

What, why and how?

Pedagogy with very young children

There's a lot going on!
Pedagogy with
very young children



Prompts for reflection
A collection of eight vignettes

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Notes: There's a lot going on! Pedagogy with very young children

The national Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF; 2009, p. 46) and the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF; 2016, p. 36) define pedagogy as:

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

This video shows a number of episodes where an educator and children are teaching and learning together. It also includes the ideas of the educator, Melanie Turkopp (Mel). The overall aim is to provide an overview of some of the important elements of pedagogy or practice that is high quality.

The intent is not to prescribe specific practices, but rather to show examples of practice as prompts for critical reflection and discussion.

Rationale for video

The overarching theme of the video is that pedagogy with very young children is complex and requires deep thinking.

Pedagogy with children under three years old is less understood and practised than that with children over three years old and there are many challenges. One of the main challenges is figuring out what very young children are trying to do and communicate, and what their intentions are can be like solving a mystery.

Evidence of very young children's learning is less obvious than that of older children, in part because the younger the child, the less adept they are at communicating with language.

Educators and other professionals who work with this age group need to have consistent determination to try to understand children's intentions. Adults need to figure out what children are communicating, both verbally and in their behaviour. What are they telling us about what they have learned or are learning, their personal way or style of being and what they are interested in?

Traditional stereotypes of very young children can also lead to underestimating their learning because we either don't notice it or we misinterpret it.



A further challenge to offering a curriculum that is high quality is that the difference between very good and mediocre pedagogy is often subtle. Pedagogy has as much to do with educators' rationales — that is, what and how they do it — as it does with what they do.

Purpose

The main purposes of the video are to:

- clarify what good quality pedagogy or practice with very young children means and what it involves
- highlight the various important roles educators play in promoting and extending very young children's learning and development
- increase awareness of the complexity, variety and significance of the many roles educators play
- demonstrate that effective pedagogy with very young children is based on profound respect, deep and broad knowledge and thoughtful willingness to critique and innovate.

Themes

The main theme of the video is that quality pedagogy:

- demonstrates profound respect for each child as capable, with the right to contribute to their daily life
- emerges from deep and thorough knowledge of each child
- has clear purposes.

Pedagogy that enacts respect, knowledge and clarity of purpose arises from critical reflection, being creative, experimenting, taking reasonable risks and learning along with children.

Background information

Filming took place over two days, three months apart. On the first day of filming Mel worked in a group with other educators. On the second day, she changed rooms and worked with a small group of children on her own, with another educator available for when she had to leave the room.

The terms pedagogy, teaching and practice are used in the video, and in the notes that follow, to describe educators' work.

The principles also apply to children younger and older than the children appearing in the video who are aged 1½ to three years.

The messages in the video are also relevant to professionals other than educators who work with children in this age group.

What is pedagogy?

Educators can promote children's learning in excellent ways at any time, not just at 'special' times. Pedagogy takes many forms and includes the following, as well as other practices:

- identify and build on interests
- introduce new possibilities
- encourage
- challenge
- make easier
- demonstrate and model (for example, persevering, trying different ways, not being devastated by failure)
- make suggestions
- mediate conflicts
- show warmth and affection
- have conversations and ask open-ended questions
- show interest and valuing – acknowledge effort
- set up engaging environments
- select and offer materials that invite play
- instruct directly
- observe and reflect
- work (and play) alongside.

Main messages (explicit and implicit)

The main messages here are also in the video.

Very young children's learning is subtle. This means that supporting and extending their learning requires adults to pay close attention in order to figure out what children are trying to do and communicate and what they're demonstrating they've learned or are interested in learning.

When very young children are healthy and feel safe and secure, they have a built-in drive to learn, explore and experiment using all their abilities. This means that sometimes adults support learning most effectively by not getting involved, but by being accessible, interested and communicating that to the child, by being present and aware.

The quality of the encounters that adults have with very young children impacts greatly on the learning that takes place. Adults need to pay close attention and use professional judgment in order to take full advantage of valuable opportunities.

The adult's role is dynamic. It isn't an 'either-or' situation where the adult does nothing while children play and explore on their own, or that the adult initiates and leads.

In any learning 'episode', an adult typically employs a variety of teaching strategies. Using the analogy of a dance – the adult leads, the child follows, the adult follows, the child leads.

Although a rich environment plays a critically important role, good quality isn't a simple matter of putting a few things out and letting children play. Adults need to set up environments with aims in mind. These aims or purposes may be for either individual children or all the children – or both.

Providing a flexible though predictable routine to the day is crucial.

Recognising and extending children's interests and what has meaning for them can be challenging. Sometimes their interests are clear, but not always. Sometimes circumstances or the environment provide a great catalyst for learning.

Educators' clarity about their decisions supports informative conversations with families, children and others about their pedagogy.

