



## The Early Years Learning Framework Professional Learning Program

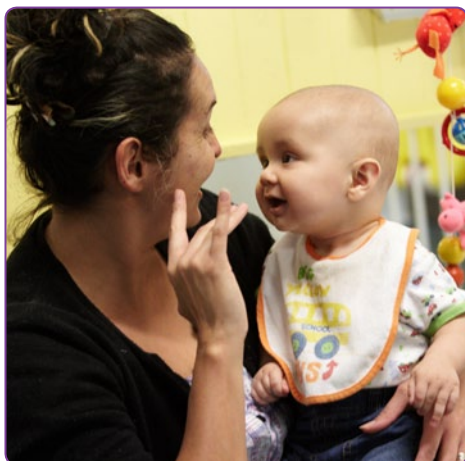


# Intentional teaching

## Introduction

The *Early Years Learning Framework* (EYLF) is part of the early years reform agenda of the Australian Council of Governments (COAG) and a key component of the National Quality Framework. The vision and title of *The Early Years Learning Framework: Belonging, Being and Becoming* resonates with early childhood practitioners because it describes what they see as their core business: Creating spaces in which young children can feel attached, feel appreciated for what they are right now and feel supported in what they might become as effective citizens in a complex future world.

Judy Radich, Director of Cooloon Children's Service in Tweed Heads on the NSW North coast, said at the recent ECA National Conference in Adelaide, that 'the more she and her colleagues talk and think about those words—*Belonging, Being and Becoming*—the more they realise the words need unpacking in terms of their meaning for early childhood practice in their own context'. She believes that developing a deep understanding about how the vision of the 'three Bs' can be lived in daily practice is a great place to start working with the EYLF.



## Master Class—about intentional teaching

Judy presented a Master Class on the EYLF at the conference, as part of ECA's funded Professional Learning Program. Her focus was 'intentional teaching'—one of the eight key Pedagogical Practices which promote children's learning outlined in the EYLF (2009, p. 14–18):

- The EYLF defines intentional teaching as 'educators being deliberate, purposeful and thoughtful in their decisions and actions'.
- It notes that: 'Intentional teaching is the opposite of teaching by rote, or continuing with traditions simply because things have always been done this way'. (EYLF, 2009, p.15)

*Intentional teaching is thoughtful, informed and deliberate.*

Educators in prior-to-school settings have not always been comfortable with being termed 'teachers', but we have come to realise that everything we do in our daily interactions with children 'teaches' them something. If we're impatient, it teaches children that they're not worth our focused time; if we listen carefully and respond sensitively, it teaches children that we really care about them as people and believe they have opinions and ideas worthy of adult attention. If we notice that children are interested in a new idea and we follow-up in our programs, we're beginning to be 'intentional' about our teaching.

**'Intentional teaching is thoughtful, informed and deliberate.'**



## New perspectives

- The term 'intentional teaching' has become part of early childhood language in recent years.
- This reflects the understanding that children's learning is greatly enhanced through interactions with more informed, experienced learners.
- Ann Epstein, from High/Scope for example, sees intentional teaching and 'active learning' as reciprocal components of successful adult-child interactions.

The very successful High/Scope pre-school program in the USA (High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, 1996) describes 'active learning' as situations in which:

- children have opportunities to set their own goals and select materials and activities
- adults encourage children's efforts and help them to extend their work by talking with them about what they're doing, by joining in their play, and by helping them to solve problems.



## Intentional teaching in action

Judy presented three 'vignettes' to show how intentional teaching operates in her service. Two of the vignettes involved 'solving everyday dilemmas with intentions in mind':

### Vignette 1:

- We had a safety problem—children racing around the bike track with trucks. We could have solved this by just putting the trucks away or by talking about rules, or by staggering outside play times...
- But, we wanted the children to have the trucks but to use them in a more constructive way...
- Children remembered we had originally 'set up' the trucks in the 'island' area in the yard that already had undulations, bark and trees...
- So we talked about this with the children and decided together to create 'a four-wheel drive park' as many of the children related to this experience...
- We discussed what else we might need to create a park like the one they described—'fallen logs, rocks and a tent'—children offered many other ideas such as somewhere for the baby, the dog...

- Stones were delivered and staff and children spent three days moving them into place.
- Staff and children solved a problem together. This supports our view that nothing is *done to* children but *done with* children.

*Both intentional teaching and active learning are involved...*

Judy explained that '...wherever possible, we engage children in projects which give them opportunities to feel capable as they see their ideas carried out, to cooperate together and do real work'.

