early childhood professionals, participants engaged in and continued to build new connections, and strengthened existing collaborative partnerships.

Practice reflection 7: Maternal and child health service promoting early childhood services to support collaboration

A maternal and child health (MCH) nurse commented that when talking with families about early childhood services she had changed her language from talking about 'childcare workers' to talking about 'childcare educators'. She also stated that she felt more confident promoting early childhood services as places that provide education and care.

The simple change in nomenclature use, and the confidence and knowledge to promote early childhood educational and care services, can be viewed as symbolic of how participation in the ALD Project helped increase respect for all early childhood professionals and their work. Respect for the work of other professionals is the first step in developing partnerships or working collaboratively with other early childhood professionals.

Participants considered multidisciplinary approaches to assessment to support earlier referral, for example collaboration between MCH and long day care services, and collaborative approaches to planning for transitions. School teachers described visits to early childhood services to observe the learning environment and forming relationships with children and educators long before the transition statements were completed.

Participants who had management responsibilities for services described connecting with educators and children in their services to talk about learning and to support meaningful and purposeful documentation.

> *'I see myself as a significant adult in the eyes of the children. When I visit the kindergarten room they are eager to have a conversation with me and involve me in what they are doing. I have a stronger relationship with them now. I also have reinforced the importance and value of providing mentoring, coaching and leadership.'*
>
> *'Next steps for practice: continue my involvement and leadership, provide ongoing mentoring … continue to strengthen relationships, build my own professional knowledge and experience including further study.' (Children's services)*

In workshops, participants described the benefits of meaningful and collaborative reflection on practice change with colleagues and other early childhood professionals. They valued opportunities to share, discuss and reflect on their own practice, which strengthened professional networks and forged new professional connections. The workshop structure over an extended period of 10 months supported participants to hear about the core aspects of each other's work, including challenging taken-for-granted practices and building relationships over time. Time for professional dialogue with a focus on respect and collaboration supported new understandings about the complexity of work with children and families within the early years.

As a result of being in a multidisciplinary grouping with a diverse mix of service types across the early years sector, participants' professional conversations were strengthened. They also gained new insights and a greater respect for each other's work.

Participants reported that collaborative partnerships were a more enriching way to work. They described how using the detail within the VEYLDF and the EYLF meant they could discuss more confidently with families the meaning of the learning they were seeing and the possibilities for learning and active connections. Working in partnership with other services as assessment communities also offered a rich opportunity for exploring diverse professional perspectives of individual learners.

Participants also reported that partnerships between early childhood professionals that draw on each other's skills, knowledge and expertise builds on children's prior learning. This supports continuity in assessments, which contributes to progress in children's learning and development across the birth-to-eight-years period. Using a common learning and development framework, and documenting, analysing and planning for learning, supports collaboration and information sharing with children, families and other professionals.

Practice reflection 8: Documentation to encourage family feedback in long day care

The following participant worked as an educator in long day care and developed an inquiry question focused on developing documentation to encourage family feedback and involvement in children's learning. What follows is a Parent's Learning Story that draws on the family's perspectives of their child's interest, achievements and challenges to support a link between learning at home and in the service.

Child's Name: ▮▮▮▮▮ Date: 02|05|2012

A PARENTS LEARNING STORY

Tell us a story about:
what your child's current interest are, how they get involved at home, how they have learnt new ways after persisting with a challenge, their creative expression or how they take responsibility

▮▮▮ has recently re-discovered his wooden train set at home. To start with he was heavily reliant on Mum or Dad to "make the track". With some encouragement, ▮▮▮ now enjoys building the track by himself! He is involved in lots of pretend play as he drives the trains around calling out "all aboard" and lots of self-talk. He is also developing spatial awareness skills and a variety of concepts (ie. in, out, up and down).

Drawing on families' perspectives of their child's interest, achievements and challenges supports linking learning at home and in early childhood settings.

"…was very engaged, building a car track outside at long day care"

6. Lead and support colleagues

The project findings highlighted practitioners describing and demonstrating practices in leading and supporting others. Modelling pedagogical leadership in workplaces and developing a shared vision with colleagues around assessment for learning and development are critical for practice change and implementation of the VEYLDF. Participants spoke about increased confidence in changing their own practice, as well as in teams and across their organisations.

During the ALD Project workshops, project leaders reported distinct changes of pedagogical leadership skills of participants, across all groups. In part, this applied where participants had workplace responsibilities related to influencing others, such as family day care coordinators and field workers, those newly appointed to pedagogical leadership positions and long day care coordinators and early years managers in local government. However, it was observed that this natural authority and support for colleagues was a strong theme, regardless of position or qualification level.

Throughout this period of national reform, early childhood leadership has been described as a 'new dimension' and 'intentional leadership'[5]. Project participants exercised leadership in different ways to support other's learning about assessment for learning and development.

> *'Leadership doesn't mean the people with the most teaching experience. It's those with the motivation for change in practice and sharing that change.' (Primary school)*

Practice reflection 9: Leading colleagues in changing assessment practice in family day care

A family day care (FDC) coordinator provides a rich example of how an early childhood professional can lead and support others to think differently about, and change their practice, in relation to learning and assessment.

The family day care coordinator demonstrated respect for the educators she worked with through her decision to model new ways of thinking about learning and assessment as opposed to 'telling' or 'informing' others. She expressed a belief to her mentor that she couldn't expect educators to change or to try new ways of assessing children's learning if she wasn't able to do this herself.

The family day care educator sent copies of learning stories she had written based on her observations in an FDC setting to her mentor for feedback on their appropriateness in capturing the learning, the analysis of the learning, and the next phase of the planning cycle.

Modelling how to write a learning story that reflected the requirements of the VEYLDF, the EYLF and the National Quality Standard was a powerful tool for supporting the educator's learning. She identified that three out of the four educators she was working with in her inquiry project began to change their assessment practices based on their increased understanding of assessment for learning. In addition, she noted that her conversations with FDC educators had an increased focus on pedagogy, which reflected their increased confidence and understandings.

5   Waniganayake, et al 2012, *Leadership context and complexities in early childhood education*

New understandings about change during a period of significant reform have strengthened the leadership capacity of early childhood professionals and their confidence in supporting others with ongoing engagement and implementation of the VEYLDF. Using the Educational Change Model in the context of a model of continuous improvement supported participants to strengthen leadership and progress implementation of the VEYLDF during a reform period.

