# Assessment of Children as Having a Strong Sense of Identity in Early Childhood Education and Care: Literature Review

Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework

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# Contents

The Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF) aims to guide all early childhood professionals in their work with children and families. It sets out eight Practice Principles that provide a foundation for achieving the five nationally agreed Early Years Learning Outcomes in the *Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (Australian Government Department of Education and Training 2009).

The VEYLDF describes five Learning and Development Outcomes for children from birth to eight years, connecting the Learning Outcomes from the Early Years Learning Framework to the first three levels of the Victorian Curriculum Foundation–10 (VCAA 2017a). The five Outcomes help early childhood professionals to plan for and assess children's learning and development, and provide a common language to support collaborative approaches between early childhood professionals and families. The five Learning and Development Outcomes are:

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

This literature review is part of a series of reviews designed to assist Victorian early childhood professionals to implement the VEYLDF.

The primary focus of this review is supporting early childhood professionals to monitor children's progress in relation to the first Learning and Development Outcome: *Children have a strong sense of identity*. As the Outcomes are closely related, it may also assist in monitoring progress towards other Outcomes. For example, children's sense of identity is closely associated with their sense of wellbeing, while the development of empathy and respect (key components of identity) may expand children's ability to connect with and contribute to their worlds. Early childhood professionals are encouraged to read this review with children's holistic development in mind.

The VEYLDF also includes eight Practice Principles to guide evidence-based practice:

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

The content of this review will be used to inform a practice guide, which will support early childhood professionals to use the findings of this review in their practice. The review introduces key concepts and tools that will underpin the practice guide, thereby establishing a strong base of common knowledge and understanding that early childhood professionals can apply to their practice.

# Executive summary

This literature review is one of a series to support Victorian early childhood professionals to assess children's learning and development in relation to the five Learning and Development Outcomes in the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF). This review focuses on the first Outcome: *Children have a strong sense of identity.* Its purpose is to provide a resource that equips early childhood professionals with the knowledge to identify and assess children's progress towards this Outcome in all early childhood settings.

Section 1 unpacks the concept of a strong sense of identity in children from birth to eight years of age. It defines the components of this Outcome as it is described in the VEYLDF and in relevant research.

Identity is the unique sense a person has about who they are, how they belong and how they are valued. The research literature includes many definitions of identity. This review organises these ideas into three strands of identity that are important in early childhood, and have an ongoing influence on development.

Central to the child's development of a sense of identity is their personal identity. This includes awareness of self, summed up in the statement: 'I know who I am', and includes the constructs of self-expression and self-awareness. A strong sense of identity requires that a child also appreciates who they are, summed up in the statement: 'I value who I am'. The development of self-esteem and self-efficacy supports this.

The contribution that other people make to the child's development helps to define the child's social identity. There are two elements that build social identity; one is the learning received from an inward direction, the other is what the child learns from looking outward. The young child's attachment and communication with close others, such as parents[1] and family members, helps them learn that 'You know who I am', contributing to their understanding of themselves as knowable. When these inward social bonds furnish the child with security and trust, they develop the concept that 'You value who I am'.

Looking outwards, a child will develop a sense of social identity based on a growing awareness that they are part of some groups (ingroup identification) and are different from those in other groups (outgroup recognition). Thus they will be able to say 'I know who you are'. When this sense of outward social identity is strong and the child develops empathy and respect for others, this will translate into 'I value who you are'.

These components of a strong sense of identity are illustrated in Figure 1.

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1.   Adults with day-to-day carer responsibility for a child, including foster carers and kinship carers

Section 2 discusses principles for assessing children as having a strong sense of identity. In assessing if children have a strong sense of identity, educators face questions about how to select appropriate assessment tools across phases of development. The review prompts educators to consider how they administer assessments and how to interpret the results, as well as how to translate their findings into planning and to communicate this to parents.

The following six principles for assessing sense of identity inform the review. In turn, these can be applied to inform early childhood professional practice:

1. Assessment addresses established components of children's identity.

2. Assessment enables early childhood professionals to describe a trajectory of identity development.

3. Assessment is valid, reliable and fair.

4. Assessment is conducted in a way that enhances engagement and relationships.

5. Assessment includes children's self-assessment.

6. Assessment involves the child's community and informs professional partnerships.

Section 3 identifies a range of tools available to support early childhood professionals in their assessment of children's sense of identity. The tools selected address each of the key components of the Learning and Development Outcome *Children have a strong sense of identity* and consider children's development from birth to eight years.

These tools are summarised in a table, which indicates the components of identity that each tool is designed to measure, based on the components of identity described earlier. The tools selected for this review are:

• Ages and Stages Questionnaire: Talking about Raising Aboriginal Kids (ASQ–TRAK)

• Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scale 2 (BERS-2)

• Behavioral Rating Scale of Presented Self-Esteem for Young Children

• Berkeley Puppet Interview

• Early Childhood Generalized Trust Belief Scale (ECGTBS)

• Pictorial Scale of Perceived Competence and Social Acceptance for Young Children (PSPCSA)

• Strange Situation

• Te Whãriki Learning Stories.

In Section 4 the eight tools are described in more detail, with an overview, a description of how the instrument is used, and a brief discussion of its purpose and value.

Few of these tools are in common use, either in research or in early childhood education and care (ECEC) services. This reflects the reality that, to date, limited work has been done to address the assessment of young children's sense of identity, particularly in Australian contexts. The tools listed above were selected because they covered at least one or more of the components of identity discussed in this review, and in most cases were available for use by early childhood professionals. They may, therefore, provide early childhood professionals with ideas for improving how they monitor the development of a strong sense of identity among the children with whom they work, and provide a starting point for professional reflection about this Outcome.

This review also includes a glossary to support understanding of any unfamiliar terms, and a list of references to help early childhood professionals identify further reading to build their knowledge in greater depth.

# Introduction

This review aims to support observation of children's developing sense of identity in early childhood services by identifying tools that can help early childhood professionals recognise and assess how that development is occurring. It focuses on the first VEYLDF Learning and Development Outcome *Children have a strong sense of identity*.

The VEYLDF defines this outcome as having four components:

1. Children feel safe, secure and supported.

2. Children develop their emerging autonomy, interdependence, resilience and sense of agency.

3. Children develop knowledgeable and confident self-identities.

4. Children learn to interact in relation to others with care, empathy and respect (VCAA 2017b).

Early childhood professionals recognise these components as important in their philosophies and practice, but the constructs within these components are not easy to assess. Through their relationships with children, professionals are likely to have some understanding of what each child knows, thinks and feels – about themselves, and about other children and adults they encounter in their lives. Yet, professionals may struggle to find the language to describe children's progress in these areas, and articulate it to families, and to their colleagues. This literature review aims to build on the knowledge that early childhood professionals already have about the children with whom they work, and provide some research-based tools for describing the development of a strong sense of identity more clearly and systematically.

To do this, the review aims to connect the description of a strong sense of identity in the VEYLDF to relevant constructs in early childhood research. The main objective of the literature review was to identify tools for assessing a strong sense of identity that could assist early childhood professionals in their day-to-day work. The purpose is to introduce this evidence base to early childhood professionals, and enable them to make informed choices about how they explore the impact of their programs on children's sense of identity.

The review begins by providing greater clarity about what a strong sense of identity involves, and how it develops during the early years. The purpose of assessment against the outcomes in the VEYLDF is to monitor children's progress over time, not only to provide point-in-time observations. The systematic assessments of children's sense of identity described in this review help educators to take a developmental approach to assessing this outcome, recognising that all children's developmental pathways will differ, especially for such a complex outcome, which depends on many different factors to flourish.

Talking about a strong sense of identity is inherently political, because it concerns how individuals relate to society. It requires early childhood professionals to make connections between big political ideas, such as Reconciliation or the #MeToo movement, and the power dynamics that they observe and influence in their practice with children and families. Thinking about a strong sense of identity, therefore, also requires a deep commitment to reflective practice, so that professionals can recognise who has power within early childhood services and why, and how professionals' own identities and biases contribute to these dynamics (Cannella & Grieshaber 2001). The technical tools for assessing a strong sense of identity described in this review may help early childhood professionals navigate these political dynamics in more informed, purposeful ways.

This review also proposes some guiding principles for the assessment of children's sense of identity, to support early childhood professionals in selecting and applying the various assessment tools that are available for their use. By using these tools in innovative, child-centred ways, early childhood professionals might not only enhance their own programs but also contribute to the growth of new practices in early childhood pedagogy and assessment. The evidence base is still emerging about how to support children to develop a strong sense of identity, and how to recognise and assess this development. This literature review, therefore, aims to provide a starting point for ongoing professional dialogue and research in this area.

# Section 1: How is a strong sense of identity defined in children from birth to eight years?

This section sets out a framework for defining the construct of a strong sense of identity in children from birth to eight years of age. It starts by unpacking the concept of a strong sense of identity, including definitions from the VEYLDF and from the research literature.

The VEYLDF positions identity as the outcome that is foundational and profoundly important:

> Identity is unique to each individual, and defines who people are, what shapes their interests and how they come to view the people and events around them (DET 2016, p. 18).

The VEYLDF goes on to associate many different terms with the concept of identity: inclusion, belonging, security, support, relationships, attachment, autonomy, interdependence, resilience, sense of agency, care, diversity, empathy and respect (VCAA 2017b).

Research literature also describes identity as having many parts, making it difficult to settle on a single definition. Researchers have variously described identity as being contextual, relational, emotional, multiple and storied (Boylan & Woolsey 2015, p. 63). It could be said that the concept of a strong sense of identity does not have a very strong sense of identity itself! On the other hand, coping with the shifting definitions of a strong sense of identity is good practice for coping with the shifting nature of children's own identities, which can vary in different contexts, relationships and emotional states.

In 2019, the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) published a major literature review *A Positive Sense of Identity and Culture: Defining and Measuring Progress for Children and Young People in Australia* (Renshaw 2019a). By compiling definitions of identity from psychology, sociology, anthropology and social science, the review produced the following list of concepts related to identity:

- self-concept – how a person describes themselves

- collective self-concept – a person's sense of self as a group member (social identity)

- self-esteem – a form of self-evaluation

- perceived self-efficacy – a person's belief in their capacity to achieve intended results

- identity exploration and commitment – process of gathering information about, and experimenting with, identity before making a firm decision on what applies and having defined goals

- social identity and group membership – self-identifying and behaving as a member of a social group

- narrative identity – internal narrative that makes meaning of past, current and aspirational experiences and actions

- situational identity – process of activating different identities according to the social situation or context

- place and national identity – a personal and group identity aligned with physical locations, political and civic roles (Renshaw 2019a, pp. vi–vii).

The ARACY review had a broad scope, and considered research on identity in early years, childhood and adolescence through to young adulthood. It is worthwhile reading for all professionals interested in this topic.

The challenge in this literature review was to distil the broad literature on a strong sense of identity into a simple model that could apply to practitioners' work with children aged from birth to eight years. Our model needed to do two things:

- Help early childhood professionals understand what a strong sense of identity looks like, and how it develops.

- Enable us to identify assessment tools that professionals could use.