## The basis for intentional teaching

In her Master Class, Judy explained that 'intentional educators':

- create a learning environment that is rich in materials and interactions—with opportunities for children to practice choosing, thinking, negotiating, problem solving and taking risks
- encourage children to explore materials, experiences, relationships, and ideas through a variety of open-ended materials
- create opportunities for inquiry—where children can ask questions, investigate, gather information, consider possibilities, form tentative conclusions and test and justify them
- actively 'join in' children's play, 'tune in' and respond to children's views and ideas
- model thinking and problem solving and challenge children's existing ideas about how things work—*'I'm wondering why the water keeps disappearing into the sand?'*

### Vignette 2:

Another of Judy's vignettes also involved solving an everyday problem: Some toddlers didn't always like the lunch provided; staff worried that they weren't getting enough nutrition. In a staff discussion, different views about 'nutrition' and 'what children should do' emerged. It was decided to provide a box of refrigerated sandwiches from which children could select, either to replace the set lunch, or as an addition to it. It was necessary for staff to put aside personal beliefs and routines to focus on 'what is the real issue?' The vignette demonstrates how everyday practice can be thoughtful and intentional. By giving children choice, staff 'taught' children that:

- lunchtime routines are about enjoying our food and each other's company, and learning to eat and talk together in a civilized way
- the personal preferences and views of young children are respected around here
- children's needs come before staff convenience
- young children have 'agency'—they can influence what happens to them.

### Vignette 3:

Judy's third vignette presents a more obvious opportunity for intentional teaching. It involved 'being intentional about maths' by using playdough:

- The educator had observed several preschoolers talking and comparing—'I am bigger than you ...'
- She was aware of early math concepts and keen to include the language and ideas of maths in the everyday experiences she offered to children.
- Planning for a small group activity, she intentionally chose a familiar and popular material with the potential for maths talk.



- As children rolled their play dough she engaged them in conversation—‘mine is longer than...’; ‘Jarrah’s is as long as the table’; ‘we need to join them together to fit the big table’; ‘look how long mine’s getting ... which is longest?’; ‘who is tallest out of Ben, Kylie and Luke?’

By planning to create an opportunity for children to ‘...make comparisons and draw and test conclusions’, the educator was “teaching”...important ways of thinking mathematically’.

By engaging children in shared, sustained conversation, she was extending their understandings, providing new language to describe things and showing that she valued children’s thinking.

## Setting up for intentional teaching

In Judy’s service an environment is created in which:

- there is joint ownership of space and reciprocal decision-making
- children can access materials, investigate how things work and explore puzzling questions
- relationships of mutual respect and trust are established
- children and adults collaborate to solve problems
- children’s ideas and opinions count and we don’t have to make a rigid rule – as in the sandwiches and using the trucks – we can find a solution that suits everyone
- adults contribute knowledge from their own experience to enrich, challenge and extend children’s learning.

## Conclusion

For many years we have steered away from talking explicitly about what it is we are teaching in early childhood. We focussed strongly on inputs such as the environment, materials, activities and routines but were not necessarily explicit about what we wanted young children to learn.

Intentional teachers act with specific learning goals in mind—both for aspects of children’s development in social and emotional, cognitive, physical and creative domains *and* for learning in the academic domains of literacy, maths and science.

Adults intentionally play roles in guiding children’s experiences and children have significant and active roles in planning and organising learning experiences.

It is not about saying at a particular part of the day *I will intentionally ‘teach’ children something*. It is about being intentional about what we provide across the whole day.

Judy suggests that when educators approach the new *Early Years Learning Framework*, it helps to have ‘an outlook of uncertainty’, to be prepared to put aside old habits and to have a go.



## Questions

- What can we do to help children and families feel they belong when they arrive at our service?
- Are there ways we can give children a bigger say in daily routines and activities?
- Have children shown any new interests that we could follow up in our programs?
- What can families tell us about children’s strengths and interests?
- Can children easily access materials, including stored equipment when they want to demonstrate their competence and stretch their capabilities?
- Currently, are we ‘intentional’ enough about fostering children’s learning including children’s social and emotional growth?
- Do we trust children to be able to explore big ideas and puzzling questions?
- Do we have the pedagogic knowledge to extend children’s understanding as they investigate, talk and think?
- What do we need to know to be more ‘thoughtful, informed and deliberate’ in our interactions with children?

Early childhood practitioners receiving these e-Newsletters are invited to post their comments and ideas on the [ECA Forum](#).

Content from the conference, from the forum and from research with the early childhood education and care community will provide material for future e-Newsletters.

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