The following practice reflection refers to vacation care, a recreational program, and outlines how this service reframed a challenge around planning to create an opportunity for staff to come together to discuss assessment for learning approaches and program planning and evaluation.

Practice reflection 10: Assessment for learning and development in a recreational program

Assessment for learning and development in a recreational program is providing our team with new opportunities and challenges. It has required a radical shift in thinking from a traditional recreational approach, providing a safe and fun environment, to one focused on education and care.

Our assessment for learning approaches cater to children's needs based on attendance, which occurs during school-holiday periods for single days or for a limited number of days. Using the planning cycle and collecting evidence and data for children's learning has brought new challenges to our work.

Our practices are now more focused on how children's learning is progressing. As a team, we explore and discuss the new insights and knowledge we have about children's learning and our practice. We know that assessment for children's learning involves building and layering evidence; that is, there needs to be a point A and a point B so we can observe and map progression of learning over time.

My role in leading and supporting colleagues has enabled our team to build their professional knowledge of the VEYLDF and the Framework for School Age Care, and to trial and adapt a range of approaches to support assessment for children's learning and development.

To support teams, a stronger focus in our work over the last 12 months has been on professional learning opportunities for educational leaders and educators. This has included introducing time-release initiatives enabling educators to meet together for critical thinking, reflection and program evaluation. We have also organised professional learning on site for our team, tailored to looking at children's learning and respectful relationships.

Being involved in the ALD Project reignited interest and passion in my own learning and, as a result, I am asking more questions and taking an inquiry approach in my work. Taking an inquiry approach generates new questions for me in my work as an educational leader, and I am now considering how we can continue to modify and reshape our assessment tools and program to encourage the unique learning opportunities in school-age care programs.

Participants report that their involvement in the Project was closely aligned to their success in managing change and implementing the VEYLDF. They described taking what they had learnt during project workshops, and sharing and applying it back in the workplace. The project supported participants to make meaning of their own practice, which helped them support others to get started with implementation and consider aspects of their practice that could be different.

> *'My view of leadership has begun to change from feeling I needed to have all the answers*
> *to a more collaborative model.' (Kindergarten program)*

Participants used the tools and resources back in their services and provided direct support and encouragement to their colleagues. Discussions within workshops was continued back in workplaces, with examples of reviewing the nature of staff meetings to include pedagogical discussions, a review of workplace responsibilities and more collaborative approaches to gathering evidence of children's learning.

This was a strong feature of change described in kindergarten environments, where participants described working with their educational colleagues to gather data and evidence with children.

The external influences that impacted on these initiatives included National Quality Standard assessments, and the requirement to be able to describe and discuss elements of practice and program decisions, and to have a deep knowledge of children and their interests and dispositions for learning.

Project leaders described participants putting relationships with children at the centre of their practice. There was evidence of participants engaged in companionable learning with children, particularly in the birth-to-three-years period.

Family day care educators described reviewing their programs and seeking opportunities to collaborate with other services to support assessment for learning. For example, in the birth-to-three-years group, educators in long day care considered providing evidence of children's learning to health professionals in maternal and child health to support a Key Age and Stage visit.

Those participants working in early childhood intervention and schools could see the value in connecting with families and other services working with children. Project leaders described a strong theme of respect for other's opinions and ideas, and shared meaning from the opportunities for discussion when it was connected to a shared vision.

Participants began to be more aware of the importance of communicating to families and other early childhood professionals what they were noticing about children's learning over time. Evidence of learning in documentation was beginning to be used to support collaborative discussions with other services. This includes clinical assessments, for example with MCH and ECIS. Participants described greater knowledge and confidence in making learning visible and described valuing aspects of children's learning that related to wellbeing, dispositions for learning and involvement in learning.

Practice reflection 11: Leading and supporting teachers to rethink what they do with children's evidence in primary school

As a result of taking part in the ALD Project, a primary school principal described some of the changes she introduced in her work with children, families and other professionals.

Linking with families early to support learning

In order to support improved Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) outcomes, the principal had already commenced weekly Rhyme Time literacy groups with families for babies and toddlers using the State Library professional learning kits. What became increasingly evident was the value for families in connecting to the school community prior to the Foundation year. Parents provided feedback about how they were feeling more confident, included and welcome in the school.

The principal's inquiry question related to using the prep interviews to enhance the transition process for children, families and teachers.

As part of transition visits in the year prior to school, the principal reported paying attention to conversations with the children to understand their interests. She described placing a greater emphasis on how children are learning and what they need to best support their learning. In developing responsive relationships with families as part of the transition to school planning the principal noted:

'Before being part of the project I had always valued the input from parents but being part of this study helped me realise just how important this information is. I think the main change for me is working with the parents from the initial meeting to grasp a deeper understanding and appreciation of their child.'

Leading and supporting a continuum of learning

The principal described allocating specific time for teachers to consider the educator's evidence of learning provided in transition statements. The teachers used this evidence to support the data they were gathering as part of mandated assessments in the first few weeks of school.

'I think ensuring that the classroom teacher has as much information as possible to help the child (and the parent) transition with confidence is the most important thing, as is helping the teachers to concentrate on what the child can do – look at the positives and work from there.'

Leading and supporting teachers to rethink what they do with evidence of children's learning

The principal described supporting teachers to look for evidence of children's learning throughout the day rather than just in a specific curriculum time. For example, assessing whether the child can count from one to 10 could be done at line-up time or during developmental play rather than in a maths lesson. Encouraging teachers to be more observant across the day provided much better evidence to support assessments.

Specific coaching sessions were provided to support teachers in the early years to work with the VEYLDF. This led to professional conversations at staff meetings and people becoming more reflective on their own teaching. 'Professional conversations in the staffroom about learning, assessment and evidence also became more frequent as all people in the learning teams became more familiar with the outcomes we were seeking.'

Practice reflection 12: Transforming practice in long day care

An educator in a long day care service provides a useful example of the professional transformation that was possible through participation in the ALD Project.

This educator's transformation was at several levels and began with deeper understanding of her professional identity. The educator came to understand that changing her own practice first was essential if she was going to lead changes in others.