In discussing assessment of identity, the ARACY review concluded that 'there are limited validated tools developed for this purpose in the Australian context' (Renshaw 2019c, p. 9). This review, therefore, needed a model for understanding a strong sense of identity that would enable identification of the limited range of available assessment tools and help professionals to recognise this VEYLDF Outcome in their practice.

| SOCIAL (INWARD) | PERSONAL | SOCIAL (OUTWARD) |
|---|---|---|
| | **Awareness (sense)** | |
| **You know who I am**<br>• Attachment<br>• Communication | **I know who I am**<br>• Self-expression<br>• Self-awareness | **I know who you are**<br>• Ingroup identification<br>• Outgroup recognition |
| | **Appreciation (strong)** | |
| **You value who I am**<br>• Security<br>• Trust | **I value who I am**<br>• Self-esteem<br>• Self-efficacy | **I value who you are**<br>• Empathy<br>• Respect |
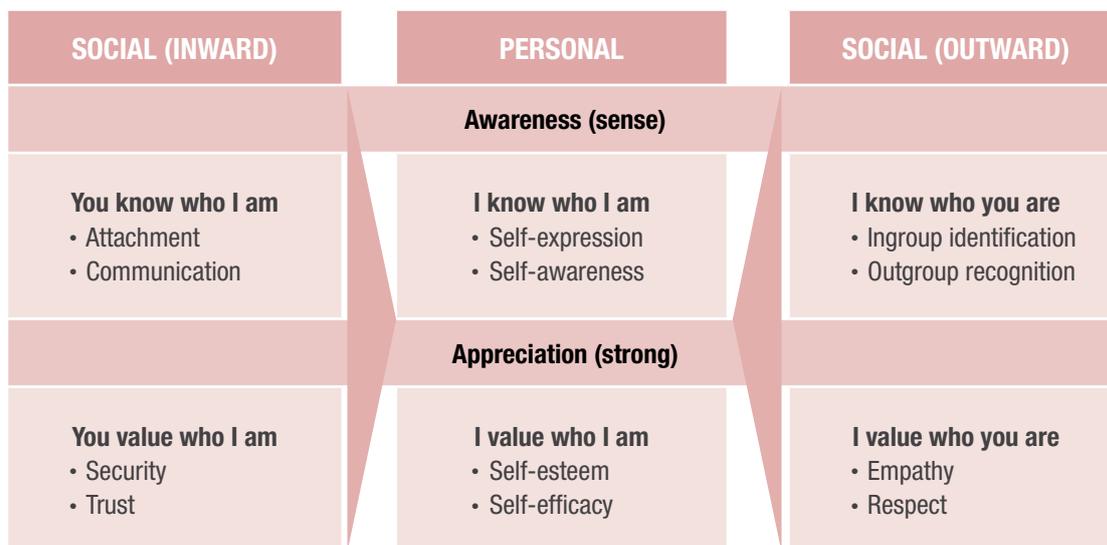
**Figure 1: The components of a sense of identity**

Our model for understanding a strong sense of identity is illustrated in Figure 1. It has three components:

• Personal identity – how the child sees themselves

• Social identity (inward) – how others see the child

• Social identity (outward) – how the child sees others

The personal and social aspects of identity reflect the two fundamental human desires: to belong (social), and to be unique (personal) (Woodhead & Brooker 2008). The 'inward' and 'outward' components of social identity reflect that identity is shaped by how a child sees others and how they believe others see them.

Each of these components is itself divided into two sections: awareness and appreciation. These reflect the constructs of the VEYLDF Outcome: children must have a *sense* (awareness) of what their identity is, and that sense of identity must be *strong* (appreciated or valued). This demonstrates that a strong sense of identity involves both knowing and feeling, and integrates cognitive, social and emotional development.

Each of the six components of the diagram is defined by a simple statement, showing what a child will think or feel when they have a strong sense of identity. These statements are intended to help early childhood professionals to translate these complex constructs into beliefs that they can recognise in children's everyday thinking. A child whose thinking reflects all six statements would have a strong sense of identity in every possible way.

Each component in the diagram also contains two constructs, to link the simple statements to the research literature. Because identity can include so many different constructs, it was important to condense these into a finite set of terms that could be researched in the assessment literature. Early childhood professionals may be able to suggest other constructs associated with each statement – or might have a different model in mind for how they fit together. This review does not aim to provide a single, authoritative model, but simply to suggest an approach on which researchers and professionals can build.

## The difference between components and attributes of identity

This model is not the only way that identity could be defined. It focuses on the components of a strong sense of identity, rather than the attributes of a person from which their identity is formed (Hannum 2007). Attributes of identity might include age, gender, ethnicity, social class or language background. It might also include aspects of personality and behaviour, such as being loud, quiet, polite, competitive, shy or inquisitive. Physical attributes, such as height, weight, skin colour, muscle tone or physical ability, can also be important to identity. These attributes may be changeable over time or fixed throughout a lifetime.

Knowing these attributes is also important for understanding identity, and for remembering that identity is about more than what can be easily observed on the surface. Brainstorming all the ways a child might describe themselves (perhaps beginning with how one would describe oneself) can help professionals realise the infinite parts from which individual identities are constructed. The labels given to these attributes are important in themselves and in communicating which attributes are desirable and valued. Professionals must be especially aware of the impact of labelling children according to their abilities, such as 'slow readers', as these labels can carry lasting effects on children's sense of identity as learners (Yoon 2015).

This review does not focus on the many attributes that make up an individual's unique identity but on the components of a strong sense of identity that apply to all children. All of these components can be applied to any of the attributes of a child's identity, using the simple statements in the model. For example:

- A child might know their own gender (*I know who I am*) and the gender of others (*I know who you are*), but do they respect other genders (*I value who you are*) and feel proud of their own (*I value who I am*)?

- A child might be aware of their membership of a particular language group (*I know who I am*) but do they feel that their educators know what that language means to them (*you know who I am*)? Do they feel secure that their educators appreciate that attribute of their identity (*you value who I am*)?

These examples help to show that assessing whether or not a child has a strong sense of identity is not just about describing their attributes. It also involves evaluating how those attributes are understood and valued in the way that the child thinks and feels about themselves, and in their relationships with others in their world.

The next section explores each of these components of a strong sense of identity in more detail.

## Personal identity

### What is personal identity?

Personal identity is defined as how a child sees themselves. As shown in Figure 1, personal identity is the central construct in the model of a strong sense of identity developed for this review. It relates directly to the VEYLDF statement: *Children develop knowledgeable and confident self-identities* (VCAA 2017b).

As discussed in the introduction to this section, there are two elements to personal identity: awareness (*I know who I am*) and appreciation (*I value who I am*). When a child knows who they are, they demonstrate self-awareness and self-expression. When a child values who they are – that is, when they are strong in their sense of personal identity – they demonstrate self-esteem and self-efficacy.

### Self-expression

Self-expression is the external demonstration of a child's self-concept (Kim & Ko 2007). Self-concept refers to the child's individual awareness of their own characteristics and attributes, and the ways in which they are 'both like and unlike others'. It involves 'awareness of self as a separate, individual person, awareness of one's identity in a social world, and self-acceptance' (Castle 1974, p. 6). It is a fundamental component of a strong sense of identity referring to the child's awareness of who they are.

As a child develops, their self-expression becomes moderated by their self-regulation skills, which are a component of both executive function in the cognitive domain (Cloney, Jackson & Mitchell 2019) and self-management in the social and emotional learning domain (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning 2012). It involves the ability to moderate their self-expression to be appropriate for different circumstances (Ipp 2017). Self-expression can also vary across cultures and is considered more important in cultures that place a high value on the individual and uniqueness (Kim & Ko 2007).

### Self-awareness

Self-awareness, also known as self-knowledge, is one of the earliest aspects of self-concept to emerge in young children (Cherry 2019a). It refers to the awareness of one's self as a distinct individual, separate from others. As children develop, self-awareness involves knowledge of their own thoughts and feelings, or:

> the ability to accurately recognise one's emotions and thoughts and their influence on behavior. This includes accurately assessing one's strengths and limitations and possessing a well-grounded sense of confidence and optimism (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning 2012, p. 9).

**Self-esteem**

Self-esteem is defined as how an individual feels about themselves. While self-concept is a form of 'self-description', self-esteem is a form of 'self-evaluation' (Renshaw 2019a, p. 12). It includes:

> awareness of feelings of personal worth, beliefs in one's own abilities and competencies, ability to solve problems, ability to express one's preferences, ability to accept minor failures, and development of responsibility and independence (Castle 1974, p. 6).

**Self-efficacy**

Self-efficacy is another kind of self-evaluation, relating to whether an individual believes that they are capable of achieving a desired outcome in a particular situation (Bandura 1982). It is closely associated with one of the components of this Outcome as described in the VEYLDF in relation to children's 'emerging autonomy, inter-dependence, resilience and sense of agency' (VCAA 2017b). There is a connection to a child's disposition or their tendency to respond to situations in a certain way. Self-efficacy appears to be dependent on a number of interwoven factors, including how the child is feeling, the setting, the child's presumptions about the task and their belief about their own resources (Carr & Claxton 2002, p. 11).

## Why is personal identity important?

The four components of personal identity in this review are deeply inter-related and fundamental to a child's sense of identity. By being aware of who they are, and seeing value in who they are, children also establish a foundation from which to develop other components of identity. Research indicates that a strong sense of personal identity is essential to many other aspects of children's learning and development (Castle 1974).

A strong sense of personal identity has benefits for cognitive, emotional and even physical development. The ARACY review on identity found that 'having a positive perceived self-efficacy and self-concept, and a better rounded or "achieved" identity status, has been positively associated with academic and psychosocial outcomes among young people' (Renshaw 2019c, p. 4). Seeing other children succeed can raise a child's self-efficacy and motivate them to engage in a task, while negative emotional thoughts about their capabilities, or fear of failure, lowers their self-efficacy (Gregory, Herreen & Brinkman 2018, p. 20).

There is also a strong connection in recent literature between a strong sense of personal identity, and wellbeing and mental health in children (Armstrong et al. 2019). Conversely, low self-esteem has been associated with a wide range of problems throughout the life course, such as anxiety, drug abuse, delinquency and depression (Leary 2007). Promotion of self-esteem is also important because it is self-reinforcing: researchers argue that all people prefer to feel good rather than bad about themselves, and will behave in ways that promote self-esteem (Sedikides, Gaertner & Toguchi 2003).

In Australia, children's personal identity is also enshrined in human rights. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which Australia ratified in 1990, provides for every child's right 'to preserve his or her identity, including nationality, name and family relations' (United Nations General Assembly [UNGA] 1989). Children have these rights from the moment that they are born (Alderson 2008). The VEYLDF and the EYLF are aligned with the UNCRC, and the EYLF requires early childhood educators to 'reinforce in their daily practice the principles laid out in the UNCRC' (Australian Government 2009). Children's knowledge of their name, nationality and family members is, therefore, not only an important part of their sense of identity but also an expression of this right in everyday practice.

## Tools for assessing sense of personal identity in the early years

The assessment of constructs like self-esteem and self-efficacy has a strong tradition in psychology, especially in relation to older children, adolescents and adults. Researchers who study how people think about themselves have been 'particularly interested in the so-called self-conscious emotions – shame, guilt, embarrassment, social anxiety and pride' (Leary 2007, p. 319). However, in 1984, Harter and Pike noted that little attention had been paid to measurement of these constructs in young children. The use of assessment tools for these constructs with young children, therefore, remains relatively new. This was reinforced in the 2019 ARACY review, which noted that few direct assessments of young children's personal identity were available and that most assessment relied on educator or parent reporting:

> This is not to suggest that young children do not hold valid views or cannot articulate their sense of identity and culture, just that there are limited validated tools developed for this purpose in the Australian context (Renshaw 2019c, p. 9).

