



WHAT IS PEDAGOGY? How does it influence our practice?

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Child Australia recognises the importance of a shared understanding of high quality pedagogy in its early childhood education and care services in ensuring it meets the mission statement of the organisation and that the values of the organisation are embedded in everyday practice.

This discussion paper aims to ensure that Child Australia services staff, the families we serve, the professionals we collaborate with and the communities we operate in are aware of the professional conversations and research underpinning the pedagogy enacted within our services.

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What is pedagogy?

Pedagogy is an encompassing term concerned with what a teacher does to influence learning in others. As the importance of high quality early childhood education and care services for children has become more clearly understood, so has the teacher/educator's role in the provision of these services. This demands a clear understanding of the meaning of 'pedagogy' and how it plays out in individual educators and services.

The definitions below show a range of thinking around the term pedagogy, all of which have what a teacher does and how they do it at their core. The National Quality Agenda in Australia uses the term 'educator' to encompass all with direct contact and responsibility for children's learning and development in early childhood education and care services. For the purpose of this document the terms 'teacher' and 'educator' are used interchangeably.

Definitions of pedagogy include:

The function or work of teaching: the art or science of teaching, education instructional methods.

(Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), 2009a, p.42)

... the instructional techniques and strategies that allow learning to take place. It refers to the interactive process between teacher/practitioner and learner and it is also applied to include the provision of some aspects of the learning environment (including the concrete learning environment, and the actions of the family and community)

(Siraj-Blatchford, Sylva, Muttock, Gilden & Bell, 2002, p.10)

Pedagogy is about learning, teaching and development influenced by the cultural, social and political values we have for children...in Scotland, and underpinned by a strong theoretical and practical base.

(Education Scotland, 2005, p.9)

Quality teaching is defined as pedagogical practices that facilitate for diverse children their access to knowledge, activities and opportunities to advance their skills in ways that build on previous learning, assist in learning how to learn and provide a strong foundation for further learning in relation to the goals of the early childhood curriculum ... 'Te Whariki' and cultural, community and family values.

(Farquhar, 2003, 5)

'My Time, Our Place: Framework for School Age Care' (FSAC) and 'Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework' (EYLF) view pedagogy as educators' professional practice, especially those aspects that involve nurturing relationships, curriculum decision-making, teaching and learning.

(DEEWR, 2009b; DEEWR 2009c).

Pedagogy develops from a range of factors including theories and research evidence, political drivers, evidence from practice, individual and group reflection, educators' experiences and expertise, and community expectations and requirements. It informs both curriculum (all the interactions, experiences, activities, routines and events planned and unplanned) and teaching in a service. It reflects and supports the principles of and outcomes sought by a service.

Early years' pedagogy is an extremely complex phenomenon comprising a wide variety of practices underpinned by principles acquired through training and as a result of professional experiences and personal understandings. Because of its complexity 'effectiveness' has to be viewed as a whole rather than as particular aspects taken in isolation.

(Moyles, Adams & Musgrove, 2002, p.1)

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Why is pedagogy important

Early childhood education and care is concerned with ensuring children achieve positive outcomes. Research on teaching, learning and outcomes shows that quality pedagogy is identified as a key lever for improving children's outcomes. Sound research evidence, discussed later, shows what educators can do to provide children with strong foundations for ongoing learning and development in all aspects of life. This evidence must be reflected in educators' pedagogy if children's learning and development is to be optimised.

Pedagogy in Child Inclusive Learning and Development Services (Child Australia)

Child Australia recognises the importance of a shared understanding of high quality pedagogy in its early childhood education and care services in ensuring it meets the mission statement of the organisation and that the values of the organisation are embedded in everyday practice.

This statement aims to ensure that Child Australia services staff, the families we serve, the professionals we collaborate with, the communities we operate in and the broader community are aware of the pedagogy enacted within our services.

It will provide the educators within our services with an understanding of the evidence base behind this pedagogy and an awareness of how they can contribute to the development of pedagogy. The statement will assist in ensuring educators are aware of the impact they have on children and to articulate not only what they do, but why and how they do what they do to parents, carers and the wider community.

In clarifying 'pedagogy' we can develop a deeper understanding of what is informing our practice and why we work in particular ways. This helps us to make our practice more visible both to others and ourselves.

(Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2005, p.3)

Child Australia early childhood education and care services operate within a government policy context that focuses on quality and continuous improvement through a National Quality Framework. This framework includes state legislation underpinning a National Quality Standard. Standard 1 requires services to enhance each child's learning and development through the development of curriculum informed by an approved learning framework (DEEWR, 2013).

Child Inclusive Learning and Development services subscribe to the principles, practice and outcomes of the approved EYLF and FSAC. The approach of these frameworks supports our mission to develop the capacity of the early childhood education and care sector, families and community to support children's wellbeing, learning and development and reflects our values of integrity, respect, recognition, collaboration, commitment and innovation.