- Project leaders described how participation in the workshops over a 10-month period, had transformed this educator's professional identity from a reticent one to that of a confident, high level contributor. Initially, the educator was very reluctant to complete the reflection forms, but by the final workshop she was deeply engaged with written reflective practice. We see this 'transformation of participation' as indicative of how the ALD Project enhanced her professional knowledge and skills, and sense of worth (professional identity). This is the type of professional activity that is expected of an educational leader under the NQS requirements.

- The second level of transformation identified was the shift from being a room leader who did not regard herself as a leader, to taking on that role and supporting significant changes in practice related to assessment for learning. The educator used a very simple tool to support these changes. She suggested to other educators that they ask the question 'What is the learning?' whenever they were analysing records such as observations or photographs. The coordinator of the service also noted that this educator was taking on a leadership role in staff meetings about assessing and documenting children's learning.

- The educator was motivated by the concept of having conversations about learning with families. The educator described a shifting from discussing what children had done during the day, to talking about what they were learning. She identified in her written and verbal feedback and reflections that this change in practice resulted in more extensive, interesting conversations with families as they began to 'tune in' more to their children's learning. Her ability to shift the focus of conversations with families and colleagues and of program planning, from a developmental perspectives to learning and developmental perspectives, reflects the cultural shift required by the VEYLDF, EYLF and NQS.

'I have had some interesting questions to answer from parents. They are becoming more aware of the frameworks and seem more willing to ask questions. Educators are starting to ask more questions. Feeling more confident at work with my co-educators.' (Long day care)

Opportunities and challenges

Throughout the ALD Project, participants identified both opportunities and challenges in their day-to-day work. These opportunities and challenges influenced early childhood professionals' engagement with reform initiatives. Practitioners spoke about opportunities to rethink their practice approaches to assessment for learning and development as well as influence colleagues in this work. Working as early years professionals during a period of significant reform also presented challenges for many participants. Participants spoke about needing time for practice change to be embedded into daily work practices. Participants were able to draw on the ECM to support their understanding of the chronological nature of implementation as they moved and transitioned through the three phases of change.

An overview of the range of opportunities articulated by participants is described here:

- Opportunities for affirming practice related to assessment for learning and development as well as opportunities to build on current practice and to use assessment to inform planning decisions. There was also an appreciation that improving and changing assessment practices does not necessarily take more time or add to a workload.

- Opportunities for reflective practice and critical thinking informed professionals' knowledge and conversations that directly influenced practice change.

- The value in exploring commonalities and differences across the early years broadened participants' knowledge of the birth-to-eight-years services.

- Participants used the ALD Project workshop opportunities to rethink their concept of time, particularly in relation to how to bring assessment for learning processes into the classroom and learning environments, rather than trying to find time outside these learning spaces. This had a twofold benefit: practitioners described being more present with children, and there was less pressure to always document outside of direct contact time with children. Opportunities were also created for children to contribute to documenting their own learning.

- Participants valued the significance of having a creative space to share, integrate and implement new knowledge and understandings about assessment for learning and development with children, families, and other early childhood professionals.

Throughout the project, participants also spoke about the following challenges in their day-to-day work.

- Varying knowledge about, and uptake of, the VEYLDF was identified as a challenge within and across some services. Working within the broader political context of significant reform created some uncertainty, particularly for those services working towards the NQF and new regulations impacting on staff-child ratios, staff qualifications and hours of service. While it was acknowledged that these reforms are a positive step towards improving outcomes for children and families, there are challenges for services as they move through implementation of new frameworks, requirements and standards.

- Limited time to document evidence and to meet with colleagues to plan and critically reflect together presented challenges. The challenges included allocating time for review of assessment practices with competing priorities, agendas and workloads.

- The potential to feel isolated was identified as a challenge, particularly for some standalone kindergarten programs. This impacted on opportunities to collaborate with colleagues and other early childhood professionals.

- In outside school hours care challenges were identified in exploring what assessment for learning looks like in a setting where the majority of staff are casual and there can be high turnover of staff. In addition, children's hours of attendance can be limited and may not be not across a regular time period.

Further resource development

Participants identified a range of areas to assist with further development of assessment for learning and development practices. These include:

- support and training, including practice and documentation examples

- practice examples demonstrating links between the VEYLDF and EYLF

- information about, and access to, information technology and social media as mechanisms to record and share assessment for children's learning and development

- resources and strategies to support creating opportunities for critical reflection, collaborating with other early childhood professionals, and with children during sessions (frequency and duration), and for conversations with families

- practice examples demonstrating ways to strengthen family, child, cultural and community influences in programming, including recognising parents' knowledge of their children and fostering reciprocal relationships

- opportunities to work in multidisciplinary groupings and with colleagues to support implementation.

It is evident in the ALD Project that sharing changes in practice approaches to assessment for children's learning and development has an impact on outcomes for children and contributes to supporting practice change more broadly across early years services.

Section 6 Implications for practice, policy and research

New and ongoing implementation initiatives in a period of reform including revised regulatory accountabilities and policy directions, continue to influence and shape collaborative, effective and reflective practice across the early years.

The ALD Project identified that early childhood professionals are more prepared to engage in the trial and adaptation of evidence-based practices. This is evident at both the individual and service level. The workshop materials and the definitional work explored by participants in the workshops have directly supported national quality framework requirements in early childhood education and care.

The Educational Change Model suggests that participants in the ALD Project are demonstrating practice change within the Development phase. During the workshop series this was evident in participants' increased capacity to engage with theoretical ideas and with resources and tools. Project leaders have described participant mentoring and modelling of key Project ideas back in services. Evidence of new and intentional leadership in influencing the work of colleagues in services has emerged as a significant trend.

This Report includes examples of practitioner evidence of children's learning, their experiences and adaptations in working with tools and resources, and practice reflections outlining significant changes in practice with children, families and with colleagues.