Children learn a lot from each other about many things. For example, first-hand experience with other children teaches them about the 'give and take' of social interactions and how to be with others. At this age however, as they experiment with this complex area of learning, the adult's role is to help children learn positive and constructive ways of interacting with others.

Questions for reflection and discussion

What comes to mind when you hear the phrase 'teaching children under three'? Do you think it's an appropriate term? Why or why not? How is it different to the terms pedagogy and practice?

What does it mean to allow children to surprise you? How does that link to high expectations?

What are some examples in the video that show children as capable and of enacting respect?

What are some of the traditional stereotypes about children under 2½ years of age that interfere with seeing their learning – that cause adults to have low expectations of them?

How would you describe your style as an educator? Have you needed to alter that style in any way to work more effectively with this age group? If you did, why did you have to?

How do you decide how much to include in the physical environment? How many choices are optimal?

How do group size and children's abilities affect your decisions about how many duplicates of favourite materials or toys to make available or how much patience is optimal for children at this age – or any age?

How much attention do you pay to re-setting up the environment while children are present? Does it just happen on an ad hoc basis? Does it happen frequently enough or too frequently?

What supports and encourages you to think more deeply about what children are communicating?

What encourages you to be creative and innovative in your practice?

How do you use language with very young children? Do you speak naturally and in a way that encourages them to respond?

The video focuses on children aged between 1½ and 2½ years. To what extent do the points about pedagogy apply to younger and older children? How is it the same and how is it different with children of different ages?

What are all the different ways Mel teaches? What are some particularly effective ways?

Stereotypes about very young children are mentioned in the introduction to the video. What are some examples, and how do they interfere with good practice?

How do you plan for children to have opportunities to teach each other and learn from each other?

Do you agree that the younger the child, the more likely they are to have a built-in learning agenda? Why or why not? Is there less need for adults to initiate learning with younger children?

Is it essential for educators to plan for very young children? How do you plan? Are the processes of planning and general considerations the same for children under three years as it is for children over three years?

Discuss intentions or purposes. What are your goals for the children you work with? What results do you want?

Discuss the assertion that with regard to practice, pedagogy and teaching, why and how you do what you do as an educator matters as much as what you do. Do you agree or disagree? Why?

Do you agree or disagree with the assertion that you cannot know a child deeply and well without obtaining a lot of information from families? What are your reasons?

What are some examples of valuable information you have received from families that has influenced your relationship with their child and the learning opportunities you provide?

What steps can you take to improve communication with families and two-way sharing of information about the child?

How to use this video

Stress the point with viewers that the examples are just that – examples. They are only one of a number of ways to approach good practice.

The video can be shown in its entirety or just the introduction and one segment at a time. This video can be used on its own as a general introduction to illustrate pedagogy with very young children or with one or more vignettes in *Prompts for reflection*.

Emphasise that what matters in reflecting critically on practice is teasing out the details, the subtleties of what is done and said.

A workshop activity could involve asking participants to list all the ways that they teach very young children. Alternatively they could be asked to list all the ways Mel teaches as they watch the video.

If you are using the video with professionals who work with children older or younger than the ones in the video, ask what ideas in the video relate most directly to their work. Are there any concepts that don't apply?

A session could include a lively discussion about what creates a culture where educators and early childhood professionals go deeper in their understanding of children and in their practice. What helps and what gets in the way?

Before showing the video, suggest participants take notes, including any questions about statements that they don't agree with or that make them think. Use these observations as a basis for discussion.

In a viewing and discussion among a group of colleagues, it could be interesting and useful to explore Mel's 'style' as an educator and encourage educators to explore their own style. Self-awareness is a foundation for improvement and professional learning.

Discuss the fact that as an adult with a child or children you have choices all the time (discretionary decision making) about what you respond to and how, and what you initiate. How do you decide?

You could ask participants to pay particular attention to Mel's use of language as this isn't explicitly emphasised in the video. Not just the content of what she says, but how she uses language. Real conversations, even when you're not sure what a child has tried to communicate, are crucial.

Stress the importance of taking advantage of opportunities for one-to-one or one-to-two experiences with children. You can't always plan them in advance, meaning that educators need to be constantly aware of looking for opportunities.

You may want to call people's attention to the changes in the children over the three months between filming days (Van and the twins).

Point out that helping children learn to be together is a legitimate area of learning and very different to behaviour management. What are the implications of shifting thinking away from managing to seeing it as an area of learning? What are some examples of ways that adults teach children to be together in positive ways?

Comments relating to use of the video

Participants may not be completely comfortable with some of the practices depicted. That's fine. Make this point up front and discuss the reasons. Keep in mind that disagreeing is different to seeing them as inappropriate or impossible for their setting.

Note that the video may give the appearance of the educator being too interventionist, too involved. That is a function of the topic – what educators do. There were many moments during filming when children were playing independently.

One of Mel's strengths is her natural and easy way of using language with the children. It is worth paying close attention to the way she commentates or narrates experiences.