The frameworks support our strong belief that pedagogy encompasses a spirit of enquiry and professional dialogue about why we do what we do, that learning through play and intentional teaching are key to optimising children's learning and development and that children are people with agency.

Effective pedagogy not only produces outcome results in relation to input, but also represents a common core of values and objectives to which all those involved can subscribe. (Moyles, Adams & Musgrove, 2002, p.3)

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The Early Years Learning Framework' (EYLF) and the 'My Time, Our Place: Framework for School Age Care' (FSAC) share the same five outcomes of:

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

The frameworks also share five principles:

1. Secure and respectful relationships
2. Partnerships
3. High expectations and equity
4. Respect for diversity
5. Ongoing learning and reflective practice

The principles are enacted through practice which focuses on assisting all children to make progress in relation to the outcomes. The practice statements of the frameworks highlight:

1. Holistic approaches
2. Responsiveness and collaboration with children
3. Learning through play
4. Intentionality
5. Environments
6. Cultural competence
7. Continuity of learning and transitions
8. Assessment and evaluation

The principles, practice statements and outcomes do not stand or operate in isolation. This interconnectedness is derived from the research literature and is replicated in the holistic practice of high quality early and middle childhood services.

The frameworks view pedagogy as educators' professional practice, especially those aspects that involve nurturing relationships, curriculum decision-making, teaching and learning. The support for this pedagogical approach comes from a range of sources and is discussed below.

Our pedagogy builds on empirical research, evidence from practice, individual and group reflection, exploration and enquiry and accepting that we are life-long learners who do not know everything we need to know but who strive to learn and do better. Through ongoing engagement with the principles, practice statements and outcomes of the EYLF and FSAC we deepen our understanding of our pedagogical base.

Why this approach to pedagogy is used - the evidence base

High quality pedagogical practice is underpinned by theories and research evidence concerning children's learning. It acknowledges and supports the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. This section provides a brief overview of relevant articles of the Convention, evidence from neuroscience and influential studies that both validate and challenge aspects of traditional early childhood education and care practice. Links to the practice statements of the EYLF and FSAC are made. The links are not exhaustive and serve as indicators of how effective pedagogy is developed.

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The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

- Article 12 of the Convention recognises a child's right to express his or her views and to have those views taken into account in all matters affecting the child.
- Article 28 recognises the right of the child to education
Article 29 states that this education shall be directed to:
 - the development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential (Links to Practice Statement 1, 2, 3, 4 and 8)
 - the development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, parents cultural identity, language and values in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, civilizations different from his or her own and respect for the environment (Links to Practice Statements 2, 3, 4 and 6)
 - the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes and friendship of all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin (Links to Practice Statements 3, 4 and 6)
- Article 32 recognises the child's right to engage in play and recreational activities. (Links to Practice Statement 3)

Theories

Theories provide different lenses through which to interpret and gain insight into complex issues... Educators can use theories to assist them to make sense of and respond to different circumstances and contexts... Because all theories have strengths and limitations, it is preferable for educators to use a range of theories rather than relying only on one. (DEEWR, 2010, p.1)

The following theories are those mainly referred to in relation to early childhood education and care practice:

- *Behaviourist theory* - behaviour is learned and can be unlearned, unacceptable behaviour can be replaced by acceptable behaviour and changes in children's behaviour occur due to the responses they get to their behaviour.

Pedagogical practices associated with this theory include: educators reinforce appropriate behaviour through rewards ranging from a positive statement to tangible rewards such as star charts; educators avoid reinforcing inappropriate behaviour or remove children who are behaving inappropriately; educators draw children's attention to the consequences of their behaviour. (Links to Practice Statements 2 and 6)

- *Developmental theory* - development depends on the context, genetic and environmental circumstances; development leads learning; children learn through exploration and play with concrete materials; physical, cognitive, emotional and social domains of development are interwoven.

Pedagogical practices associated with this theory include: educators facilitate children's learning by planning a rich environment with routines and play-based experiences that may be linked to learning goals appropriate for children's unique and holistic development; using developmental theory, educators observe children to understand and interpret their development and individual differences. (Links to Practice Statements 1, 2, 3 and 6)

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- *Socio-cultural theory*- relationships and participation are central to learning; children develop and learn in multiple ways that are socially and culturally approved and constructed; children learn ways of being interdependent through their participation in everyday events and as members of different social groups; learning leads development; children are active agents and contributors in the social groups in which they participate.