The ALD Project has contributed to participants describing renewed commitment to their work in early years education and care. Project leaders describe evidence of a strengthened professional identity within the Project groups. The specific ALD Project focus on assessment for learning and development has provided a specific lens through which to review and redevelop practices to improve outcomes for children. This has been evident through:

- strengthened professional identity
- increased understanding of incremental change over time and how to refocus attention and commitment to ongoing investigation
- strengthened capacity to measure progress in evidence of assessment for learning and development over time
- recognition that small specific evidence-based practice interactions and actions can have a profound impact on children, their families and on children's learning and development
- understanding of the importance and complexity of the birth-to-three-years period for learning and development now and for long-term learning
- conversations about children's learning and development with families and with other early childhood professionals.

Summary of significant changes identified within the Project

The power of an inquiry model of professional learning linked directly to the context for the practitioner has influenced progress and increased capacity to document children's learning: using the Early Years Planning Cycle (EYPC) to collect information, question, plan, act and reflect and review – layering of evidence over time, being able to discuss what they know about children's patterns of learning over time, and how this evidence can be included as part of referral decisions.

Knowledge of the VEYLDF increased across the workshops as participants built up understanding of what was in the Learning and Development Outcomes and engaged in learning about the research evidence that underpins the Practice Principles.

Critical reflection on practice linked to evidence strengthened participants' capacity to describe and demonstrate evidence:

- using evidence to ask questions and to describe change and growth
- increase in fluency to see and describe learning
- trial and error approach to adaptation – based on theory and evidence
- reframing issues – to see the learning
- development of shared approaches to assessment for learning.

Mentoring has been described by participants as a strong link that supported their ongoing involvement in the ALD Project. Participants developed increased confidence and demonstrated leadership roles back in their services and settings. Their actions supported deeper engagement by colleagues with the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF) and greater confidence and creativity in practices. This emerging leadership is a strength and could be further supported through opportunities to develop systems for ongoing peer support.

For teachers in the early years of school, knowledge of the VEYLDF has supported their planning and practice, using the transition statements to build on children's prior learning within the school environment. Participants in schools have been active in talking with children about their own learning and providing opportunities for children to plan and track their own learning in the classroom.

Where schools are setting up playgroups and learning programs for families, teachers are seeing the increased value and importance of these links for strengthening a sense of community and long-term outcomes for learning.

For early childhood professionals working in outside school hours care, the accountability requirements and practices related to learning in a recreational environment is new. Recognition and capacity to strengthen recreational learning and connect this with other settings is emerging.

Educators from early childhood settings show evidence of increased precision and fluency in documentation to describe children's learning. This is demonstrating a deep knowledge of individual children and is contributing to collaborative perspectives of children's learning across settings and services.

Strengthened connections between early childhood educators and with ECIS and MCH services are evident. Sharing connections across disciplines, and using multiple sources of information contributes to joint decisions that may support early referral and clinical assessments. New opportunities for joint service discussions and assessments with families have been identified.

Implications for policy, practice and research

Over a sustained period of time, the inquiry model of professional learning acts as a lever to support assessment for learning and development practice. Shared knowledge and respect for the work of other early childhood professionals with different roles and responsibilities is a first step in developing partnerships and collaborative approaches to assessment for learning and development. Strengthening leadership in regional and local network learning communities is an identified key to improving outcomes for children.

The power of the collaborative approaches to the ALD Project with policy, practice and research is evident in practitioners:

- seeing themselves as researchers
- leading and influencing others in a period of reform
- engaging with questions of philosophy, ethics and practice to inform and enrich decisions about children's learning and development
- engaging with frameworks and theory to support and enrich decisions about children's learning and development.

A key feature that emerged from the ALD Project was the new opportunities identified for conversations with families about children's learning. Participants described increased sharing of information between early childhood professionals and families about learning that was occurring in the service and at home.

In relation to assessment for learning and development of young children, infants and toddlers, it is clear that evidence of children's learning can look different in different settings. The ALD Project has highlighted emerging evidence of shared approaches to assessment for learning with families, children and other early childhood professionals. The common language of the Outcomes is recognised as a valuable communication tool to support integrated thinking about children's learning.

There are new opportunities as reform progresses for strengthened connections between early childhood intervention specialists and educators in services. As the documentation of children's learning in early childhood becomes more precise, it strengthens possibilities for joint use of specific evidence in collaboration with other services, for example maternal and child health (MCH) and early childhood intervention services (ECIS). This is important to support planning and tracking of children's progress in learning and development with families.

There is an opportunity to strengthen these connections in future projects with further exploration of joint opportunities for assessment of children's learning with families. MCH practitioners, supported playgroup leaders and early childhood intervention professionals have demonstrated evidence of this in working directly with families to respond to learning as it is occurring.

Integrated thinking and approaches across services and systems is supporting new collaborative work. The MCH practitioners provided a valuable presence within this multidisciplinary practitioner research project. MCH practitioners demonstrated natural leadership and supervision roles in workshop discussions and in collaborative connections with colleagues. The universal MCH service is a central link to supporting greater shared knowledge, for example, about attachment in infants and toddlers and the implications for current and further learning and development.

Family-centred practice is understood across the early years. However, in the Development phase of implementation there are opportunities to review practices: to include shared decision-making, and create welcoming and inclusive environments in services. This is particularly important to support effective work with families who have complex support needs.

The development of more effective partnerships with families supports the learning occurring at home and in services. A focus on further development of tools and resources that support a shared approach to assessment with families would assist this.

Practitioners have identified that small evidence-based practice changes can have a significant impact on children, families and professional identity and confidence. When practitioners have high expectations for all children and when they pay attention to both the cognitive and emotional capabilities of children, they make a difference to both individual child and group outcomes. In using **documentation that demonstrates growth and change over time**, practitioners are better able to engage in strong and equal partnerships with families and other early childhood professionals.

Practitioners in early childhood intervention services have used the Outcomes as a common tool with other early childhood professionals. **This inclusive practice has been identified as a key feature of collaborative approaches to assessment for learning and development.**

There is evidence of an increased capacity and skill for **shared conversations about children's learning and development**. This is a new dynamic that's evident in strengthened relationships with children, with families and with other early childhood professionals.

There is an ongoing opportunity in using the Early Years Planning Cycle to strengthen early childhood professionals' practice decisions based on their evidence and analysis to support accumulated learning:

- Practitioners intentionally plan a range of experiences over the longer term that provide opportunities for children to practice, consolidate, extend and enrich their knowledge.
- Practitioners intentionally plan experiences that challenge children's thinking and provide multiple opportunities for children to revisit learning in different ways within different experiences.