Other research on child wellbeing has shown that children's views of their own wellbeing can differ from their parents' views, supporting the value of direct assessments of children's own perspectives (Riley 2004).

While our review identified tools that measured one or more components of personal identity, only one of these covered all four components and only two were for use with children under three years of age:

- The Pictorial Scale of Perceived Competence and Social Acceptance for Young Children (Harter & Pike 1984) assesses across the four personal identity subdomains of self-expression, self-awareness, self-esteem and self-efficacy, as well as the outgroup recognition area within social identity (outward).

- The Behavioral Rating Scale of Presented Self-Esteem for Young Children measures self-expression, self-esteem and self-efficacy, as well as communication from the social identity (inward) component (Haltiwanger & Harter 2018).

- The Berkeley Puppet Interview investigates children's self-awareness using large puppet characters to ask children about their identity (Measelle et al. 1998). It builds on a study by Eder (1989), which found that children as young as three-and-a-half could demonstrate self-awareness by answering questions about their own and others' emotional states. The study found that self-awareness for preschool-age children related to the recollection of how they felt about specific events, but that children were able to describe patterns and traits in their own and others' behaviours by age seven or eight (Eder 1989).

## How can early childhood professionals assess a sense of personal identity?

If personal identity is something that develops within a child's own internal thoughts and feelings, early childhood professionals may wonder how they can possibly assess it. One answer lies in focused observation. There are some clues in the VEYLDF about what professionals may observe:

- Children talk about who they are, communicate and engage in local, social and cultural practices.

- Children explore different identities and points of view (for example, dramatic play).

- Children use their home language, and share aspects of their culture.

Self-expression is perhaps the most readily observable component of personal identity. Self-expression in young children is often associated with the arts – such as language (Cappello 2006), music and visual arts, including using digital media (Sakr 2017) – but may also be present in the everyday choices that children make, such as what food they eat and the clothing they like to wear. Drawing is a typical way that children express themselves and 'their feeling of who they really are, who they want to be' (Raburu 2015, p. 100).

This review encourages early childhood professionals to sharpen their observations about children's sense of personal identity and increase the available tools for knowing what children are thinking and feeling. In developing improved assessment practices, professionals must recognise that children and families will approach personal identity in a variety of ways. Assessment of personal identity involves being attuned to factors that may affect how a child expresses their personal identity, including their level of self-regulation (which may mean their self-expression varies in different contexts) and their cultural background (recognising that children *within* specific cultural groups may also express themselves in very different ways).

Adverse assessments of some aspects of personal identity, such as self-esteem, can be associated with clinical mental health issues. This review is not intended to equip early childhood professionals to conduct assessments for clinical diagnosis or to replace the need for expert support from referral services. Instead, it aims to equip professionals to support the development of personal identity for all children, based on evidence that self-esteem and self-efficacy can be taught and learnt. Early childhood professionals are well-positioned to achieve this, through their close relationships with children and families.

## Social identity (inward)

### What is social identity (inward)?

In this review, the inward component of a child's social identity is defined as how the child believes that they are seen by others. Like personal identity, this component of a strong sense of identity includes awareness *(you know who I am)* and appreciation *(you value who I am)*. These relate directly to the component of this Outcome identified in the VEYLDF, that *children feel safe, secure and supported*. It also relates to children's autonomy: if identity is conceived as 'concerned with persuading others and oneself about who one is, and what one is able to do', then it follows that 'the judgement of others is crucial' (Gipps 2002, p. 80).

As shown in Figure 1, the inward component of social identity is divided into four interrelated domains. When a child feels *known* by others with whom they interact, they demonstrate a strong sense of attachment and communication. When the child feels appreciated by others, they demonstrate a sense of security and trust.

### Attachment

Attachment is a significant theory in early years development. In this review, attachment is defined as a child feeling that an adult is aware of their presence and attuned to their needs. The VEYLDF defines attachment as having attentive, affectionate, consistent, available, attuned adults as a source of comfort and reassurance (DET 2016, p. 18). In the research literature, attachment theory has two core concepts:

1. The parent–child relationship helps regulate the child following threatening events.

2. Early relationships shape a child's internal working model of the world, which subsequently operates throughout the life span to influence how an individual perceives and copes with threat (Gunnar & Doyle 2016, p. 109). Like self-awareness, this 'internal working model' is formed based on a child's recollection of specific events, in which they received support from their parent.

### Communication

Communication relates to a child feeling that others understand them. The VEYLDF explains how expressing one's self in ways that are understood by others is an integral part of developing a strong sense of identity:

> Children's wellbeing, identity, sense of agency and capacity to make friends is connected to the development of communication skills, and strongly linked to their capacity to express feelings and thoughts, and to be understood (DET 2016, p. 22).

The VEYLDF also recognises that 'the acquisition and maintenance of first or home languages has a significant and continuing role in the construction of identity' (DET 2016, p. 10). Verdon et al. explain the lifelong impact that a child's first language has on their academic, social and emotional outcomes (2018, p. 5).

### Security

Security is a 'sense of "belonging" or "safety" in specific spaces', which may include home or ECEC environments, as well as public and virtual spaces (Renshaw 2019c, p. 12). The VEYLDF recognises the importance of children feeling 'safe and secure', including through 'close attachment and kinship': 'In order to form a strong sense of self, children need to build secure relationships first within families and then with caring, attentive adults and other children in the places they spend time' (DET 2016, p. 18).

While attachment is the foundation of security, this report separates these two constructs into the awareness (knowing) and appreciation (valuing) components of the conceptual model (Figure 1). This is because security is a specific quality of an attachment when the child feels loved and valued (Cherry 2019b).

### Trust

Trust is the key ingredient in relationships, from which a strong sense of security can develop (Roberts 2017). The VEYLDF recognises 'reliance on others' as an important element of young children's learning, as well as 'learning to be relied on' (DET 2016, p. 18). Research indicates that three factors form elements of trust: reliability, emotional trust and honesty (Betts, Rotenberg & Trueman 2009). The level of trust that children feel towards others develops through a complex system of relationships, which expands as the child grows older (McNally & Slutsky 2018). It, therefore, extends beyond a child's immediate secure attachments to the wider community.

### Why is social identity (inward) important?

The importance of secure attachments has been long recognised in early childhood research. In 1969, Bowlby explained how early social interactions contribute to a child's later functioning, in particular the developmental significance of a child's relationship with their parents. This can affect all aspects of learning and development, as early attachments 'have critical consequences for an individual's social and emotional functioning and associated developmental outcomes' (Morley & Moran 2011, p. 1072).

The way that children perceive how others see them provides an important link between their experiences (external stimuli) and their personal (internal) development. The EYLF explains this connection:

> Identity is not fixed. It is shaped by experiences. When children have positive experiences they develop an understanding of themselves as significant and respected, and feel a sense of belonging. Relationships are the foundations for the construction of identity – 'who I am', 'how I belong' and 'what is my influence?' (Australian Government 2009, p. 20).

For early childhood professionals, this confirms that the ways that children experience relationships in ECEC settings have lasting effects on their lifelong development, from the first cuddle to the last wave goodbye.

This component is especially important in the earliest years of life. In the first two years, warm, responsive relationships with parents are essential for teaching children to trust and for helping them to learn to deal effectively with frustration, fear and other negative emotions (Raikes & Thompson 2006). During these years, children learn whether or not they will be responded to by others and how much they can trust those around them. Learning to explore is a fundamental task of infants and toddlers, and they are more confident in their explorations when they are confident that their parents will be available when they return.

The inward aspect of social identity is especially important for vulnerable children. Research shows particular benefits of secure, trusting relationships for children from disadvantaged backgrounds (McNally & Slutsky 2018) and for children who have experienced trauma (Gunnar & Doyle 2016; Perry 2005). Adverse experiences of attachment can also increase vulnerability, with research showing that 'early experiences in non-secure attachment relationships place an individual at risk for developing a cognitive framework that increases their vulnerability to depression following stressful life events' (Morley & Moran 2011, p. 11).

All children have a right to be known, recognised and heard. This includes the right to freedom of expression, thought, conscience and religion, and to express their views freely 'in all matters affecting the child' (UNGA 1989). The extent to which children are genuinely consulted and engaged in decisions and actions can strongly influence their sense of agency and emerging autonomy (Alderson 2008).

Children also have the right to feel loved and secure. The UNCRC notes the importance of secure family relationships to children's sense of self: 'for the full and harmonious development of [their] personality [children] should grow up in a family environment ... of happiness, love and understanding' (UNGA 1989). Early childhood professionals, therefore, have a responsibility to support families to provide this kind of environment for children and to aim for 'happiness, love and understanding' in ECEC settings.

## Tools for assessing social identity (inward) in the early years

The focus of this review is on assessment of the child and how they demonstrate the development of attachment, communication, security and trust. It also focuses on ECEC settings in which early childhood professionals work. While recognising the absolute importance of the family, and other relationships, in the development of social identity (inward), tools that measure the home environment and family functioning are outside the scope of this review. Tools that may be useful for assessing this construct include:

- Both the Berkeley Puppet Interview (Measelle et al. 1998) and Strange Situation (Ainsworth et al. 1978) measure attachment and security within this domain. The Strange Situation has been used in child development research over many years and is considered the classic test of attachment in children aged between nine and 18 months.

- There is a communication component to several of the tools reviewed for this project. Learning Stories (Carr & Lee 2012) and the Ages and Stages Questionnaire – Talking about Raising Aboriginal Kids (ASQ–TRAK) (D'Aprano et al. 2016) can be used for children under six years, while the Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scale 2 (BERS-2) (Epstein 2004) uses a parent's report to assess communication and trust in children from age six years and older.

- The Early Childhood Generalized Trust Belief Scale (Betts et al. 2009) is a single-purpose assessment measuring trust in children aged between five and eight years.

## How can early childhood professionals assess social identity (inward)?

Assessing the inward component of social identity means monitoring how a child's interactions with others shape how the child feels about themselves. This begins with early childhood professionals paying close attention to the impact of their own responses on children's sense of whether they are known and valued. The VEYLDF encourages professionals to 'show sensitivity to the messages they convey about the child's and family's unique abilities' (DET 2016, p. 10). Taking time to reflect on how a child responds to a particular interaction (verbal or non-verbal) can provide insight into how they are feeling.

Like personal identity, the inward component of social identity can be difficult to detect. A child who has not developed a sense of security may avoid or withdraw from interactions, and may 'slip under the radar' while professionals attend to children who express their needs more forcefully. In busy ECEC settings, extra effort may be required to observe whether or not all children are feeling secure and included, while also recognising that withdrawal from the group may also be an expression of security for children who enjoy some time alone.

Infants and toddlers are often expert at communicating their sense of security. Research shows that 'healthy infants and toddlers will show preferential attachments to parents, are eager to explore novel objects and spaces, and enjoy initiating and responding to social interactions' (Fernald et al. 2017, p. 37). A baby's playful engagement in back-and-forth exchanges demonstrates that their sense of trust is emerging.