Pedagogical practices associated with this theory include: educators take the context of children's lives into account in their expectations, planned experiences and in routines such as meals and sleep arrangements; children's learning is scaffolded (for example, questions, demonstrations, prompts) by adults or other children; children move through learning with assistance to independent understandings; educators use responsive listening in order to understand and respect children's learning; learning experiences connect with and extend children's ways of knowing, skills and understandings that they bring from home and the community; documentation of children's learning is in multiple forms to make the learning visible to others. (Links to Practice Statements 1, 2, 3, 6 and 8)

- *Critical theory* – children are born with rights; children have agency which means they have the capacity to make decisions and choices about their learning; social transformation is supported through education for a more just and equal world.

Pedagogical practices associated with this theory include: families and children are co-participants with educators in negotiating, developing and implementing learning agendas, outcomes and assessment; critical questions are used to support planning by exploring learning from a child's perspective –'What is it like for me in this place?', 'Do you listen to me?'; strategies such as role play and photographs are used to help children discuss their answers; educators adopt a critical enquiry approach to curriculum planning. (Links to Practice Statements 2, 4, 5 and 6)

- *Post structuralist theory* – children have complex and shifting identities as they move between and participate in different groups; there are multiple and contested ways of knowing and learning.

Pedagogical practices associated with this theory include: a focus on seeking out how power plays out between children, children and educators and the equity effects of these dynamics in relationships; democratic participation and inclusion for every child and family is supported; learning experiences build or bridge the different ways of knowing and learning that children bring to the service; multiple assessment strategies and different perspectives are used to interpret this data. (Links to Practice Statements 2, 4, 5, 6 and 8)

(Adapted from *Educators belonging, being and becoming. Resources CD* (2010) from material drafted by Charles Sturt University (CSU) Early Years Learning Framework Consortium.)

A number of well-respected early years' programs can be seen to be based in a specific theory, for example the High/Scope pre-school program in the United States is underpinned by developmental theory and the pre-school programs of Reggio Emilia in Italy are underpinned by socio-cultural theory. However elements from other theories can also be seen in descriptions of such programs. Theories provide guidance but are not restrictive, even in the most developed programs.

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Neuroscience

A growing body of evidence relating to brain development emphasises the importance of the early years of life and of high quality pedagogy in promoting positive outcomes for children.

During the period from 0-8 years the metabolic rate of children's brains rises sharply and stay high throughout this entire period. This means that young brains are biologically primed for learning.

(Shore, 1997; Blakemore & Frith, 2005; Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) 2006, cited in Marbina, Church & Tayler, 2011)

The biological heritage children are born with is mediated through the quality of their everyday experiences and interactions. (McCain & Mustard, 1998).

(The findings from neuroscience link to Practice Statements 2, 3, 4, and 5.)

Evidence relating to high quality pedagogy in ECEC services includes:

- the brain develops through a complex interplay between the genes we are born with and our everyday experiences from birth onwards. This is achieved through billions of neurons (nerve cells) being stimulated to form sensing pathways. These pathways influence a person's learning, behaviour and biological processes which in turn affect mental and physical health. Connections across the pathways are established early in life through a complex process of neurons sending impulses to one another and genetic expression (how, when and where the genes we are born with work).
- the relationship between child and caregiver has a critical impact on the developing structure of the child's brain that influences his/her capacities and capabilities in adult life. Early experiences activate genetic expression resulting in the formation of critical neural pathways within the brain. These pathways underpin children's capacity to use language, to become literate and to understand and cope with the complexities of environments. Early experiences influence responses to internal and external stimuli throughout their lives. If coping processes are well established, individuals are able to adjust to life's experiences. If not, biological systems, tissues and organs deteriorate, leading to long-term chronic mental and physical illness.
- the 'wiring' of the brain is heavily influenced by the quality of early interactions. The interaction between genes, early environments and experiences shapes brain development and influences lifelong learning, behaviour and health. The interaction between children and carers determines which connections are activated and retained. (McCain, Mustard & Shanker, 2007)

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Research Studies

A number of studies have had a significant impact on thinking about pedagogy in early childhood education and care services. This section highlights findings from the following studies: the High/Scope pre-school education model (United States), the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education Project (United Kingdom), The Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years study (United Kingdom), the Competent Children Study (New Zealand) and the Study of Pedagogical Effectiveness in Early Learning (United Kingdom).

The High/Scope preschool education model is based on developmental theory. It follows a participatory learning approach where adults arrange interest areas in the learning environment, maintain a daily routine that encourages children to learn actively and join in children's activities asking questions that extend children's plans and help them think through what they do. Children are provided with a set of key child development experiences with assessment through observation and there is an emphasis on parent involvement. It emphasises:

- cognitive development theory placing primary emphasis on problem solving and independent thinking rather than social development
- the child as a self-initiated active learner
- adults gauging children's developmental status and presenting intellectual challenges intended to stretch the child's understanding.