Impact of multidisciplinary practitioner research

The ALD Project has demonstrated evidence of increased participant confidence, knowledge and capacity to critically reflect, and to describe and value, aspects of children's learning and development. In particular, an increase in professional knowledge was noted in relation to children's wellbeing, identity and dispositions for learning, and including children's views of their own learning.

Professional respect and dialogue has been strengthened between early childhood professionals from a range of services and settings. Participants have demonstrated leadership and high expectations in their work with children and families.

Project participants have engaged in new and strengthened conversations about learning with children and families. They have used specific evidence of learning over time and linked this evidence to their practice to track further learning and development.

Important opportunities have been identified to value and develop genuine formal and informal exchanges and discussions with families about children's learning and development.

Adapted tools and resources have been used to support assessment for learning and development.

ALD participants have worked collaboratively with researchers and policymakers to make a significant contribution to ongoing implementation of the VEYLDF and to emerging multidisciplinary practitioner research.

Appendices

Appendix 1:
Educational Change Model Action Plan to support practice

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Initiation, **Development and Consolidation are three distinct phases of reform described in the Educational Change Model (ECM).** They can be used to describe changes in practices and approaches when implementing the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF) and the National Quality Framework.

Understanding the phases of change from an individual and service viewpoint supports a model of continuous improvement. This can be used to identify strategies and resources to strengthen understanding of, and engagement with, the VEYLDF.

Implementation: Making a difference to children's learning

Where are you now? Where is your service?		
Initiation Phase *1–2 years*	**Development Phase** *2–5 years*	**Consolidation Phase** *5–10 years*
Context across reform period – common reactions and experiences ♦ Inspired by new knowledge ♦ Uncertainly about practices ♦ Opportunities for leading ♦ Confusion between frameworks ♦ Reignited passion for early years ♦ Short-term changes in confidence		
Making decisions to engage Getting started Recognising new language and introducing practices (VELYDF)	Making discoveries, adapting practices Creating networking opportunities Sharing evidence of learning and reflecting on practice with others Leading and supporting colleagues	Refinement of practice Shared leadership Building capacity and ownership locally Working collaboratively in local networks
Strategies to support understanding and implementation		
Become familiar with learning and development frameworks Go to EYE 1 Action Plan *Where do I begin?* Unpack 'What is assessment for learning and development?' Use resource *Guide to Practice Principle 7: Assessment for learning and development*	Trial an Evidence Collection Tool to document progress of children's learning over time Map how you establish and maintain partnerships with professionals at EYE 4 Network Activity Critically reflect on practice with colleagues to ask, 'How are we including children's views in their own learning?' and 'What other ways could we do this?'	Foster a culture of inquiry, reflective practice and continuous improvement Actively inquire into key ideas and common themes in local networks

The phases of change draw on an ECM, which is described in the *Evaluation of the Implementation of the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework: For All Children from Birth to Eight Years: Early childhood professionals' perceptions of implementation activities and resources 2010–2011 Final Report May 2012*, available at: www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Documents/earlyyears/EvaluationOfImplementationOfVELDF-FinalReport.pdf (PDF - 776KB)

Appendix 2:
Statement of Commitment ALD Project 2012

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Welcome to the Assessment for Learning and Development Project: a specific inquiry-based research project designed to inform and support implementation of the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF).

The Assessment for Learning and Development (ALD) Project is structured over a 10-month period and is designed to support a broad range of early childhood professionals to investigate and apply approaches to assessment for learning and development in early years settings to advance children's learning in the five Outcomes.

Your commitment to this ALD Project is highly valued. The Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, Early Years Unit, is committed to providing you with every opportunity to make the most of your professional learning experience in the ALD Project. You will be supported to participate in this informative, practical and stimulating project that will contribute to your work in services with children, families, the community and the early years sector.

The greatest factors in your success will be your willingness to contribute what you know and do in the service setting and with children and families; to ask questions and enquire, to be reflective and to begin to debate ideas and practices knowing that all views and opinions are respected and valued; to have a commitment to develop professionally and personally; to acknowledge that self-care is essential and that a most important personal resource to nurture is our stamina.

Skills I will develop

The project has been designed to give all participants the opportunity to:

- know and be able to apply assessment for learning and development approaches as part of an ongoing cycle of planning that advance children's learning and monitor progress in the five Outcomes
- know and be able to apply assessment for learning and development approaches which includes use of tools and resources that reflect contemporary early childhood theories and research
- use reflective practice that involves engaging with questioning and enquiry to gather information and gain insights to inform curriculum decisions and practice development and change
- demonstrate leadership through implementation and embedding the VEYLDF and connected frameworks in your service
- use leadership skills to contribute to the development and/or strengthening of a positive organisational culture
- contribute to the early years professional learning community.

My commitment

Supporting and informing implementation of the VEYLDF

Individual inquiry-based projects that are agreed to with workshop facilitators, will be designed to support a valuable contribution to the application of assessment for learning and development in participants' settings.

A key feature of the ALD Project will be the design and use of tools and resources to assist early childhood professionals in undertaking assessment for learning and development to progress children's learning in the five Outcomes. Activities, tools and resources designed and available as part of the ALD Project will be developed to make the best use of people's time and be applicable to early years settings.

To this end, project activities are designed to enhance, refine and/or replace workplace documentation and assessment practices that participants currently use. Therefore, project activities that relate to documentation of children's learning and reflective practice are not designed as additional work.

Time for reflection

Reflective practices, including critical reflection and professional inquiry, support early childhood professionals in becoming more effective.

Reflection time will be built into all workshop sessions by project facilitators in the form of written journal reflections and discussion to support inquiry projects and ALD Project outcomes.

Time commitment

Time is a factor in meeting project needs and remaining connected to work commitments back at your service. The ALD Project has been designed to take into account work responsibilities of all participants.

Participants have made a commitment to attend the five workshops over the next 10 months.

Receiving support

Personalised support in the form of coaching and mentoring will be available throughout the Project from project facilitators and VCAA staff to help with goal setting and inquiry projects.

Time is allocated for coaching and mentoring during workshops as well as structured discussions between workshops 3 and 4 and 4 and 5. To ensure the discussions outside workshop time fit with each participant's availability, at the start of the project you will be asked to indicate the most suitable time for follow-up contact.