Children and families from diverse cultures have an equal need to feel that they belong, and may have different ways of expressing trust and attachment. Understanding language and culturally relevant practices helps educators to recognise how a child's sense of identity is developing (Renshaw 2019c). Celebrating and fostering culture is a source of strength for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families (National Children's Commissioner 2015). Every child brings their family's way of communicating thoughts and feelings into ECEC services (Hamel & Pelphrey 2009). Effective assessment involves being attuned to these ways.

## Social identity (outward)

### What is social identity (outward)?

In this review, the outward component of social identity is defined as how the child's view of other people shapes their view of themselves. This definition recognises that how an individual feels and behaves towards other people not only reflects, but also shapes, their own sense of identity. The VEYLDF recognises that fostering respect for diversity is important in shaping a strong sense of identity for all children:

> Values and attitudes, understandings of community and individual, and ways of communicating and behaving, all impact on children's sense of belonging and acceptance. When children experience acknowledgement of and respect for diversity, their sense of identity becomes stronger (DET 2016, p. 12).

This component includes awareness of others (*I know who you are*) and appreciation of others (*I value who you are*). Awareness includes identification of ingroups, to which the child belongs, and outgroups, to which others belong. Appreciation of others includes respect and empathy – two essential concepts in the VEYLDF.

### Ingroup identification

Ingroup identification is the extent to which a child includes membership of social groups in their own sense of identity (Tropp & Wright 2001). It relates to collective self-concept, or 'a person's sense of self as a group member' (Renshaw 2019a, p. 3). The ability to recognise one's self as a member of a group develops from the first few years of a child's life, beginning with the identification of one's self as a member of a family and developing as children gain exposure to broader social networks (Renshaw 2019b).

Cultural identity has been identified as an important component of ingroup identification. Young children may not initially understand their cultural group as an abstract idea (for example, labelling themselves as a particular ethnicity) but may instead understand it in terms of the shared experiences of people in that group, such as language, foods, festivals or stories (Renshaw 2019b). The VEYLDF identifies enabling children to use and maintain their first language, and respecting Aboriginal perspectives, as ways in which professionals can help children to feel that the experiences of people in their own cultural group belong in their ECEC setting. Connection to place or Country, and the natural environment, are other tangible symbols of group identity (DET 2016, p. 18).

### Outgroup recognition

Outgroup recognition is the extent to which the child identifies groups to which they do not belong, and incorporates this 'otherness' into their own sense of identity. Children's awareness of other social groups also begins developing early in life. Parker-Rees explains: 'As they learn about the distinctiveness of others, infants also come to learn who they are, co-constructing a personal social identity' (2014, p. 367).

While children tend to rate their own group as most desirable, outgroup recognition should not be confused with the development of prejudice. Research shows that a child's liking for their own group does not necessarily translate into a dislike for other groups (Cameron et al. 2001; Kowalski 2003). This shows the importance of connecting awareness of others with appreciation of their differences. A healthy sense of identity helps children to be more open to other communities and not to fear differences (Jelic 2014, p. 225).

### Empathy

Empathy is the ability to understand and share the perspective of others, and is one of a suite of essential social and emotional skills. While empathy contributes to many VEYLDF Outcomes, this review is concerned with the contribution that empathy towards others makes to a child's own sense of identity. As children develop the ability to understand the perspectives of others, they also develop greater awareness of themselves. For example, a Harvard University study demonstrated how children's empathy and self-awareness grew together when they learnt about their place in the broader global context (Salmon, Gangotena & Melliou 2018).

### Respect

Having respect for others contributes to a child's sense of identity by enabling them to engage curiously and constructively with difference, and to recognise their own distinctive qualities as worthy of appreciation. The VEYLDF emphasises the importance of learning from others, requiring professionals to:

> maximise opportunities for all children to do well and learn from others, including opportunities to experience diversity and difference in ways that nurture positive attitudes, and care and respect for others (DET 2016, p. 12).

Respect may be understood and demonstrated differently in different cultures and environments, with some cultures placing a high value on respect for adult authority among young children (Fernald et al. 2017).

### Why is social identity (outward) important?

The outward aspect of social identity has clear benefits for fostering the internal aspect of social identity. When children express awareness, empathy and respect towards others, other children benefit from the resulting higher levels of trust and security. Like all social and emotional outcomes, development of this Outcome in one child, therefore, directly benefits the learning and development of others. Children who experience inclusive, respectful ECEC environments are more likely to thrive in childhood and beyond. How children see others also benefits how they see themselves. The VEYLDF describes how a child's awareness of themselves in the context of others can help to build their confidence: 'A strong sense of identity enables a child to be confident, and to recognise and accept that in any social setting there are consequences for their actions and behaviours' (DET 2016, p. 18).

Recognising the social identities and perspectives of others also makes children feel better able to give voice to their own identity and to celebrate 'the fundamental aspects of ourselves' (Pelo 2005, p. 72).

Development of respect and empathy are also embedded within children's rights. Pettman describes how personal identity and social identity are the building blocks for rights-based teaching and learning:

> Any person, of any age, will struggle to appreciate and value the freedoms and rights of others if they themselves lack a strong sense of identity and self-worth. Teaching and nurturing these skills should begin early, focusing first on supporting development of a strong sense of identity and self-worth, and subsequently directly engaging with human rights values and principles (1986).

The UNCRC stipulates the central role of education in supporting development of a child's respect 'for civilisations different from his or her own' (UNGA 1989).

Respectful attitudes are especially important in societies that have experienced conflict between groups, so that all children grow up with identities oriented towards peace and reconciliation, rather than partisanship. The Northern Ireland Peace Project is an example of a deliberate strategy to build children's identities as citizens of a shared country, based on recognition of the strengths of both their ingroup and outgroup (Fitzpatrick 2007). The VEYLDF provides an example of respect for the resilience of the culture of Aboriginal peoples, which can help all Australian children develop strong identities that are built around reconciliation and hope:

> The yam daisy represents the survival of a strong Aboriginal identity. The yam daisy was central to the diet of Aboriginal Victorians. It was almost wiped out by colonisation but has survived (DET 2016, p. 17).

Children can also strengthen their own sense of identity by learning about how identity is formed in other cultures. For Aboriginal children 'connections to country, including through learning on country in the natural world, support identity' (DET 2016, p. 18). Learning about the strengths of Aboriginal identities has benefits for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children (Jackson-Barrett & Lee-Hammond 2018).

### Tools for assessing social identity (outward) in the early years

Assessment of social identity (outward), that is, how children see other groups, can involve observations of children's behaviours in social interactions, or discussion with children about others in their communities. Constructs such as ingroup identification and outgroup recognition can also be assessed using more formal measures, even from infancy. For example, one study explored ingroup identification and outgroup recognition by observing the choices of a 14-month-old child about which adults to imitate: either one speaking in their home language or one speaking a second language (Buttelmann et al. 2013). The study found that children expressed a preference for imitating the adults who belonged to their home linguistic group, indicating an emerging sense of self and other.

Some assessment tools examined in this review explore aspects of social identity (outward):

- The Berkeley Puppet Interview (Measelle et al. 1998) measures sense of ingroup identification and outgroup recognition in children older than three years of age.

- The second edition of the Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scale (BERS-2) can be used with older children to assess empathy and respect (Epstein 2004).

- While this review focuses on assessments of children, and not assessments of the learning environment, some readers may be interested in investigating the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale Extension (ECERS-E) (Sylva et al. 1998). This includes a diversity element intended to capture the way an ECEC program supports diverse cultures and languages. The Victorian Department of Education and Training has reviewed ECERS-E as a valid assessment tool (DET 2018). In exploring such tools, professionals should keep in mind that environmental assessment tools developed in other countries may not be designed to reflect or support the culturally diverse and Aboriginal perspectives of Australian ECEC.

### How can early childhood professionals assess social identity (outward)?

Many early childhood professionals are already fostering ECEC environments that celebrate diversity and inclusion. This reflects the VEYLDF Practice Principle of 'equity and diversity', which recognises that 'children feel welcome and learn well when professionals respect and acknowledge their unique identity' (DET 2017). Educators can build respect for diversity through supporting children to engage with families and communities, or by taking action to address bullying and discrimination (Renshaw 2019c). Recognising diverse concepts of play is another way to create inclusive ECEC environments (Adair & Doucet 2014).

Assessment of children's awareness and appreciation in relation to others often occurs through observing their social interactions or through two-way interactions in which children can express their views. There are many moments in ECEC settings in which children may reveal their developing views about others, including in dramatic play, collaborative learning experiences or reading books that challenge them to think about others in more empathetic and respectful ways. Early childhood educators may use these experiences as opportunities to assess children's emerging respect for diversity, as well as to foster it.

Conversely, assessment itself can be an opportunity to foster respect for diversity, by experimenting with different ways of knowing and seeing. Cannella and Grieshaber encourage teachers to reflect on how their own identities might bias their observations, and to 'encourage children to explore multiple ways of seeing what happens in their interactions with each other' (2001, p. 177). Evaluating events through multiple perspectives can help all children recognise their own unique strengths, as well as those of each other.

Young children may express their understandings of respect in different ways. Bennett (2011) found that children are capable of describing the different status of social groups, in ways that reflect external judgments. Other researchers have found that young children's understanding of respect may be closely related to ideas of fairness, and the belief that everyone should be treated equally (Englemann & Tomasello 2019). Learning to treat others fairly helps to build children's confidence that they will be treated fairly in return.

### What are children's trajectories of sense of identity in early childhood?

Assessment of each Learning and Development Outcome in the VEYLDF involves monitoring the progress of a child's learning and development, and looking for growth in their level of knowledge, skill or capability. How does a sense of identity develop over time, and how can early childhood professionals observe growth in this domain?

This section looks at research about the development of a child's sense of identity over time, and how the many component areas of identity relate to one another. It considers particular transition points that may influence development of identity, and discusses the connection between identity and executive function.

#### How does a child's sense of identity develop over time?

There is a developmental aspect to identity that is associated with a child's increasing social circle. The changing sense of a child's identity has parallels with Bronfenbrenner's (2005) ecological model of child development. This model situates the child within an expanding environment, from the home and family, and outwards to the wider community of ECEC, and community-based services (Jackson et al. 2019).

The specific areas of identity discussed earlier develop over time, including from early childhood into the school years, and from school into adulthood. The formation of a child's sense of self and connection to family and community begins at birth, and infants as young as three to six months can distinguish individuals by age, gender and race, and display a preference for their native language.

> Even at this young age, children are sensitive to the messaging they receive about the identity and cultural markers that they associate with or that have been externally attributed to them (Renshaw 2019b, p. 7).

Babies observe the people around them, developing cognitive models of their attachment figures (Sherman, Rice & Cassidy 2015). By age five, children can subjectively identify with specific social groups and assess their relative status.

> Therefore, it is never too early to promote positive and constructive messages about people and groups with a diverse array of characteristics and abilities; and to facilitate peer relationships based on supportive and non-competitive group norms (Renshaw 2019b, p. 8).

Transition points are of particular interest in the development of identity. Moving into an ECEC setting or starting school means changes in physical and learning environments, rules and routines, social status and identity, and relationships for children and families, 'all of which result in tensions between change and stability and between adjusting to new challenges and preserving old patterns' (Hirst et al. 2011, p. 11).

Each child's sense of identity develops differently, according to their individual context and community.