Notes: Prompts for reflection

This collection includes an introduction and eight vignettes that were filmed with a group of children aged between 14 months and three years at Elwood Children's Centre, an education and care service in Melbourne. Some of the vignettes also include Mel Turkopp, the educator who works with these children,

talking about her pedagogy or practice.

Although the vignettes were created for educators, the content is relevant to the practice of other professionals whose work focuses on children under three years and their families. Similarly, the content is relevant to children younger and older than the age range of children who appear in the vignettes.

Anne Stonehouse introduces the eight vignettes:

1. The coffee shop
2. The power of books
3. Dough and sticks
4. Lunch
5. No duplicates of vehicles
6. Sleeping outdoors
7. Learning to be with others
8. Under the sofa

The vignettes do not need to be viewed in this sequence. Each vignette can be used separately. However, viewing the introduction video along with a vignette will help to orient viewers to the overall themes and key messages. Familiarity with the content of *There's a lot going on! Pedagogy with very young children* will also add to understanding and reflecting critically on any of the vignettes.

This booklet contains a brief set of notes to accompany each vignette.

These notes include a brief summary, some questions and points for discussion as well as some topics that the vignette might illustrate.

These suggestions are not comprehensive, and anyone who watches the vignettes and reads the notes will come up with their own ideas. The notes are not designed to dictate or restrict discussions about the vignettes.

The vignettes were chosen for their potential to spark reactions from viewers and to encourage discussion, debate and critical reflection.

Educators can use the vignettes and notes on their own, but using them in a group and sharing questions, ideas and perspectives will enrich the experience. This is likely to result in more comprehensive professional learning.

Purpose

It is important to keep in mind and to remind viewers that the purpose of the vignettes is not to recommend specific practices, such as having very small groups with one educator, sleeping outdoors, not having duplicates of some materials or any other particular way of going about caring for and educating children.

Good quality practice is very much influenced by context – by the particular children, educators and families, the geographical location of the service and the community to name just a few.

However, all good quality practice reflects three key characteristics, which are illustrated in the vignettes:

- profound respect for young children, viewing them as both capable and vulnerable, and acknowledging their right to contribute to decisions about their experience
- deep and thorough knowledge of each child, combined with unrelenting determination to try to understand their intentions – what they're telling you through their behaviour and communication about what they've learnt, what they are learning, their personal style of being and what they are interested in
- clarity about your intentions or purposes – what you want children to learn, the reasons why and how best to enable that learning.

Pedagogy that enacts respect, knowledge and clarity of purpose arises from sustained critical reflection, being creative, experimenting, taking reasonable risks and learning along with children.

Essential associated material

Being familiar with *There's a lot going on! Pedagogy with very young children* will reinforce learning and set the stage for using *Prompts for reflection*. It is recommended that you read *There's a lot going on! Pedagogy with very young children* and read the accompanying notes before viewing the vignettes.

How to use

The notes suggest some possible focus topics that the vignette could prompt. These are suggestions; each vignette can be used for a broad range of topics. If possible, facilitators of discussions and professional learning sessions should view all the vignettes to discover which ones relate most closely to topics they are addressing.

The vignettes can be used in a variety of ways in professional learning. You could ask participants to read the relevant notes before viewing the vignette. Facilitators can focus viewers' attention on specific aspects of the vignette or leave it open to discover the range of issues and topics the vignette raises for viewers.

With most, if not all of the vignettes, viewers will benefit from seeing them more than once. One suggestion is to ask viewers after the first viewing to comment on anything that interested, puzzled, impressed or bothered them. Then, before showing it the second time, ask viewers to focus on the educator and what she does and says. The third time emphasis could be on the children and what they are likely to be learning or demonstrating that they have learned.

It is important to emphasise to viewers that the point is not to be judgemental and simply criticise what they see and hear. Although constructive criticism will be a valuable part of the reflection and discussion, and a starting point for talking about good quality practice, just being negative is not very helpful. Discussions about the vignettes will be most useful when viewers keep an open mind, think seriously about their content, keep in mind their purposes and apply what they learn from the videos to their own practice.



1. The coffee shop

Overview

In this vignette children interact with each other and with an educator and engage in dramatic play for an extended time in a play area set up as a coffee shop.

Background information

This dramatic play in the coffee shop went for approximately 15 to 20 minutes. A shorter version appears in *There's a lot going on! Pedagogy with very young children*.

Mel explained that she set up the area because going to coffee shops and cafés and seeing adults drinking coffee is part of everyday life for many of the children she works with.

Possible focus topics

This vignette relates to and can prompt discussion about a range of topics. Here are some possible topics, but you should not be limited to these:

- image of children as capable and competent
- social play among children under three years
- dramatic play
- value of opportunities to pretend and act out familiar situations and events
- educators' roles in children's play
- educators' roles in mediating interactions
- educators' use of language
- high expectations
- intentionality
- connecting the curriculum with children's family and community life
- building on children's interests
- children's attention spans.