Professional learning community

Successful implementation of the VEYLDF is enhanced when communities of learners are actively engaged with implementation resources and are supported by a collaborative learning environment.

A key element of the ALD Project is to build and strengthen a professional learning community. You will have the opportunity to do this by being an active, contributing member to your group; with a commitment to connect and build partnerships with other professionals and services outside your immediate service; and to explore new ways to integrate the community into the children's learning program.

Additional reading

Reading of relevant research literature and contemporary early childhood theory readings is encouraged as part of professional learning. The VCAA acknowledges that this can at times be difficult, and commits to compulsory reading outside workshop time being kept to a minimum.

A reading period may be built into workshops for participants to consider specific material. All readings provided can be used as an ongoing resource within your service.

Confidentiality

Participants are required to maintain privacy and respect confidentiality in relation to the ALD Project. Unless authorised, participants are not permitted to make public comment or speak on behalf of the VCAA or participation in the ALD Project using confidential information or on sensitive issues**.**

As a participant in the VCAA Assessment for Learning and Development Project I agree to:

- be available to attend workshops
- receive support by way of mentoring and coaching as part of the project
- support and inform implementation of the VEYLDF
- be an active member of my professional learning community
- allocate time for data collection, reflection and reading
- maintaining confidentiality.

Participant Name	Signature	Date

With appreciation for your willingness to participate and in recognition of your commitment to the ALD Project.

Manager Early Years	Signature	Date

ALD Project Manager	Signature	Date

Appendix 3: Developing an inquiry question

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VCAA Assessment for Learning and Development – Inquiry Project

Taking an inquiry approach

- Context specific – has meaning that is relevant to your service and within your community
- Learning in practice – our practice (what we do) is informed by knowledge (why we do it) and vice versa
- Multilevels of learning – superficial and easily acquired shifts in practice to 'frame breaking' changes in how we think, feel and do things.

Goal: Beginning to frame an inquiry question

In thinking about assessment for learning and development, what are your key areas of concern?

What aspect of assessment for learning and development would you like to focus on?

_____

_____

Reality: What are you doing now?

How do you currently approach assessment for learning and development? What tools and resources do you use?

How are you using reflective practice to:

- inform approaches to assessment for learning and development?
- challenge and change some practices?

_____

_____

Options: What would you like to change – this year, for this group of children, for these families?

What are you doing now in assessing children's learning and development that works well? How do you know?

What do you think you need to do to reach your ideal outcome/goal?

_____

Wrap Up

What are the next steps to take? How can you keep track of your progress? Who can support you?

_____

_____

Follow-up Actions (write down two steps)

_____

_____

Appendix 4: Participant inquiry themes: Assessment for learning and development

1. **Connecting observations and documentation to assessment for learning and development**

   - How do I make decisions regarding what should be assessed, why, when and how?

   - What does quality documentation look like? How much? How many records?

   - How do I use my observations and documentation of individual and groups of children to collect evidence that supports assessment for learning?

   - What do I look for/assess when undertaking assessment for learning and development?

   - How can I document and plan for program routines to maximise opportunities for each child's learning?

   - How do I use the Early Years Planning Cycle to undertake assessment for learning and development and advance children's learning?

   - What specific learning and development am I observing and assessing?

   - How do I know that assessment for learning leads to improved outcomes for children?

   - How do I identify children who may benefit from special support or intervention?

2. **Monitoring children's learning and development progress: analysing assessment information to show children's learning using the five Outcomes as a key reference point to identify progress**

   - How do I use the assessment process to capture the 'distance travelled' by children in their learning and development?

   - How do I undertake assessment for learning to ensure it links to the five Outcomes?

   - How do we use assessment to enrich children's learning?

   - In what ways do our assessment practices highlight the learning in everyday activities and routines?

   - What opportunities do I plan to discuss my observations and analysis with team members including seeking and using feedback? How do I use this feedback to inform assessment for children's learning and development?

3. **Making decisions about programming to advance children's learning and development: assessing children's learning to inform curriculum decision making and pedagogical approaches. What's next?**

   - What strategies do I use to increase my understanding of assessment for learning and development to inform curriculum decision-making?

   - How do I undertake appropriate child level assessments that inform program development and improve outcomes for children?

   - How do I use intentional teaching to scaffold and extend children's learning?

4. **Identifying children's approaches to learning/dispositions for learning**

   - How do assessment for learning practices help children see themselves as competent and confident learners?

   - How do I incorporate the individual learning strategies that children use into my programming?

   - How do I rethink and test my assumptions about how children learn?

   - How does the way I set up the learning environment influence children's learning?

   - How do I respond to children's ideas within play-based environments?

5. Including children's views of their own learning

   - How well and in what ways do we involve children in their own assessment for learning?
   - How do I enable children to set their own goals, assess their own achievements and take some responsibility for their learning?
   - How can I support children to contribute to their own learning?
   - How do I provide opportunities for children to discuss and reflect on what they are learning?
   - How do I engage children in their own learning and support them to challenge and extend their thinking?
   - How do I support children developing an understanding of themselves as learners?
   - What examples do we have of children contributing to their own assessment?
   - In what ways can babies and toddlers contribute to their own learning/assessment?
   - How do I actively involve children in their own assessment in order to enhance learning?

6. Understanding the early childhood professional's role in children's learning informing practice

   - What strategies support me to engage with the VEYLDF as it relates to assessment for learning?
   - How do I identify and align my pedagogy with assessment for learning?
   - How do we use the information that we gain from children's learning to promote ongoing learning/advance children's learning? Plan for what is next?
   - How is children's learning co-constructed through interactions between educator and child?
   - How do I reflect on my own views and understandings of early childhood theory, research and practice?
   - How do I reflect on the effectiveness of my interactions and planning for children's learning and development?
   - Reflect on ways in which learning is co-constructed through **interactions between ECP's and each child**
   - What are my strengths in assessment for learning and how can I use these to build on support children's learning and development?

7. Collaborative approaches to assessment for learning and development and making learning visible to children and their families, educators and other professionals

   - Who are we assessing for and for what purpose?
   - How do I make children's learning visible to themselves, families, educators and other professionals?
   - How do I collaborate with families and other professionals to support assessment for children's learning and development?
   - How do I know that I am using **inclusive assessment processes** that are responsive to culture, capabilities, strengths, and collaborate with children, families and other services?