> For children from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, having access and exposure to the transmission of language, beliefs, practices, heritage and history has increased importance in establishing meaningful connections and pride in their cultural identity. Extended family and community elders often have an important role in this transmission (Renshaw 2019b, p. 8).

Although early childhood professionals face the challenge of catering for diverse developmental trajectories for children, the literature in this area is limited. There is research specific to the development of identity in Aboriginal children (Colquhorn & Dockery 2012; Purdie & McCrindle 2004), and recognition of the potential impact on identity development for children in child protection and out-of-home care. The importance of early and effective treatment for children affected by trauma and loss, and for vulnerable children, is acknowledged in reviews about identity, such as Krakouer et al. (2017).

Identity continues to develop into early middle childhood and through to adolescence when 'exposures to negative stereotypes, bullying or discrimination can impact on self-concept, self-esteem, aspirations and perceptions of self-efficacy. This in turn can have negative effects on academic and mental health outcomes' (Renshaw 2019b, p. 9).

Early adulthood (a period for most people stretching from 20 to 30 years of age) is another major period of identity development. Given that many early childhood professionals work with young adults, either as colleagues or as parents of the children in their care, it is useful to recognise that this is a time when new roles are emerging, including those of worker, partner or parent. Extending respect to parents undergoing identity development recognises that 'identity work needed to negotiate changing identity is uncomfortable and challenging … because identity is rooted in personal histories' (Boylan & Woolsey 2015, p. 2). When early childhood professionals extend empathy and respect towards parents, and make them feel that their identities are known and valued, this also has flow-on benefits for their child's sense of belonging.

### How do the components of a strong sense of identity relate to one another?

The personal and the social components of identity are interdependent, and develop alongside one another in deeply integrated ways. Using different terminology to describe the same idea or construct in psychology, education or public health can make it 'challenging to synthesise the research evidence about what programs are effective at improving different outcomes' (Gregory et al. 2018, p. 8). The interplay between internalisation and socialisation (Raeff 2014), and how children's interactions with others shape their internal 'sense' of self (Hymel et al. 1990), helps to explain the relationship between the social and personal components of the model that guides this literature review (see Figure 1), as well as the relationship between a child's sense of identity and other VEYLDF Learning and Development Outcomes. Executive function is central to early learning and development (Sylvia 2018); therefore, this review includes a discussion about the specific relationship between a strong sense of identity and executive function.

Perhaps the most critical connection between the components of a strong sense of identity is contained within the Outcome itself: children need a *sense* of who they are (awareness) and this must be *strong* (valued). If this connection is broken, there is a risk that a child's sense of identity may develop in negative ways, including the erosion of self-esteem, attachment and empathy and respect towards others. This can be seen in children who become aware of aspects of their identity that they do not feel are valued within their communities, causing them to feel ashamed or to become unempathetic or disrespectful towards others. While trust develops as a result of responsive care, mistrust emerges when infants have to wait excessively for comfort or are treated harshly (Erikson 1995). These counterexamples illustrate the need for identity to be both 'sensed' (understood by the child, not just named by an adult) and 'strong' (positive and secure).

Assessment of the development of a strong sense of identity may, therefore, also involve observing indicators that a child's sense of identity may not be developing optimally. In ECEC settings, problematic development of identity might be demonstrated in behaviours such as reliance on others for approval, pride in one's own identity to the detriment of others or comments that indicate low self-esteem. Professionals can also be watchful for potential risks, which may include:

- the removal or absence of positive exposure to people, places and methods important for transferring family or cultural heritage

- a lack of parental and social support

- experiences of trauma, oppression, marginalisation and discrimination (Renshaw 2019b).

This review takes a strength-based approach to assessment of a strong sense of identity and focuses on tools that explore children's progress, rather than their difficulties. By examining tools that address all components of a strong sense of identity described in this review, it aims to encourage early childhood professionals to monitor children's development across all of these areas, recognising that progress in one component has flow-on effects for progress in the others. All components also depend on the protective and supportive factors that children experience in their ECEC, home and community environments. The knowledge and capabilities of early childhood professionals are among the most important of these factors.

### How does identity relate to executive function?

Children's sense of self, and the strength of their sense of self, is linked to components of executive function in a number of ways. Evidence shows it can also be harnessed in order to strengthen specific components of executive function, particularly inhibitory control (known also as self-regulation) and working memory. There is research showing the relationship between internalising problems and executive function (Wang & Zhou 2019). Aspects of children's identity may also affect how executive function is demonstrated and assessed (Garcia, Sulik & Obradovic 2019).

The self-reference effect refers to the tendency for people to remember more information when it is related to them, than when it is not. Where the self is implicated in information or a problem, people can more effectively encode (or process) that information (Symons & Johnson 1997). Experiments with young children have demonstrated that their performance on literacy, memory and numeracy tasks improve when the self-reference effect is employed (Turk et al. 2015). Researchers believe this may be due to a child's sense of self being something that is familiar, frequently accessed and associated with concrete knowledge (Lewis 2003).

Research has also explored the impact of adopted identities, through imaginary role-play, on children's inhibitory control. In one study, the 'Batman effect' describes how children adopting the characters of superheroes were found by one study to demonstrate improved inhibitory control and persistence when attempting a frustrating task (Carlson, White & Davis-Ungera 2014). Children pretending to be Batman (or a chosen superhero) worked harder and for longer without becoming as frustrated as others who didn't take on an identity. Researchers note that because pretending uses the same brain networks as real behaviour, role-playing someone who is competent and confident can enable children to translate these skills into real life (Carlson & White 2013). Persistence and emotional regulation relate to executive function through the skills of goal orientation: strategising and planning, time management and implementation.

While the Batman effect relates to the impact of adopted identities on inhibitory control, other researchers have theorised about the impact of imaginary role-play on children's ability to experience alternative identities and viewpoints. This may have implications not only for children's inhibitory control, but also for their cognitive flexibility and problem-solving. 'Experience with pretend play (including but not limited to identity-based play) may contribute to gains in executive function by providing a way to reframe real-world events and problems' (Carlson, White & Davis-Ungera. 2014). This has important implications for the practice of early childhood educators in terms of supporting and extending imaginary play, and supporting parents to do this at home.

Research has also found that children's identification with ingroups and outgroups can improve self-control, when measured in an experimental environment. One recent study revisited the Stanford marshmallow test to understand whether or not group identification had any impact on self-control: it did. Children who were placed in a group, and told that members of their group waited a long time compared with members of the 'other' group who did not, exhibited a greater degree of self-control (Doebel & Munakata 2018). This raises some interesting issues around the relationship between individual self-esteem and collective self-esteem.

Having defined the elements of identity in early childhood and established the value of using assessments of identity, there emerges the question of how to identify and select appropriate assessment tools. Section 2 provides a set of principles to guide assessment decisions.

# Section 2: Principles for assessing children as having a strong sense of identity

This section sets out principles for the assessment of a strong sense of identity. It is informed by the overriding principles of the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF): 'All children benefit when assessment reflects a whole-child approach that may include their health and wellbeing, reveals their strengths, and shows what might next be learnt' (DET 2016, p. 13).

In assessing children as having a strong sense of identity, educators face questions about how to select appropriate measures across phases of development, how to administer assessments, how to interpret the results, and how to translate their findings into planning and communication with parents. There are a number of sources that provide advice in this area. The American Psychological Association (1985) publishes standards for educational and psychological testing, and the World Bank describes 10 ideal characteristics of early childhood development assessment (Fernald et al. 2017, p. 63). For the purposes of the identity domain, we highlight six key principles of assessment that were used to guide the selection of assessment tools to measure children's sense of identity:

1. Assessment addresses established components of children's identity.

2. Assessment enables early childhood professionals to describe a trajectory of identity development.

3. Assessment is valid, reliable and fair.

4. Assessment is conducted in a way that enhances engagement and relationships.

5. Assessment includes children's self-assessment.

6. Assessment involves the child's community and informs professional partnerships.

To support children to enhance their sense of identity, early childhood professionals may find it useful to build their knowledge of developmentally appropriate assessment tools that measure the components of a strong sense of identity outlined in Section 1. To be most valuable, these assessments must be valid, reliable and fair for all, including culturally diverse groups; and must be useful to educators. Figure 2 illustrates these three criteria, which guided the selection of assessment tools evaluated in this review.

The following principles are specifically related to assessments for use by early childhood professionals for determining and tracking an individual child's developmental level to inform planning. These assessment principles are not about assessing quality of programs, ECEC settings or home learning environments

Relevance of construct
Does it measure a component of the outcome?

Usefulness for educators
Can it help educators to plan for learning?

Validity, reliability and fairness
Does it measure accurately and consistently?
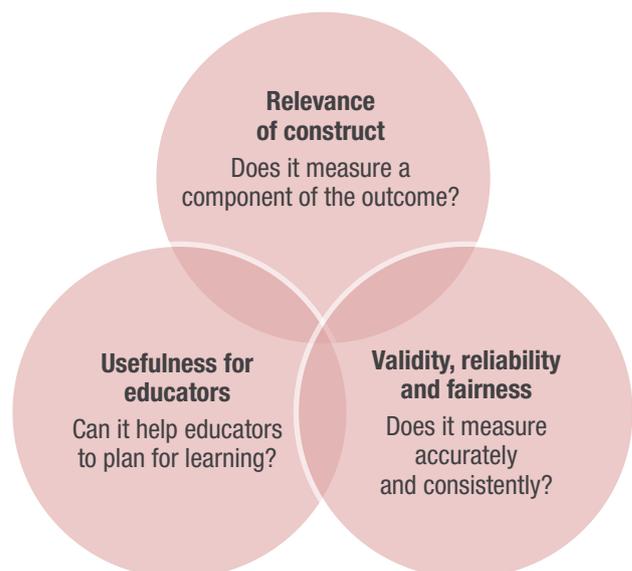
**Figure 2: Overview of assessment principles**

## Assessment addresses established components of children's identity

The first principle of any assessment is ensuring that it does, in fact, measure established components of a child's sense of identity. As discussed earlier, the components of a strong sense of identity are not as clearly defined in the research literature as other VEYLDF Learning and Development Outcomes, and professionals may end up 'patching together multiple tools and methodologies to measure a sense of identity both within and across domains' (Fernald et al. 2017, p. 63). The model shown in Figure 1 and the matrix of tools in Section 3 are both designed to make this 'patching together' easier for early childhood professionals, drawing on constructs established in the research: that is, personal identity, social identity (inward) and social identity (outward), as well as the subdomains of each of these. Once an educator is familiar with how the components of a strong sense of identity are described in research, they are able to assess if an assessment instrument is fit for purpose.

## Assessment enables early childhood professionals to describe a trajectory of identity development

As early childhood is a time of such rapid development, educators need to match assessments to the level and domain that is relevant to their planning for particular children. The usefulness of an assessment tool lies in being able to show variation across the period of development for which that tool is designed. In the area of identity, researchers are wary of describing a single trajectory of development, raising the possibility that different values and ways of behaving may change the rate or order in which abilities develop in different cultures; for example, using rules of social conduct and respect. This reflects that 'certain domains of early childhood development, such as social-emotional development, are likely to be more susceptible to cultural influences than other domains, such as motor development' (Fernald et al. 2017, p. 28).