Questions for critical reflection

What image of children does this segment portray?

What roles does Mel play in this episode? What more could she have done?

What is the role of the rich physical environment in this play? How does it contribute to the play?

What difference would it have made to the play if Mel had not joined in? Why?

In the past, one of the ways of thinking about children aged less than three years was that they don't play together. What comments would you make about the interactions and play observed in this vignette?

What are some examples in the vignette of children cooperating with each other?

It is obvious that Mel enjoys being with the children. How does an educator's enjoyment of being with children contribute to experiences?

What do you think Mel's intentions were in setting up the café?

What are her intentions in relation to thinking very carefully about whether or not to get involved in children's play?

What are some examples of Mel mediating between children?

Mel ends the coffee shop play fairly abruptly. Why do you think she did this? How do you decide when to re-direct children's interest and attention?

Why do you think this opportunity so interested the children? What was it about it that captured their interest? How could Mel extend and build on the interest the children demonstrated?

What kind of 'home corner' or dramatic play spaces do you offer to the children you work with? What are your reasons? How could you enrich or change it to offer more interesting learning opportunities?

Consider the dramatic play of the children you work with, especially those who are under three years old. How would you describe it? What are its sources?

What learning has this video provoked? What might you do differently as a result of seeing and discussing it?

Comments

Setting up and using the coffee shop is a good example of an educator both initiating a play and learning opportunity and building on children's possible interests. It's only a possible interest because children under three years are not as likely as older children to indicate an interest using language. Mel would have had to reflect on what she had noticed and then she probably inferred an interest. Much of the time, with children this age, you initiate something, you notice their reactions and you take it from there. It could be interesting to discuss how educators can become involved in children's play without becoming the centre of attention.





2. The power of books

Overview

This vignette relates to addressing Aboriginal cultures in meaningful ways with very young children and, more generally, the value of books and stories. The book that features is *Wargan the Crow*, by Cindy Laws and Adam Laws (2002).

Possible focus topics

This vignette relates to and can prompt discussion about a range of topics. Here are some possible topics, but you should not be limited to these:

- intentionality and clarity about purpose
- planning with specific learning in mind
- planning for both the group and individuals
- the value of repetition and availability of a learning resource over time
- children's fluctuating attention
- connecting different experiences and materials
- addressing reconciliation and Aboriginal culture with very young children
- educators' use of language
- high expectations
- tuning in to individuals
- responding to children's attempts to communicate in non-superficial ways
- building on children's interests
- the importance and many uses of books in the program.

Questions for critical reflection

Mel uses the words 'consistent' and 'constant' to explain her aims in doing something meaningful about Aboriginal culture. What do you think she meant?

Many early childhood services rely on displayed artefacts in their efforts to acknowledge Aboriginal cultures. How does the use of the book *Wargan the Crow* go beyond that?

What do you think the children have learnt, and are learning, about books and stories in general?

This vignette shows the book being used in several ways. What are they? Why is it valuable to make books available to children over a period of time?

What do you think is the value of a child sharing a book or story with another child?

What image of children does this vignette portray?

What are all the different ways books are used in your program? What different kinds of books do you make available?

How can books promote social interaction among children?

What roles does Mel play in this episode? What more could she have done or what could she have done differently?

What do you think Mel's intentions were in choosing this book and creating the display?

Why do you think this story interests the children so much? What is it that captures their interest? How might Mel extend and build on the interest the children demonstrated?

The book provokes a lot of language and conversation from these very young children. How can you use books to encourage conversations with the children you work with?

What role does familiarity play in your curriculum? How do you balance the need for novelty to maintain children's interest with their need for familiarity and sameness?

What learning has this vignette prompted for you? What might you do differently as a result of seeing and discussing it?

Comments

This vignette could prompt a discussion about authentic (in contrast to stereotypical or superficial) ways to acknowledge Aboriginal cultures in programs.

This vignette is part of an activity that lasted for more than 30 minutes; although the two children lost interest or were distracted at points, their attention always returned to the story.



3. Dough and sticks

Overview

This segment features two children playing with dough and small sticks. They attempt to sort out the use of the materials with an educator's intervention.

Possible focus topics

This vignette relates to and can prompt discussion about a range of topics. Some of these topics are listed below, and you will think of others:

- curriculum as the child's whole experience
- learning to negotiate
- learning to regulate behaviour, self-control
- learning about your own and others' rights and obligations
- intentionality and clarity about purpose
- educator's intervention – if, when and how?
- expectations of children
- children's agency and autonomy
- educators' use of language as a teaching tool
- the importance of having enough materials
- the power of modelling and imitation.

Questions for critical reflection

What stands out for you about this experience?

What do you think Mel's intentions are in her interventions?

What do you think Mel's responses and solutions teach the two children?