Appendix 5: Reflection Sheet AM

VICTORIAN CURRICULUM
AND ASSESSMENT AUTHORITY

Workshop Reflection Sheet
For completion at the beginning of each workshop

Name:
Date: / / 2012

VCAA Assessment for Learning and Development Project 2012	
Group:	AM

What has happened since last we met? What practices have you changed?

What helped or hindered the changes? Who and what helped?

Is there something that has inspired you or been a challenge for you? Describe.

What questions has this raised for you?

Appendix 6: Reflection Sheet PM

VICTORIAN CURRICULUM
AND ASSESSMENT AUTHORITY

Workshop Reflection Sheet
For completion at the conclusion of each workshop (from workshop 4)

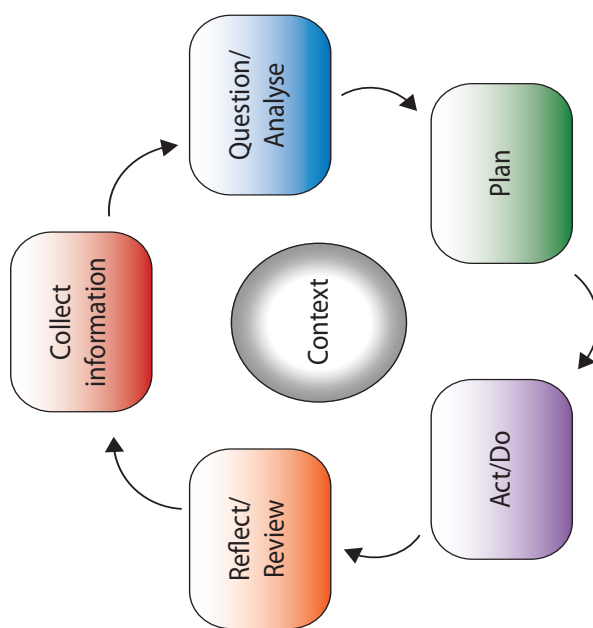| |
|---|
| Name: |
| Date: /   / 2012 |
| VCAA Assessment for Learning and Development Project 2012

Group: PM |
| What challenged your thinking today? Why?

What current practices were affirmed?

What new learnings or knowledge have you gained today?

How will this change or effect your practices back in the workplace?

What does this mean for your inquiry research question? (complete for workshop 2 onwards) |

Appendix 7: Documenting children's learning

Link - http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Documents/earlyyears/eye/EYE10_SuppChildLearn_FA.pdf
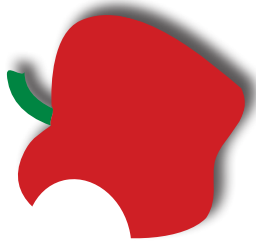
Documentation of children's learning

The Early Years Planning Cycle outlines the process early childhood professionals use to collect and interpret evidence that contributes to a detailed, up-to-date, strengths-based picture of children's learning and development to inform planning and practice decisions. This Planning Cycle is used to support assessment for learning 'which is designed to discover what children know and understand, based on what they make, write, draw, say and do.' (VEYLDF p. 13)

The Early Years Planning Cycle supports:

- purposeful **observations over time**
- **collecting, analysing** and **assessing** individual and group learning and development in different contexts
- **making plans** about each child and groups of children
- **sharing information** and **collaborating** with children, families, colleagues and other early childhood professionals
- **reflecting** on all aspects of events and experiences
- applying **context** to inform practice decisions

Practice Principles

1. Family-centred practice
2. Partnerships with professionals
3. High expectations for every child
4. Equity and diversity
5. Respectful relationships and responsive engagement
6. Integrated teaching and learning
7. Assessment for learning and development
8. Reflective practice

Early Years Planning Cycle

- Collect information
- Question/ Analyse
- Plan
- Act/Do
- Reflect/ Review
- Context

The Early Years Planning Cycle is adapted from the *Educators' Guide to the EYLF* (2010)

National Quality Standards for Early Childhood Education and Care

QA1 – Educational program and practice   QA5 – Relationships with children
QA6 – Collaborative partnership with families and communities   QA7 – Leadership and service management

VCAA **E**ARLY **Y**EARS **E**XCHANGE
No. 10 July 2012
1

Updated February 2013

Observe and Collect Information	Question and Analyse	Plan, Act and Do
Record what you know and see about children's strengths, interests, capabilities and culture - Observe purposefully - Make decisions about what to document, and why and how - Document evidence that describes children's learning and development in everyday as well as planned experiences - Encourage children to describe their learning - Demonstrate the progress and pathways a child or group of children take - Describe learning achievements and areas where a child may need additional support - Deepen knowledge and understanding about children, families and communities to inform planning and practice decisions **Gather evidence of children's learning and development** - Listen to children's conversations - Observe children's involvement and dispositions for learning, skills in play, thinking and behaviours - Use samples of children's work, for example, a photo of a painting, a taped conversation - Take anecdotal records of conversations with children, families, colleagues and other professionals - Refer to enrolment information - Use an Evidence Collection Tool to document observations, analysis and planning	- Understand what children know, say and can do - Link evidence to Learning and Development Outcomes noting the overlap of outcomes to support a holistic view of children's learning - Analyse evidence of children's learning and development to inform curriculum and planning and practice decisions - Plan conversations about children's learning with children, families, colleagues and other professionals to identify, and plan for children's learning and development **Context for professional learning** - Gain a deeper understanding of the five Learning and Development Outcomes - Draw on evidence of children's learning, early childhood theories and frameworks and the Practice Principles to analyse and understand children's learning and your practice decisions	- Design learning experiences and environments that build in continuity, predictability and repetition - Assess children's learning and development on an **ongoing** basis and in **everyday experiences** - Monitor children's progress over time - Use evidence to inform curriculum decisions - Discuss learning and next steps with children, families, colleagues and other professionals - Support families as children's most important educators - Work collaboratively to document and assess evidence of children's learning at home and in other settings **Context for planning and practice decisions** - Use integrated teaching and learning approaches - Use reflective practice to inform and review decisions about children's learning and your practice - Evaluate the effectiveness of the learning and development program