Given the rapid development of children from birth to eight years of age, many assessments are valid for a limited developmental period. As this review discovered, there is no comprehensive set of tools that covers all the components of a strong sense of identity, across the birth-to-eight-years period. Repeating a particular assessment over time may be one way to deal with this challenge. The use of learning stories as an assessment template in New Zealand ECEC settings provides an example of this. A learning story records a moment in time that shows the performance of a child against selected outcomes. When used on multiple occasions over months and years, progress can be tracked on the depth and sophistication of the child's interactions (Carr & Claxton 2002, p. 22).

## Assessment is valid, reliable and fair

Validity refers to whether an assessment tool measures what it claims to measure, and reliability refers to its ability to produce valid results consistently, across contexts. While assessment tools are expected to have demonstrated both validity and reliability to appropriate standards of rigour, definitions of validity and reliability may vary for different types of tools, and in the domain of identity development, 'reliability and validity need to be determined within each cultural context' (Fernald et al. 2017, p. 75). For example, standardised tests may demonstrate validity using psychometric methods, whereas qualitative assessment tools may demonstrate validity by providing rich and valuable data that subject matter experts agree assesses the construct of interest. The *Te Whāriki* Learning Stories assessment in this review is an example of where validity and reliability has been demonstrated through expertise, rather than psychometric analysis (Carr & Claxton 2002). The template has been developed by well-respected researchers in early childhood and has been adopted by the New Zealand Ministry of Education as a key assessment tool for this age group.

The fairness or bias of assessments across different cultures is of particular concern in the assessment of a child's sense of identity. Researchers highlight the challenge of documenting children's 'multiple, partial and shifting identities in ethical and equitable ways' (Simpson-Dal Santo 2014). If an assessment is based on 'normal' identity for a particular group of children and then applied to another group of children, there is a risk that 'the latter group is vulnerable to being characterised as deviant, rather than different' (Fantuzzo et al. 1996, p. 1081). There are psychometric methods that can be used to empirically evaluate this, for example, the concept of differential item functioning (Hambleton & Rogers 1989). However, there are few instruments relevant to this review that have been validated across diverse groups. Professionals must, therefore, reflect critically on any assessment process that they choose to implement, to consider how it might be biased for or against particular children or families.

## Assessment is conducted in a way that enhances engagement and relationships

In the VEYLDF, a strong sense of identity depends on strong relationships to both develop and assess. Professionals who build strong, secure relationships with children and families are not only contributing to the development of each child's sense of identity, but are also gaining the trust and understanding that is necessary to assess how each child is thinking and feeling. Assessment of a child's sense of identity also depends upon observing their relationships with others in their communities, including other children. The social and the personal aspects of identity are interdependent, and develop alongside one another in deeply integrated ways. Observing a child's development of a strong sense of

social identity involves observing not only the individual, but the individual as part of a group.

A strength-based approach to assessment is an important part of early childhood professionals' relationships with children. Researchers investigating social skills in young children have concluded that many measures tend to assess from a negative orientation with the aim of identifying problems (Elliott et al. 1989). Changing the focus of assessment tools to prosocial behaviours is a positive direction for educators and researchers to pursue. Another path is to reinforce the importance of using a variety of different people when rating a preschooler's identity development. Multiple perspectives ensure a richer picture of the child.

## Assessment includes children's self-assessment

'Self-assessment can be a key motivator for each child to continue along a pathway toward new challenges and further success, especially if they are encouraged and supported in this practice' (DET 2016, p. 13). A strong sense of identity includes the development of children's autonomy and self-efficacy, so there are good reasons for involving children in the assessment of this outcome. Children are the only ones who can accurately monitor their internal thinking and feeling, and encouraging children to express these ideas in developmentally appropriate ways can prompt their own self-awareness and reflection. At the same time, a child's sense of identity may involve deeply personal, or even painful, elements and experiences. Professionals must, therefore, exercise sensitivity and judgment in encouraging children's self-assessment.

In past research, there has been some debate about the reliability of children's self-assessment in various domains, as their limited understanding of constructs may compromise validity (Fantuzzo et al. 1996, p. 1081; Hughes 1984). Others have stressed the importance of developing methods of preschool self-reporting to access the child's perceptions of their own internal states apart from potential parent and teacher biases (Beitchman & Corradini 1988; Martini, Strayhorn & Puig-Antich 1990); more recent research also indicates that self-reporting by the child is a better indicator of wellbeing than third-party (usually the parent) assessment (Riley 2004). When involving young children in self-assessment, early childhood professionals must be conscious of how the constructs are experienced by the child, which may differ from how they are defined by the adult. Recalling experiences, rather than naming abstract constructs, may facilitate children's self-assessment of their sense of identity.

## Assessment involves the child's community and informs professional partnerships

Collecting information on children's outcomes from a wide variety of sources can help educators to assess and plan more effectively. The context, including the protective and risk factors in the family and community in which the child is situated, is an important consideration when assessing a child's sense of identity.

Early childhood professionals should assess children in ways that:

- include the perspectives, knowledge, experiences and expectations of families

- provide families with information and ideas to support the child's learning at home and in other services

- value the culturally specific knowledge about children and their identity, wellbeing, learning and development that is embedded in their communities

- are transparent, giving all adults who are close to the child access to best 'next steps' in promoting a child's learning and development (DET 2016, p. 13).

Each child's community, particularly their immediate family, plays a vital role in shaping their sense of identity. In the area of identity, early childhood educators must be particularly sensitive to the way that identity is understood in these contexts. Children are embedded in cultural systems from birth, so almost all developmental capabilities are 'in some way affected by the opportunities children have to develop their skills, the attitudes and beliefs of their parents, and their parents' expectations for healthy development' (Fernald et al. 2017, p. 67).

An important principle of assessing a sense of identity is that it helps to strengthen collaborative partnerships and approaches to assessment for learning and development with families and children and also with other early childhood professionals (VCAA 2013, p. 9). Early childhood educators who work in partnership with other professionals collate and use the evidence of children's previous and current learning and development. This enables them to build continuity in learning and development across services and transition points (DET 2016, p. 16). To a lesser degree, the principles can act as an alert to potential issues that might indicate a need for referral to other professionals. Early childhood professionals can also benefit from resources developed by professionals in other sectors, for example social workers (Department for Education and Skills 2006).

These six principles guided the selection and evaluation of assessment tools in Section 3, and the development of the criteria against which the tools were reviewed. As with all literature reviews in this series, these tools are not necessarily intended to be used directly in ECEC settings, as many have been developed for use in clinical or research settings. They have been included to give early childhood professionals a deeper understanding of how a strong sense of identity may be demonstrated, and to consider adapting for their own contexts.

# Section 3: Summary matrix of tools for assessing children as having a strong sense of identity

Sections 3 and 4 identify and describe a sample of eight tools for assessing how well children are developing a strong sense of identity. This sample represents a spread of tools across the key components of identity, as well as across ages, and the tools are applicable across a range of early childhood education and care contexts. The tools on this list were selected according to the criteria in the previous section. Few available tools met all criteria because formal assessments of a strong sense of identity are relatively rare. These eight tools were selected to give early childhood professionals some ideas about how this outcome might be assessed, using measures that they can access reasonably easily.

Table 1 presents tools that can be accessed and/or administered by early childhood professionals to assess if children have a strong sense of identity.

**Table 1: Identity assessment tool summary**

| Tools | Age | | | Administration | | | Area assessed — Personal identity | | | | Area assessed — Social identity (inward) | | | | Area assessed — Social identity (outward) | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 0–3 | 3–6 years | 6+ years | Professional | Child | Parent | Self-expression | Self-awareness | Self-esteem | Self-efficacy | Attachment | Communication | Security | Trust | Ingroup identification | Outgroup recognition | Empathy | Respect |
| **Focus of tool: Personal identity** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| **Ages and Stages Questionnaire – Talking about Raising Aboriginal Kids (ASQ–TRAK)** | ● | ● | ● | ● | | ● | ● | | | | | ● | | | | ● | | |
| **Behavioral Rating Scale of Presented Self-esteem for Young Children** | | ● | ● | | ● | | ● | | ● | | | ● | | | | | | |
| **Pictorial Scale of Perceived Competence and Social Acceptance for Young Children** | | ● | ● | | ● | | ● | ● | ● | ● | | | | | | ● | | |

| Tools | Age | | | Administration | | | Area assessed | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | Personal identity | | | | Social identity (inward) | | | | Social identity (outward) | | | |
| | 0–3 | 3–6 years | 6+ years | Professional | Child | Parent | Self-expression | Self-awareness | Self-esteem | Self-efficacy | Attachment | Communication | Security | Trust | Ingroup identification | Outgroup recognition | Empathy | Respect |
| Te Whāriki Learning Stories | ● | ● | | ● | | | ● | | | | | ● | | ● | | | ● | |

**Focus of tool: Social identity – inward and outward**

| Tools | Age | | | Administration | | | Area assessed | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scale 2 | | ● | ● | ● | ● | ● | | | | | | ● | | ● | | | ● | ● |
| Berkeley Puppet Interview | | ● | ● | ● | ● | | | | | | ● | | ● | | ● | ● | | |
| Early Childhood Generalized Trust Belief Scale | | ● | ● | | | | | | | | | | | ● | | | | |
| Strange Situation | ● | | | ● | ● | ● | | | | | ● | | ● | ● | | | ● | |

# Section 4: Evaluation of existing tools for assessing children as having a strong sense of identity

As a set, the following eight assessment tools seek to cover the components of a sense of identity in children aged from birth to eight years. As well as assessing different constructs related to identity, these tools vary in quality, in type or mode of administration, and in who is the informant in the assessment (that is, the person who supplies the information during the assessment process, which may be the child or an adult).

The descriptions provided here may assist early childhood professionals in considering how the tool assesses a particular aspect of a strong sense of identity, whether or not the tool is useful for their context, what is involved in its administration, and how they can find out more about its value. The tools are presented in alphabetical order and can be referenced from the summary matrix in Section 3.

## Ages and Stages Questionnaire – Talking about Raising Aboriginal Kids

### Overview

The Ages and Stages Questionnaire – Talking about Raising Aboriginal Kids (ASQ-TRAK) is an adaptation of the Ages and Stages Questionnaire. It has been designed by a team at the Melbourne Graduate School of Education, University of Melbourne, in consultation with Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory in Australia, for use with Australian Aboriginal children up to four years of age (D'Aprano et al. 2016).

### Instrument description

The ASQ-TRAK contains parent questionnaires designed to assess Australian Aboriginal children at ages two months, six months, one year, 18 months, two years, three years and four years. It measures age-appropriate developmental milestones in five domains:

1. Communication
2. Fine-motor control
3. Gross-motor control
4. Problem-solving
5. Personal-social skills.

ASQ-TRAK is for use by early childhood educators, including in Families as First Teachers programs, and health professionals. It takes between 15 minutes and one hour to complete the questionnaire. Professionals provide parents with a standardised questionnaire appropriate to their child's age. Parents complete this pen-and-paper assessment themselves or the professional completes the form using their responses. The professional subsequently scores the responses according to a published rubric.

No specific qualification or training is required to administer the assessment, although a short course is recommended. There is a cost to purchase the tool and it can be ordered from the ASQ-TRAK website.