What do you notice about the language Mel uses? What roles does her use of language play in this episode?

What ideas about children does this segment portray?

Are Mel's expectations of children too high? Why or why not?

How does Mel enact respect for children in this experience?

Mel is continually aware of opportunities to teach the children. What are some examples of this teaching, including direct instruction?

What could Mel have done differently or what more could she have done?

What do you think the children learned from this experience?

Children under three years are learning to use language for many different purposes. At this age children's ability to communicate in words is more limited than it would be if they were older. How does this affect their ability to resolve differences? How does it affect educators' efforts to help them? In other words, how might Mel's responses be different if the children had more advanced language skills?

To what extent do you think Van's interest in the sticks was because of Rad's enthusiastic use of them?

How did the availability of more sticks address the problem? How do you decide when planning how much material is likely to be enough? How important is having enough materials a factor in ensuring the quality of an experience?

Would you have responded in the same way as Mel? Why or why not? If not, what would you have done differently?

What criteria do you use to decide when to let children sort out their differences and when you need to intervene?

How do you teach children to be fair to others? Can you think of some examples?

How intentional are your efforts to teach children to learn to get along with each other? How do you incorporate this area of pedagogy or practice into your planning?

What learning has this vignette prompted for you? What might you do differently as a result of seeing and discussing it?

Comments

Learning about their own and others' rights and obligations and how to be with others are some of the most important and complex areas of learning for very young children. It is often necessary for educators to intervene. Good quality practice occurs when the educator's aim is not to end the dispute or conflict and resolve it for the children, but to use it as a learning opportunity, a chance to teach children something.

This vignette could be a prompt for talking about the VEYLDF Learning and Development Outcomes and the nature of curriculum. There is still a tendency for educators to think of 'activities' as being the centrepiece of curriculum. This means that viewers might see the offering of dough and sticks as a learning opportunity, whereas the reason for including this vignette in the collection is not to learn about the activity, although it is a good one. Rather it is to observe Mel's intervention: how she responds and the solutions she comes up with. A discussion about the activity could lead to a discussion about the definition of curriculum as being a child's whole experience, and the nature of the Learning and Development Outcomes, particularly Learning and Development Outcome 2.

This vignette could be used along with Vignette 5, *No Duplicates of Vehicles*, to talk about the role of educators in helping children learn about what is fair, about their own rights and those of others, and about how to negotiate and find solutions when there are tensions or conflicts (both minor and major ones).

Mel's response in this situation, to provide more sticks, is in contrast with her idea about not providing duplicates of some materials (Vignette 5) where she deliberately limits a material in order to teach children to learn to wait. What are the differences, if any, in the two situations?

Notice how Mel balances giving children freedom, choice and encouragement to do things for themselves, and also at times stepping in to help or take control.

Viewers may differ in their opinions about specific aspects of how Mel dealt with the situation. For example, when she asks Van to return a stick, she doesn't follow through when he resists. These differences may prompt animated and constructive debate.

The vignette illustrates the power of children being influenced by observing other children.



4. Lunch

Overview

This vignette features a small group of children eating lunch, with their educator speaking about her reasons for offering eating experiences the way she does.

Possible focus topics

This vignette relates to and can prompt discussion about a range of topics. Some of these topics are listed below, and you will think of others:

- curriculum as the child's whole experience
- lunchtime routine
- intentionality and clarity about purpose
- the role of predictability in supporting agency and security
- the educator's presence and contribution
- children's expectations
- children's agency and autonomy
- educators' use of language as a teaching tool
- redirecting children's behaviour respectfully.

Questions for critical reflection

What stands out for you about this lunch experience?

What do you think the children learn from this experience?

What does Mel hope that the children will learn?

What are some examples of children showing initiative, making decisions – in general, strengthening their sense of agency?

What image of children does this segment portray?

What roles does Mel play in this episode? What more could she have done or what could she have done differently?

What are examples of direct instruction? Changing the environment?

Mel talks about her goals and intentions for lunch. What are yours? Do the Learning and Development Outcomes in the EYLF and VEYLDF inform the way you offer lunch? If so, explain how.

How does the small group size contribute to the quality of the experience? If you work in a larger group, what adjustments can you make that will lead to eating experiences being more peaceful?

Are Mel's expectations of the children too high? What are the reasons for your answer?

Mel eats with the children. How does this contribute to the experience and the learning?

How does Mel enact respect for children in this experience?

Were you comfortable with the balance of encouraging children to do things for themselves and helping and doing things for them? Why or why not?

Mel seems to always be looking for opportunities to teach children. What are some examples of teaching, including direct instruction?

What do you notice about Mel's use of language? How does that affect the quality of the experience?

Can you think of ways to build in more choices for children during lunch?

What learning has this vignette prompted for you? What might you do differently as a result of seeing and discussing it?



