‘But do they do anything?’ Documentation and infant pedagogy

Infant pedagogy and documentation are central to quality early childhood education in the earliest years. It is important that teachers and educators draw on both sound understandings of baby development and best-practice pedagogy to observe, analyse and plan for young children’s learning.

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| Developmental knowledge – a snapshot |
| * Babies have excellent perceptual skills and an infant’s gaze follows and tracks objects of interest within their surroundings. * ‘Serve and return’ interactions, where infants and adults take turns making different verbal, physical and facial expressions, help develop neural pathways that enable learning. * Babies come to understand the intentions of others and associate repeated actions and patterns with consequences, including within established interactions and routines. * Babies can communicate their own intentions, reflecting desired outcomes in their minds, and they can direct their communications towards another mind, for example lifting arms to be picked up. * Babies display their knowledge of responses of others by purposely acting to elicit those responses, and they can display overt and active expressions of positive and negative emotions that draw attention and/or enable connection.   A steady ‘rhythm of the day’ that is predictable and consistent, yet flexible as needed, fits very well with babies’ developmental capacities. New routines may become unique to the setting if the differences do not have a negative impact on the babies.   * When we have sound understandings of babies’ development, we can better pinpoint: * what aspect of learning we might be noticing in observations * the language we can use to explain it * what babies might be ready to learn next, though this will also depend on context and individual differences. |

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| Best practice pedagogy – a snapshot |
| * When working with infants, pedagogy involves being socially just, critical, reflective, evolving, challenging and uncomfortable. It also involves curriculum, practices and philosophy in a holistic approach. * This means critically thinking about and reflecting on the theoretical, developmental and practical influences in our curriculum, planning and documentation. * It also means critically reflecting on the image we have of infants’ capabilities, because if we do not think they are capable, if we have simplistic ideas about babies and their needs, we will not offer them opportunities and their learning can be directly impacted. * In baby and toddler spaces, pedagogy acknowledges infants’ sophisticated expression - their powerful non -verbal communication - and plans accordingly, ensuring staff have levels of sophistication to meet children’s needs and best promote their education and care. * Good pedagogical practice results in educators who have a strong rationale for all their practices and are able to articulate and advocate for these with colleagues, families, assessors and the broader community. * Pedagogy involves understanding how all parts of the day (the staff, the space, the philosophy and thinking in action) impact on how well the day goes for both adults and children. * Intentional teaching falls within pedagogy and, among other things, we can think about intentional teaching as the environments we co-create that are thoughtfully and purposely planned and evaluated regularly, based on close and rich observations. |

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| Play – a snapshot |

* Some theories of play are almost 100 years old and, as with theory and developmental milestones, need critical attention for relevance and contemporary ‘truth’.
* We need to reframe what we think play is for babies and start to look at what the children in front of us are actually doing, which is quite often playing with the world around them and becoming playful with what they know about it.
* Play is not just about building blocks, pushing trains around a track or feeding a baby doll; it is about self-regulated and/or co-regulated ‘serve and return’ interactions that can build on and extend babies’ holistic learning.
* Maths and numeracy play, literacy and language learning play, and creative arts and pretend play are all mediated by our delivery, because babies are learning as much from how we engage with them as from what we are saying or doing.
* Pretend play is said not to start until they are about three years old, but babies can pretend to laugh, cry, sneeze and cough from six months.
* Using meaningful, simple, everyday experiences to pretend with babies in playful ways can also be an avenue to develop literacy, for example, by pretending to take bites out of pictures of food in books, or pretending to cry or laugh and naming the feeling as ‘sad’ or ‘happy’.

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| Reflection |

It is important to recognise that babies’ learning is holistic – that is, various parts of their brains are working together to process the world. So, as with any good assessment at any age, if we start where they are at, we understand that a number of aspects of their learning are always developing. With that in mind it is impossible to imagine that learning and play are separate or that aspects of developmental learning (for example, numeracy, literacy, creative arts, social, emotional) are separate experiences. Babies are learning all the time and we must use everyday, familiar and meaningful experiences as the basis for what we plan for them.

Our documentation can follow set guidelines for all ages but our knowledge about babies must be contemporary and we must critically evaluate the learning that babies demonstrate before us against the theory, developmental milestones and taken-for-granted knowledge that we have traditionally used to interpret it. We are bound by ethical and professional responsibilities to uphold the rights of our youngest citizens. Valuing this most important time in human development, and the resulting cascade of choices and practices, is a first step to doing that in our work with babies and toddlers.

This Fact Sheet was developed by Dr Andi Salamon

*Dr Salamon is a lecturer and researcher in the School of Teacher Education at Charles Sturt University, with 20 years’ experience as an early childhood teacher and director. She is currently undertaking a research project about infants’ practices, funded by the Jean Denton Memorial Scholarship, and is listed as Chief Investigator on an ARC Linkage Grant about practices enacted in digital society. Dr Salamon has a particular focus on making her work accessible to professionals and carers who are working and living with very young children. An advocate for infants’ rights and quality early years learning experiences for all children, she brings her passion to uphold children’s optimal learning into her work with pre-service teachers.*

This fact sheet supports information contained in the February 2021 VCAA Twilight Webinar ‘But do they do anything?’ Documentation and infant pedagogy [Edited vignettes of this webinar are published on the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority website for you to watch](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/news-and-events/professional-learning/earlyyears-professional-learning/Pages/PastProfessionalLearningMaterials.aspx).

#### Additional resources that might be useful.

Download copies of [VCAA early years resources](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/earlyyears/ey-curriculum-resources/Pages/Index.aspx).

Order [free hard copies](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/earlyyears/ey-curriculum-resources/Pages/Birth-to-8years.aspx) of VCAA early years resources.

Sign up to the VCAA *Early Years Alert*

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Contact the Early Years Unit, VCAA:

Email: [veyldf@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:veyldf@education.vic.gov.au)

Phone: (03) 9059 5158