Observe and Collect Information	Question and Analyse	Plan, Act and Do
What evidence have I documented?	**What does this information and evidence mean? What new insights and knowledge do I have about children's learning and my practice decisions?**	**What will I do next? How will this documentation make a difference in my work with children and families? How will my analysis inform my planning decisions?**
• Who (and what) am I noticing and why?	• **What is the child learning?**	• How will I use this information in my **communication** with the child, family, colleagues or other professionals?
• What is happening?	• What do I know **now** about what the child is ready to learn and how do I know that?	– What learning conversations will I have with children?
• Have I noticed and listened to efforts to communicate, both verbally and non-verbally, including utterances, gestures, posture and facial expression?	• What do I know now about this child's strengths, culture, learning and development?	– What intentional conversations have I planned?
• What have I observed about children's interactions, temperament, involvement and dispositions for learning?	• How does this observation link to one or more of the Learning and Development Outcomes?	– What further conversations will I have with families, colleagues and other professionals about children's learning and development?
• What conversations have I had about children's culture, interests, strengths, skills in play, talents, capabilities and agency?	• Are there gaps in the learning? Are there things I expected to see that are not evident?	• Based on analysis, what are my future **practice decisions**?
• What progress have I observed in children's learning and development across the five outcomes? Are there any gaps in the documented evidence?	• **Who have I discussed this with?** Who or what else can help me interpret this information, for example, the child, their family, other professionals, research and theories?	– How will I plan for ongoing learning opportunities in everyday routines and experiences?
• What is the evidence telling me about what children understand, know and can do?	• **What have I learned about my practice**, my teaching and learning strategies, and my interactions and relationships with children, families, colleagues and other professionals?	– How will I intentionally plan experiences that allow children to practise, consolidate, extend and enrich understandings and knowledge?
• What intentional conversations have I had with children about the progress of their own learning?	• Who or what helped or hindered the learning?	– What opportunities have I provided for children to revisit learning in different ways and using different experiences?
Context	**Context**	**Critical reflection**
• What is the learning and development progress for children, including how you know the learning has occurred?	• Is there any additional information that will help to make meaning from what is documented?	• What were the results of my action(s)?
• What (if any) significant events happened before or after the documented learning?	• What was the learning environment where this happened, who was involved and the teaching and learning strategies used?	• Did my action support the child? How?
• How did you involve yourself in children's learning and development including intentional teaching?		• How does this observation or example of evidence assist me in thinking differently about this child or group of children?
		• What changes are evident for children and for me as an early childhood professional?

This template includes **four** columns to support ongoing learning and reflective practice. It suggests beginning with a proposed program and using all elements of the Early Years Planning Cycle. This template can be adapted and used to support ongoing evidence collection and interpretation of children's learning and development over time and inform planning and practice decisions.

Name of Child or Children: _____

Observer: _____

Proposed Program Plan	Observe and Collect Information *(include date and time of observation)*	Question and Analyse	Act, Do and Plan
Outcomes for children			
Outcomes for early childhood professional(s)	**Context:**		**Critical Reflection:**

Glossary

Agency: being able to make choices and decisions, to influence events and to have an impact on one's world.

Assessment for learning and development: designed to discover what children know and understand, based on what they make, write, draw, say and do. Early childhood professionals assess the progress of children's learning and development, what children are ready to learn and how they can be supported (VEYLDF, p. 13).

Attunement: includes the alignment of states of mind in moments of engagement, during which affect is communicated with facial expression, vocalisations, body gestures and eye contact.

Dispositions for lifelong learning: enduring habits of mind and actions, and tendencies to respond in characteristic ways to situations, for example, maintaining an optimistic outlook, being willing to persevere, approaching new experiences with confidence. The capacity for children over time to persist, to concentrate, to think things through and to make considered decisions is referred to as executive functioning.

Early childhood professionals: this Report encapsulates the multidisciplinary composition of the Project groups and includes practitioners working in family day care, long day care, maternal and child health, family day care, long day care, kindergarten programs, early childhood intervention services, primary school and outside school hours care.

Inclusion: involves taking into account each child's social, cultural and linguistic diversity (including learning styles, abilities, disabilities, gender, family circumstances and geographic location) in curriculum decision-making processes. The intent is to ensure access to resources and participation, and opportunities to demonstrate their learning and value difference.

Involvement: a state of intense, wholehearted mental activity, characterised by sustained concentration and intrinsic motivation. Highly involved children (and adults) operate at the limit of their capacities, learning to change ways of responding and understanding, leading to deep-level learning (adapted from Laevers, 1994). Children's involvement can be recognised by their facial, vocal and emotional expressions, the energy, attention and care they apply and the creativity and complexity they bring to the situation (adapted from *Reflect, Respect, Relate*, DEECD 2008).

Literacy: in the early years, literacy includes a range of modes of communication, including music, movement, dance, storytelling, visual arts, media and drama as well as talking, viewing, reading and writing.

Multidisciplinary approaches: describes a partnership where two or more professionals are involved in the provision of integrated and coordinated services for children and families to support the best outcomes. In the early years, multidisciplinary approaches may include, but are not limited to, educators, community workers, allied health professionals and medical personnel.

Numeracy: broadly includes understandings about numbers, structure and pattern, measurement, spatial awareness and data as well as mathematical thinking, reasoning and counting.

Pedagogy: early childhood educators' professional practice, especially those aspects that involve building and nurturing relationships, curriculum decision-making, teaching and learning.

Shared, sustained conversations: can be both child initiated and adult initiated. They are an effective learning and teaching interaction where two or more individuals share their thinking for a sustained time, work together to make observations, solve a problem, clarify a concept, extend ideas and narratives, or evaluate activities (adapted from Siraj-Blatchford, 2009).

Transitions: the process of moving between home and childhood settings, between a range of different early childhood settings, or from early childhood settings to school settings.

Wellbeing: results from the satisfaction of basic needs; the need for tenderness and affection; security and clarity; social recognition; to feel competent; physical needs and for meaning in life (adapted from Laevers, 1994). It includes happiness and satisfaction, effective social functioning and the dispositions of optimism, openness, curiosity and resilience (adapted from the VEYLDF pp. 51-53).

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