Comments

One reason for including this vignette is that there is still a tendency in some programs to view routines as time away from the curriculum, rather than as being full of rich potential for enjoyment and learning. Eating experiences are probably the best example of this; others include arriving and leaving, dressing and undressing, toileting and nappy changing, resting and sleeping and other essential parts of the day.

The children ate lunch for approximately 40 minutes, and the vignette aims to show highlights. It is worth noting the length, as the pace of eating routines affects how pleasant and relaxed the children feel and the learning opportunities available in this amount of time.

Notice how Mel balances giving children freedom, choice and encouragement to do things for themselves with stepping in at times to help or even take control.

This vignette lends itself to analysis of the many different ways that educators teach children.

A group of four children with one educator makes a big difference to the atmosphere. There is a feeling of calm that is likely to be much more challenging to achieve with a larger group. There is silence at times and space for children to communicate. It is worth thinking about how to approximate this kind of atmosphere in larger groups. In addition to being a better experience for children, there is less stress on educators in a smaller group.

Mel's enjoyment is so evident in the video footage, but there is still the idea that it is demanding work. She may make it seem easy, but it isn't. The vignette offers a realistic example of the work of educators, not one that has been staged.



5. No duplicates of vehicles

Overview

This vignette focuses on children learning about their own and others' rights in relation to using materials and equipment and learning to wait. Mel believes that it helps children if there are a few materials in the room that are

not duplicates, so that, with guidance and support from adults, children have opportunities to learn to wait and to negotiate.

This vignette is an example of an educator asking herself questions, reflecting deeply and experimenting in order to learn more about children and support their learning. It offers an interesting perspective on planning – one that suggests that planning is in part experimenting to find answers to questions.

Possible focus topics

This vignette relates to and can prompt discussion about a range of topics. Some of these topics are listed below, and you will think of others:

- curriculum as the child's whole experience
- intentionality and clarity about aims – purposeful, thoughtful experimentation
- notion of planning as part of seeking answers to questions
- nature and role of the educator's presence and intervention
- learning to be in a group
- educator as manager and mediator
- sharing
- expectations of children
- supporting children's desires and interests
- educators' use of language as a teaching tool
- taking account of individual differences
- building in challenges for children.

Questions for critical reflection

What is your reaction to Mel's strategy? Are you comfortable with it? What would you do and why?

What learning do you think is occurring? Is this the most effective way for children to learn about waiting and sharing? Is it an appropriate time for children to learn this? Why or why not?

What image of children does this vignette portray?

What roles does Mel play? What more could she have done?

What do you think Mel's intentions are?

Are Mel's expectations of children too high?

How does Mel enact respect for children in this experience?

What do you notice about Mel's use of language? How does that affect the quality of the experience?

How does Mel help children cope with not having something that they want whenever they want it?

What do you do to support children's learning about sharing, waiting and negotiating?

How do you decide whether, when and how to intervene when children are having disputes or conflicts?

What learning has this vignette prompted for you? What might you do differently as a result of seeing and discussing it?

Comments

You may want to acknowledge from the beginning that being in a group of four children makes a difference to the length of waiting time and the ability of the educator to guide and support negotiation. Remind participants that the aim is for them to learn from viewing the vignette and reflecting on what they can take from it to apply to their pedagogy.

Some educators may be uncomfortable with the idea of intentionally not providing duplicates of favourite toys and materials. Keep in mind that

the intention of this vignette, or any of the vignettes in this collection, is not to advocate for specific practices but rather to provoke debate and discussion about how knowing children deeply informs decisions about curriculum.

This vignette offers a good opportunity to discuss issues about when to let children try to sort out conflicts and difficulties themselves and when educators need to intervene.

A crucial point about this strategy is that Mel is very clear that she's doing it in order to have the opportunity to have discussions with children about sharing. That is a very different rationale to one that builds on the idea that 'the world is a tough place and you've just got to learn to put up with it'.

The vignette could prompt an interesting discussion about the appropriateness of deliberately building in challenges to children's self-control. Some people may think that there are enough inevitable and unpreventable challenges when children are in a group, and therefore it is not helpful to intentionally incorporate additional challenges.

The vignette could also prompt discussion about a kind of 'push-down curriculum' or too much emphasis on preparing children for the future by pressuring them to acquire skills that could be more easily learnt later.

This vignette illustrates what it means to work thoughtfully, always reflecting critically. It also demonstrates the power of an educator's presence and intervention, the need to be there to guide interactions and experiences so that positive learning will occur.

Mel views planning as part of the effort required in seeking answers to the questions she has about the children and her practice. Some of her plans she describes as carefully considered experiments with the aim of learning something new. These ideas about rationales for planning may be new and/or challenging to some viewers. It could be the start of a good discussion about the nature and purpose of planning.

A good quality curriculum is the result of thinking as much about the 'why and how' of practice as it is about the 'what'. This point also lends itself to elaboration and discussion and sharing examples from practice.