### Discussion

Although ASQ–TRAK does not specifically address children's identity, the tool measures constructs that are relevant to a strong sense of identity, in the domains of communication and personal-social skills. ASQ-TRAK is also an example of an assessment tool being adapted to a specific cultural group (Australian Aboriginal children). This work, and similar translations and adaptions of the Ages and Stages Questionnaires for other groups, shows that assessments themselves must adapt to children's identities (Clifford, Squires & Murphy 2017, p. 130).

The Melbourne Graduate School of Education recognised the absence of culturally appropriate developmental screening instruments for Australian Aboriginal children. They adapted the ASQ-3 (Squires et al. 2009) and D'Aprano and colleagues published ASQ-TRAK in 2016 as a developmental screening tool for Australian Aboriginal children. It has since been used in urban settings in South Australia (ASQ-TRAK n.d.).

The ASQ-3 has been evaluated as reliable and valid and, accordingly, is a well-accepted tool with high general utility. ASQ-TRAK has not been trialled to the same extent, although one study found promising indications of its validity (Simpson et al. 2016), and a clinical trial was registered but not completed (ANZCTR 2017). This means the tool is not yet widely used in research, but may be useful for practice.

While the ASQ-3 has been developed for children aged up to 66 months, the ASQ-TRAK has only been developed for children up to 48 months of age. The ASQ-TRAK questionnaires for each of the age-stages – from six to 48 months, are all normed against the ASQ-3 US sample. Accordingly, it describes a detailed and robust trajectory of a child's progress.

## Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scale 2

### Overview

The second edition of the Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scale (BERS-2) (Epstein 2004) assesses emotional and behavioural strengths in children aged five to 18 years of age. It collects data from three informants (the child, their parent and their teacher) using a separate scale for each of these informants.

### Instrument description

The assessment contains 52 items, measured using a four-point Likert scale. Each of the three scales takes approximately 10 minutes to complete. BERS-2 is a paper-based screening instrument comprised of five constructs:

1. Interpersonal strength
2. Family involvement
3. Intrapersonal strength
4. School functioning
5. Affective strength.

The five constructs can be aggregated to report on overall strengths. The second edition of the BERS-2 kit, published in 2004, includes rating scales and scoring manuals. BERS-2 is a commercial product that must be purchased.

### Discussion

BERS-2 is one of the few available measures of empathy and respect in early childhood. It is considered potentially useful for early childhood professionals, given the BERS-2 identified and validated a range of relevant factors using a strength-based approach (Gleason 2007). By collecting information from three sources (child, parent and educator), BERS-2 also helps define how a child's emerging empathy and respect might be expressed differently from different perspectives, including from the child themselves.

Described as 'a comprehensive set of standardised instruments to assess children's emotional and behavioural strengths' (Buckley & Epstein 2004), the results from an assessment conducted using BERS-2 can be reported on composite strength measures: an overall strength index and five constructs measuring interpersonal strength, family involvement, intrapersonal strength, school functioning, and affective strength. It was a particular focus of the authors to focus on strengths, rather than deficits.

BERS-2 is most often used to assess children with either physical disability or emotional or behavioural disorders, although it has been used with children without disability. There are many publications that reference BERS-2 or its earlier versions, although almost half of them are studies of reliability or validity of the three instruments. This means that the tool is very robust as a scientific measure of children's development, and has been used by state and federal agencies to evaluate the outcomes of ECEC services.

## Behavioral Rating Scale of Presented Self-Esteem for Young Children

### Overview

The Behavioral Rating Scale of Presented Self-esteem for Young Children (Haltiwanger & Harter 2018) is a teacher's rating of self-esteem in children aged four to seven years. It relates to children's sense of personal identity, *(I value who I am),* and is based on behaviours such as exploration, curiosity, initiative and independence.

### Instrument description

This assessment accommodates the reality that young children cannot readily verbally describe their sense of self-esteem or self-worth. It requires teachers, or other adults who know the child well, to fill out a 15-item observational rating scale. There is a freely downloadable article that describes the assessment and provides a copy of the scale and scoring sheet available online from Harter (2019).

The questionnaire asks teachers about the child in two categories:

- active displays of confidence, curiosity, initiative, exploration and independence
- adaptive reactions to change or stress. For example, whether the child is able to adjust to changes, is comfortable with transitions, tolerates frustration, perseveres and displays social-emotional expressions, such as smiling or manifesting pride in one's work (Haltiwanger & Harter 2018).

Items are readily observable and clearly stated, for example 'trusts his/her own ideas', 'knows what he/she wants', 'is able to make choices and decisions' and 'makes good eye contact'.

## Discussion

This tool was developed from open-ended interviews with experienced teachers asking them to describe these behaviours they feel are shown by children with high self-esteem and those with low self-esteem. This list was then tested with a different sample of experienced teachers. A final list of 15 behaviours that seemed to reliably distinguish between high and low self-esteem was chosen for this rating tool to define individual differences in 'presented self-esteem' based on teachers' judgments.

The rating scale has been used in a number of research studies and is rated as valid and reliable. When Verschueren, Buyck & Marcoen (1998) tested the same children at ages five and eight years, they found a high degree of stability in presented self-esteem using this tool. These researchers also compared teacher ratings using this tool, against children's self-perception on Harter's Pictorial Scale of Perceived Competence and Social Acceptance for Young Children (see p. 27). They found consistency across the tools except for gender. While there were no significant gender differences found on the child self-perception measure, significant gender differences emerged for the teacher rating scale. Teachers rated girls aged five years as showing more behavioural self-esteem than boys. At eight years of age, the gender difference in teacher ratings was smaller but still significant (Verschueren et al. 1998, p. 276). This suggests that early childhood professionals must be mindful of gender differences in how self-esteem may be developed and expressed.

## Berkeley Puppet Interview

### Overview

The Berkeley Puppet Interview (Measelle et al. 1998) uses an interactive technique to interview children aged from four to eight years. Two hand puppets make opposing statements about themselves. The puppets then ask children to describe themselves as most like one or other of the puppets.

### Instrument description

The designers of this assessment hope that using puppets for what is effectively a semi-structured interview, will feel like play to the children being assessed. This interview is conducted with two dog puppets, Iggy and Ziggy, who ask the child to indicate which of two opposing statements is most like them. The two statements reflect the positive and negative ends of different behaviors and attributes, for example, 'I tease other kids' and 'I don't tease other kids'. Children respond verbally or by pointing at the puppet who is most like them. Items are scored on a seven-point scale, from very negative (1) to very positive (7) (Ablow & Measelle 1995).

The puppets are a way of assessing children that can be used to measure a number of components of a child's sense of identity. In fact, there are several versions of the interview protocol that focus on different aspects of a child's social identity, and the questions have been translated into seven languages. The questions that make up the Berkeley Puppet Interview Social Scales (BPI-Soc) are particularly relevant for assessing ingroup identification and outgroup recognition, as they tap into children's perceptions of their teachers, the learning environment and their peers.

Other professionals working with families might use the Family Environment Scales to assess children's appraisals of their relationships with their parents and siblings, and of family processes such as marital conflict, perceived parental rejection and if they blame themselves for conflict (Measelle & Ablow 2018).

### Discussion

The Berkeley Puppet Interview is described as an evidence-based assessment tool for preschoolers and children ages four-to-eight years (Ablow & Measelle n.d.). The original technical evidence was based on 97 children from two-parent households in the San Francisco Bay area (RAND 2018) and it has since been used with socioeconomically, culturally and clinically diverse samples (Ablow & Measelle n.d.). The tool has also been used as a measure in more than 100 published peer-reviewed studies.

The authors recommend formal training before using the Berkeley Puppet Interview. This is to ensure consistency in use of the tool across multiple interviewers which is particularly important for its use in formal research projects (Measelle & Ablow 2018). Educators will recognise that the puppet interview format is flexible and could be adapted to a variety of circumstances to meet the needs of particular areas of assessment.

## Early Childhood Generalized Trust Belief Scale

### Overview

The Early Childhood Generalized Trust Belief Scale (ECGTBS) is a direct assessment of generalised trust in individual early school-aged children (five-to-eight years old), published by Betts, Rotenberg and Trueman (2009). Children complete a questionnaire about reliability, emotional trust and honesty in the general targets of mothers, fathers, teachers and peers.

### Instrument description

The ECGTBS was developed from the Childhood Generalized Trust Belief Scale (CGTBS) (Rotenberg et al., 2005) for nine- to 11-year-olds but adjusted and simplified for younger children. The tool has 24 items that outline

a short scenario. Children select a response on a Likert scale, which shows the extent to which they trust the target in the scenario: (1) very unsure to (5) very sure. The items examine children's belief in how trustworthy their mothers, fathers, peers and teachers are in relation to the areas of reliability trust, emotional trust and honesty trust.

It takes 30 to 40 minutes to undertake the assessment. The items can be read to participants individually or in small groups of five or six same-gender peers. Participants are instructed to work independently, and that there are no right or wrong answers. The assessment is not available commercially, however the items are published in the appendix of Betts et al. (2009).

## Discussion

Rotenberg's interpersonal trust framework (2001) was used to guide the development of the ECGTBS. The reliability base relates to the extent to which an individual fulfils their promises. The emotional base refers to the extent to which an individual refrains from causing emotional harm to others through being receptive to disclosures, maintaining confidentiality, refraining from criticism, and avoiding acts that elicit embarrassment. The honesty base reflects the extent to which an individual is telling the truth and engages in behaviours with a benign, rather than a malicious, intent. The target dimensions pertain to how familiar and specific the target is to the individual providing the ratings. The cognitive or affective and behavioural domains further differentiate the bases of trust. The cognitive or affective domain pertains to an individual's belief that another individual would engage in behaviour pertinent to the associated base of trust. The behavioural domain corresponds to an individual's behavioural reliance on others.

The tool was developed using 211 children (103 male and 108 female) with a mean age of six years and two months. These children completed the ECGTBS twice over a year. A subsample of participants completed the ECGTBS after two weeks to assess the scale's test–retest reliability. Analysis confirmed that the ECGTBS assessed the three factors of reliability, emotional trust and honesty. However, the ECGTBS demonstrated low-to-modest internal consistency and test–retest reliability, which indicated a need for further development of the instrument. The authors of the tool have conducted ongoing research and reported findings from children in the United Kingdom and Italy.

## Pictorial Scale of Perceived Competence and Social Acceptance for Young Children

### Overview

The Pictorial Scale of Perceived Competence and Social Acceptance for Young Children (PSPCSA) (Harter & Pike 1983) assesses self-perception using a pictorial format that is appropriate for young children with limited verbal ability. It focuses on concrete pictures of familiar activities. The pictures and the manual for using the tool are available via a free download from Harter (2019).

### Instrument description

Following the success of their Perceived Competence Scale for Children (Harter 1982) the researchers looked to construct a developmentally appropriate method for assessing self-perception in young children (Harter & Pike 1984). The pictorial format of the tool asks the child to distinguish between two pictures of children engaged in an activity or social interaction, and indicate which of the pair is most like them: 'Which child is most like you? Is the child in the picture a lot like you (score 4 or score 1) or just a little (score 3 or score 2)?' Each pair of pictures represents differing degrees of interaction, with one showing a successful or positive situation and the other a less successful or negative situation, for example the target child playing with friends or isolated from the peer group.

There are two versions of the tool: one for preschoolers and a second version for early school-age children. Both have separate sets of pictures for boys and girls. The child responds to 24 Likert format questions across the four domains of cognitive competence, physical competence, peer acceptance and maternal acceptance.