There is a brief segment in *There's a lot going on! Pedagogy with very young children* where a child wants an apron that another child is putting on; later Mel gives the apron to the child. After filming, Mel indicated that this is another item that she intentionally provides only one of.



6. Sleeping outdoors

Overview

This vignette shows a child-centred sleep routine that takes place outdoors. The principles and practices of good quality pedagogy also apply to sleep and rest activities.

Possible focus topics

This vignette relates to and can prompt discussion about a range of topics. Some of these topics are listed below, and you will think of others:

- curriculum as the child's whole experience
- using routines as learning opportunities
- involving children in daily living experiences (routine)
- intentionality and clarity about purpose
- educator's willingness to experiment thoughtfully
- the role of predictability in supporting agency and security
- educator's presence and contribution to the quality of an experience
- expectations of children
- children's agency and autonomy
- catering for individual differences
- slowing down – taking time with children.

Questions for critical reflection

What stands out for you about this sleep experience?

What are Mel's reasons for incorporating sleeping outdoors into her program?

What do you think about Mel's assertion that we tend to see the outdoors as a busy place mostly for physical activity rather than for relaxing and admiring? Is that true in your program? What adjustments could you make to use the outdoors for a broader range of experiences and opportunities?

What do you think the children are learning from this sleeping experience?

What opportunities for showing initiative, making decisions and taking some responsibility for their own experience does this vignette offer?

What image of children does this vignette portray?

Regardless of where children sleep in your program, what are some ways that you can give them more control over the experience?

What roles does Mel play in this episode? What more could she have done or done differently?

How does the small group size contribute to the quality of the experience? If you work with a larger group, what adjustments might make sleeping and resting a calming, less hectic part of the day?

How does Mel enact respect for children in this experience?

What do you notice about Mel's use of language? How does that affect the quality of the experience?

Can you think of ways to empower children more in their rest and sleep times?

What objections might there be to having children sleep outside? How might you respond to them?

Mel says that she's always thought children need a good half hour between eating and going to sleep. What's your experience? Do you agree? How do you deal with that?

What learning has this vignette prompted for you? What might you do differently as a result of seeing and discussing it?

Comments

The decision to include this vignette in the collections was not solely based on the fact that the children slept outdoors, although it works well in this program. As you view this vignette, think about what ideas you can borrow to improve the sleep and rest experience in your service. Some may be interested in the idea, and others may raise many reasons why it is not possible or makes little sense. This topic can be pursued, but don't allow the idea of sleeping outdoors to side-track consideration of other messages and topics to discuss in the vignette.

Encourage viewers to consider the vignette applying the rest and sleep times used in their programs.

Filming for this segment took approximately 45 minutes. It is worth noting this, as the pace of sleeping and resting routines affects how pleasant and relaxed the children feel and the learning opportunities available in this activity.

Notice how Mel demonstrates her respect for children's different ways of going about this routine.

A group of four children with one educator makes a big difference to the atmosphere. There is a feeling of calm that is likely to be much more challenging to achieve with a larger group. There is silence at times, providing spaces for children to communicate with language. It is worth thinking about how to recreate this kind of atmosphere in larger groups.





7. Learning to be with others

Overview

This vignette focuses on efforts to help children learn to read others' feelings and to teach them to interact with other children in ways that are caring and positive. This vignette reflects the educator's view of how under three-year-olds learn to be with others, and that this is an important area for intentional actions and words.

Possible focus topics

This vignette relates to and can prompt discussion about a range of topics. Some of these topics are listed below, and you will think of others:

- curriculum as the child's whole experience, including interactions and conversations
- educators' attitudes to children's behaviour
- the importance of looking at reasons or motivations for behaviour
- how children learn to regulate their behaviour and exercise self-control
- educators' intentionality and clarity about purpose
- educators' interventions and their impact
- expectations of children
- children's agency and autonomy
- educators' use of language as a teaching tool.

Questions for critical reflection

What stands out for you about this experience?

What do you think Mel's intentions are in her interventions?

What do you think the child who is distressed may have learned from Mel's response? What might the child who caused the distress, who presumably listened to what Mel had to say, have learned?

What image of children does this segment portray?

How does Mel enact respect for children in this experience?

Mel seems to be always looking for opportunities to teach children. How does her approach differ from one based on managing behaviour?

What do you notice about Mel's use of language? How does that affect the quality of the experience?

What could Mel have done differently or what more could she have done?

Children under three years are learning to use language for many different purposes. At this age their ability to communicate in words is more limited than it will be when they are older. How does being able to communicate with language affect children's ability to deal with frustrations and challenges? How does it affect educators' efforts to teach them about positive behaviours? How might dealing with the situation in the vignette differ if the children had more advanced language skills?

How do Mel's ideas and aims compare with yours? Would you have responded the same way that Mel did? Why or why not? If not, what would you have done differently?

What do you do to help children learn to 'read' other children's expressions and behaviour? What more can you do?

What criteria do you use to decide when to let children sort out their differences and when to intervene?

How do you teach children to be gentle and caring to others? Can you think of some examples?

How intentional are your efforts to teach children to learn to get along with each other? How do you incorporate this area of pedagogy or practice into your planning?

What learning has this vignette prompted for you? What might you do differently as a result of seeing and discussing it?

Comments

Caring for others is one of the most important and complex areas of learning. Often with children this age it is necessary for educators not only to intervene when situations arise but also to actively plan to help children learn about others' rights and feelings. Good quality practice occurs when the aim is not to end the dispute or conflict or resolve it for the children, but rather to use it as a learning opportunity. This approach differs significantly from the idea of 'managing' behaviour.

This vignette could be a prompt for talking about the VEYLDF Learning and Development Outcomes and the nature of curriculum. There is still a tendency to view relationships and interactions as something that happens as children engage in pre-planned activities. This vignette offers an opportunity to talk about the critical importance in the curriculum program of opportunities to learn how to be with others. Discussion can focus on the definition of curriculum as the child's whole experience and the nature of the Learning and Development Outcomes, particularly the second Outcome, which is about children learning to be in groups, or what used to be called social skills.

This vignette could be used in conjunction with vignettes 3 and 5 to talk about educators' roles in helping children learn about what is fair, about their own rights and others' rights and how to negotiate and find solutions when there are tensions or conflicts (both minor and major ones) between children.



8. Under the sofa

Overview

This vignette is a spontaneous activity that has the potential to become 'messy' and 'unpleasant'. A child crawls under a day bed and several other children notice and want to join him. Instead of stopping it or re-directing the children, Mel guides the experience by making suggestions and commenting about what is happening, turning it into a pleasant and positive encounter.

Possible focus topics

This vignette relates to and can prompt discussion about a range of topics. Some of these topics are listed below, and you will think of others:

- intentionality and clarity about purpose
- spontaneity – taking advantage of what happens
- educators as managers and mediators
- supporting children's desires and interests
- finding solutions that work for everyone
- educators' use of language
- high expectations
- tuning in to individuals
- responding to children's attempts to communicate in non-superficial ways
- building on children's interests.

Questions for critical reflection

What do you think you would have done in this situation? Why?

What learning may have happened?

What image of children's behaviour does this segment portray?

What roles does Mel play? What more could she have done or what could she have done differently?

What do you think Mel's intentions are?

How does Mel enact respect for children?

In what ways does Mel's presence and monitoring of the experience contribute to its success?

What are all the ways that Mel guides this experience? How are her words and actions different to 'managing' behaviour?

What do you notice about Mel's use of language? How does that affect the quality of the experience?

What learning has this vignette prompted for you? What might you do differently as a result of viewing and discussing it?

This was not a planned experience. What helps you and other educators be more aware of unplanned opportunities and how to take advantage of them?

Comments

This experience turns out to be an interesting one for the children, and yet it would have been so easy for Mel to overlook it or even stop it because of the potential for it to end unpleasantly.

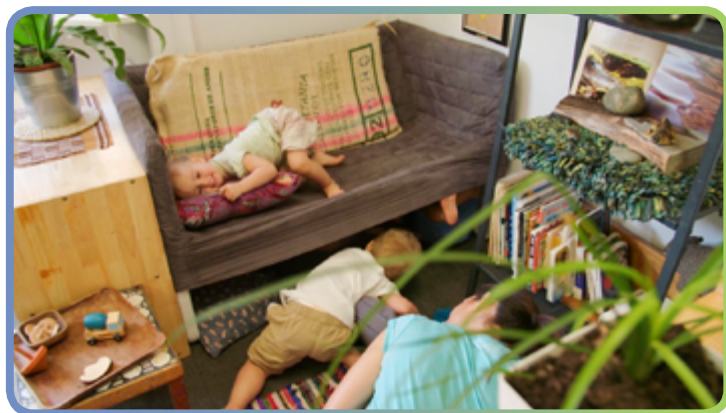
This vignette offers a good opportunity to talk about how easy it is when working with children around this age (or any age!), to overlook opportunities for learning.

One of the main messages from this vignette could be the importance of slowing down, paying deep attention and, when possible and appropriate, going along with children's intentions and interests.

At times children in groups may withdraw themselves for some peace and quiet. Perhaps that's what Cameron was doing.

Note how much time and care Mel takes to explain what's happening and the reasons for her suggestions and instructions. This could be a focus for talking about using language that teaches rather than purely manages.

This vignette offers an opportunity to discuss the difference between viewing children learning to get along as an important area for teaching and learning, as opposed to the idea of 'managing' behaviour. How are these different? What would Mel have been likely to say and do if her aim was to 'manage' the children's behaviour rather than making the situation enjoyable and constructive?



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Transcripts for all videos are available on the VCAA website:
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