### Discussion

In developing the tool for younger children, Harter and Pike sought to improve on other measures of self-concept by providing a greater range of responses for each item. They gave four choices, rather than the more typical two choices of true or false. They also worked to reduce children's tendency to give the socially desirable response (Harter 1982). The authors used pictures to solve the problem of young children's limited verbal capacity.

At least 34 studies had used the PSPCSA with preschool children by 1994 (Fantuzzo et al. 1996, p. 1072). It has been noted that this tool was developed using a sample of 90 white, middle-class preschool children from a single geographic region. Fantuzzo et al. questioned if the PSPCSA format is developmentally appropriate for preschool children based on their replication of the study with data collected from a sample of culturally diverse children aged 48 to 64 months. This serves as a reminder to educators to evaluate the cultural appropriateness of any assessment tool that uses pictorial or textual material

(Fantuzzo et al. 1996). Selection of assessments requires input from professionals who know the cultural context of the children being assessed.

The Measures Database (Education Endowment Foundation 2019) gives a single-star rating to the PSPCSA in terms of its psychometric properties. Some weak correlations between the judgments of children and teachers have been explained as a young child's tendency to confuse the wish to be competent or accepted with their own reality. While this means that the tool is not as robust as assessment tools with high levels of psychometric validity, it may still provide some ideas for how children's self-concept may be measured.

## Strange Situation

### Overview

Strange Situation (Ainsworth et al. 1978) is designed to be used with young children between nine and 18 months of age. It measures attachment, security and trust through a series of situations in which infants are observed while they are separated from and reunited with parents and when they are left alone with strangers in a room.

### Instrument description

Strange Situation is a 20-minute structured observation. When undertaken as a formal assessment, the procedure uses a dedicated room measuring 3 metres by 3 metres, with video recording facilities and furnished to encourage infant play and exploration. A professional observer introduces the child and their parent to the room, then withdraws and operates the recording equipment. There are several videos online that illustrate Strange Situation (Psychology Unlocked 2017) and educators who are interested in the exact procedure can read descriptions of how to run the assessment in research articles, such as Ainsworth and Bell (1970). From the video of the infant's behaviour a professional can classify the child as exhibiting one of four types of attachment.

### Discussion

Strange Situation has been described as 'the canonical laboratory test of infant behaviour toward the caregiver' (Sherman et al. 2015, p. 111), and there is a significant body of research that describes its effectiveness as a test for secure attachment. Designed in 1969, the original study used 56 white, middle-class infants, 49 to 51 weeks of age. It is specifically intended for use with infants under two years of age, as a one-off snapshot of an infant's attachment style, and is mainly used by psychologists, social workers and other clinicians.

Given that attachment is such a strong predictor of the subsequent social development of the child, professionals need to weigh up potential concerns about the length of this procedure, the 'laboratory style' setup and the distress caused to the infant, with the benefit of early identification of attachment issues. Strange Situation is not a tool for measuring developmental progress and is not intended for repeated administration. Other tools to assess attachment style are available for older children, usually based on self-reporting. However self-reporting is not feasible for assessing infants.

By viewing or reading about Strange Situation, early childhood educators can develop their understanding of of what secure attachment looks like, and use this knowledge when observing children in everyday situations involving relationships with both parents and strangers. Strange Situation shows that the presence of the parent encourages a secure child's exploratory behaviour, and their absence causes a reduction in exploration and heightens the child's attachment behaviours. When separated from a trusted parent, a child cries and their searching behaviour increases. When the child and parent are reunited the child wants to stay close and in contact. In a substantial number of cases, children also resisted contact in the reunion. Some children also display avoidance behaviour in relation to the parent in the reunion.

## Te Whãriki Learning Stories

### Overview

In contrast to many of the tools already discussed, which tend to be limited in scope or availability, learning stories are included to illustrate a more flexible type of assessment. Learning stories are a classroom-based assessment tool that records and interprets an aspect of a child's learning and development in a story (Hazard 2011). This is a narrative style of assessing against outcomes and is based on careful observation often using standardised templates. The Learning Stories model outlined in research by Carr and Lee (2012) has influenced early educators in New Zealand, and is reflected in their early childhood curriculum, *Te Whãriki* (Ministry of Education 2017). This is a specific example of using learning stories to assess the progress of each child against specific early childhood outcomes in a play-based curriculum.

**Instrument description**

In Carr and Lee's Learning Stories, careful observations are combined with reflective practice to build a picture of a child's development. Assessment follows outcomes from New Zealand's *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education 2017) and each learning story records a moment in time that shows the performance of the student against selected outcomes. The audience for this assessment is the educator, the child and the child's family. The steps for developing learning stories are specified as follows:

1. Write the story – the educator describes what the child did and said, and adds the educator's perspective on it, then adds a title.

2. Read to the child – the educator reads the story to the child and listens for comments and feedback and records them separately or adds them into the story.

3. Plan – the educator reflects on the completed story and describes what they will do to enhance or extend the play.

4. Connect to families – the educator provides a copy of the story to the family, along with a note asking for their feedback (Carr & Lee 2012).

When used on multiple occasions over months and years, progress can be tracked by the depth and sophistication of the child's interactions.

**Discussion**

While the *Te Whāriki* Learning Stories model may be used for any VEYLDF Learning and Development Outcomes, it is especially relevant to a strong sense of identity because children's sense of identity develops through their experiences and memories. It aligns with the New Zealand Curriculum strands: wellbeing, belonging, contribution, communication and exploration. Educators who already use learning stories may find the *Te Whāriki* approach especially useful in improving the focus of their stories on children's learning and development.

Learning stories have limitations as tools for assessing children's learning (Alexander 2015; Blaiklock 2008). As there is no standard way of writing them, there is potential variation in quality depending on who is writing the story. It is not a standardised assessment so it does not adhere to reliability standards. However, the New Zealand template has been developed by well-respected researchers in the ECEC field and has been adopted by the New Zealand Ministry of Education as an appropriate assessment tool.

Learning stories can provide a snapshot of the child's development and, as with any type of assessment, is a potentially useful tool to be selected and used when appropriate.

# Summary

This literature review identified and defined the key components of identity development in children from birth to eight years, and revealed that to date limited work has been done to support the assessment of a strong sense of identity in the early years, particularly in Australian contexts. A set of assessment tools that span key aspects of children's identity was selected for review. Six principles for assessing children's learning were identified and described. These principles can be used by early childhood professionals to inform their decisions about assessment.

The tools selected have been validated to varying degrees, and most are accessible for administration by early childhood professionals. A key finding of this literature review is that there are relatively few contemporary tools that can be used to measure this Outcome and that have been validated with culturally diverse populations. The review concludes that there is scope to further describe the constructs related to the VEYLDF Learning and Development Outcome *Children have a strong sense of identity* and to develop new tools that are fit for purpose and can be used by educators to assess children's sense of identity from a strength-based approach.

# Glossary

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

**Attachment:** Having attentive, affectionate, consistent, available, attuned adults as a source of comfort and reassurance.

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

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

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

**Dispositions:** Specific motivational, temperamental, or emotional traits, habits or responses that contribute to a child's personality.

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

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

**Equity:** The quality of being fair and just, ensuring the rights of every child to fully participate.

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

**Fairness:** Consideration of learners' characteristics and experiences that may advantage or disadvantage them in any particular assessment.

**Ingroup identification:** The extent to which children include membership of groups in their own sense of identity.

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

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

**Learning story:** A narrative style of observation that tells a story about, and interprets, an aspect of a child's learning.

**Likert scale:** Used to measure how respondents rate a series of attitudinal statements on a continuum, such as strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, strongly disagree; named after its developer, Rensis Likert.

**Multidisciplinary network:** Partnership in which two or more professionals (for example, early childhood educators, community workers, allied health professionals and medical professionals) are involved in integrated and coordinated services to support positive outcomes.

**Outgroup recognition:** The extent to which the child identifies groups to which they do not belong, and incorporates this otherness into their own sense of identity.

**Psychometric:** The analysis of data or scores derived from administering educational and psychological tests.

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

**Security:** A child having a sense of belonging or safety in specific spaces.

**Self-awareness:** The awareness of one's self as a distinct individual, separate from others.

**Self-efficacy:** Whether an individual believes that they are capable of achieving a desired outcome in a particular situation.

**Self-esteem:** How an individual feels about themselves.

**Self-expression:** The external demonstration of a child's self-concept.

**Self-management:** Ability to manage stress, control impulses, and demonstrate self-motivation in setting and achieving goals.

**Self-reference effect:** The tendency for people to remember more information if it is related to them.

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

**Social-emotional skills:** The regulation of emotional responses and social interactions, which is a function of both temperament and self-regulation, including behaviour problems, social competency and emotional competency.

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

**Subdomains:** Broad areas within a domain.

**Te Whāriki:** Māori language title of the Ministry of Education New Zealand's 2017 early childhood curriculum. The full title is *Te Whāriki He whāriki mātauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa.*

**Traits:** Attributes that may be permanent and are often genetically influenced.

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

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

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

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

**Validity:** The level of assurance that an assessment tool measures what it claims to measure.

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

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# Appendix

This table provides an overview of additional tools that were reviewed but not selected for discussion in Section 4. Early childhood professionals may find further useful material in these assessment tools.

| Tools | Age | | | Administration | | | Area assessed | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | Personal identity | | | | Social identity (inward) | | | | Social identity (outward) | | | |
| | 0–3 years | 3–6 years | 6+ years | Professional | Child | Parent | Self-expression | Self-awareness | Self-esteem | Self-efficacy | Attachment | Communication | Security | Trust | Ingroup identification | Outgroup recognition | Empathy | Respect |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Adaptive Social Behavior Inventory (ASBI) | | ● | ● | | ● | | ● | | | | | ● | | | | | | |
| ASK-KIDS Inventory for Children | | ● | ● | | ● | | ● | ● | | | ● | | | | ● | ● | | |
| Behavioral Academic Self-Esteem | | ● | ● | | ● | | | ● | ● | | | | | | ● | ● | | |
| Behavioral Academic Self-Esteem Scale | | | | ● | | | | ● | ● | ● | | | | | | | | |
| Bryant Empathy Scales | | ● | | | ● | | | | | | | | | | | | ● | |
| Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventories | | ● | | | ● | | | | ● | | | | | | | | | |
| Emotion Knowledge and Awareness Test | | ● | ● | | ● | | | ● | | | | | | | | | ● | |
| Felt Security Scale | ● | | | | | ● | | | | | ● | | ● | | | | | |
| Joseph Picture Self-Concept Scale | | ● | ● | | ● | | | | ● | | | | | | | | ● | |
| Levels of Emotional Awareness Scale for Children | | | ● | | ● | | | | | | | | | | | | ● | |
| Lifespan Self-Esteem Scale | | ● | ● | | ● | | | | ● | | | | | | | | | |
| Persona dolls | | ● | | | ● | | | | | | | | | | | | ● | ● |
| Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale | | ● | ● | | ● | | | ● | ● | | | | | | ● | ● | | |
| Social-Emotional and Character Development Scale | | ● | ● | | ● | | | | | | | | | | | ● | | ● |
| Toddler Temperament Scale | ● | | | | ● | | | | | ● | | | | | | | | |