Longitudinal research compared this approach with a direct instruction model where educators directly teach academic skills and children are rewarded for giving correct answers and a traditional pre-school model where teachers respond to children's self-initiated play in a loosely structured, socially supportive setting. The findings showed that the High/Scope model significantly contributes to the overall development of children from low and middle socio-economic backgrounds, particularly to the development of initiative, social relations and music and movement abilities.

Children from the High/Scope group were shown to perform better at school entry and in later achievement tests, exhibit higher commitment to schooling, complete high school, achieve higher earnings and greater prosperity in adulthood and engage in less crime than their counterparts who experienced the other two models (Schweinhart, 2003).
(Findings link to Practice Statements 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 8)

The Effective Provision of Pre-school Education (EPPE) Project, 1997- 2004 in the UK investigated the effects of pre-school education and care on children's development for children 3 -7 years old. The project involved 3,000 children who were recruited at age 3+ and studied longitudinally over the life of the project. One of the study's aims was to identify the most effective pedagogical strategies applied in early years' services to support the development of young children's skills, knowledge and attitudes and ensure they make a positive start at school. EPPE found that effective pedagogical strategies include:

- educators having warm, interactive relationships with children
- viewing educational and social development as complementary and equal in importance supports children in making better all-round progress
- effective pedagogy includes interaction traditionally associated with the term 'teaching', the provision of instructive learning environments and 'sustained shared thinking' (where a child and adult engage with the understanding of the other and learning is achieved through a process of reflexive co-construction) to extend children's learning
- services which put particular emphasis on literacy, maths, science/environment and children's diversity (catering to children of different genders, cultural backgrounds and

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abilities or interests) promoted better outcomes for children in their subsequent academic attainment (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford & Taggart, 2004). (Findings link to Practice Statements 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8)

The Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years (REPEY) study focussed on services that the EPPE Project identified as having effective practice. Findings include:

- effective pedagogy in the early years involves both the kind of interaction traditionally associated with the term ‘teaching’ and the provision of instructive learning environments and routines
- the most effective services provide both teacher initiated group work and freely chosen yet potentially instructive play activities
- the services that view cognitive and social development as complimentary achieve the best outcomes
- positive outcomes for children are linked to:
 - adult-child interactions that involve sustained shared thinking and open-ended questioning to extend children’s thinking
 - educators having good curriculum knowledge as well as knowledge and understanding of child development
 - shared educational aims with parents
 - formative feedback to children during activities
 - behaviour policies in which staff support children in being assertive, at the same time as rationalising and talking through their conflicts (Siraj-Blatchford, et al.,2002).

(Findings link to Practice Statements 2, 4, 5 and 8)

The Competent Children Study has tracked the development of a group of learners from when they were in early childhood education, through school and into adulthood. It identified the quality of teaching as a key lever in making a difference for children’s outcomes and reducing disparities for heterogeneous groups of children. It showed that the pedagogical variables of significance from children’s final early childhood education and development centre were:

- educators who were responsive to individual children
- educators who ask open ended questions
- educators who joined children’s play
- educators who allowed children to compete activities
- educators who guided children in the activities
- provision of a variety of activities for children to choose from
- evidence of printed material and its use by children (Wylie, 2001 cited in Ministry of Education, New Zealand, p. 6).

(Findings link to Practice Statements 2, 3, 4 and 8)

The Study of Pedagogical Effectiveness in Early Learning was designed to investigate practitioners’ perceptions and understanding of effective pedagogy. In addition to findings around practitioner’s perception and understandings, the conclusions included:

- articulation of, and reflection about practice appear to be important to practitioners in considering necessary changes to practice and improvement in pedagogical skills
- the most effective practitioners were very conscious of their impact on children’s learning
- play could be said to be at the root of educators thinking and principles but few educators were able to provide a theoretical basis (Moyle, Adams & Musgrove, 2002)

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While much of the research into early years' pedagogy has focussed on children 3+ years of age, the national agenda concentrating on quality and the introduction of the EYLF is supporting thinking about babies and toddlers who access early childhood education and care services and the important role that educators play in supporting their learning and development.

The evidence from neuroscience clearly points to the need for positive relationships and engagement with these very young children. Lally and Mangione (2006) (as cited in Marbina et al., 2011, p.16) describe infancy as a unique period that calls for unique experiences from adults (. Rockel (2009) argues that an articulated pedagogy provides a framework for dialogue as well as a rationale for action that is beyond routinely performing tasks stating:

The process of theorising how routines for infants and toddlers can actualise learning within the curriculum contributes to a pedagogy of care.
(Rockel, 2009, p. 3)

This sits well with the focus on educators' ongoing learning and reflective practice, and children's agency, including that of babies and toddlers, of the EYLF.

A focus on play-based learning and intentional teaching

The Early Years Learning Framework describes play-based learning as a context for learning through which children organise and make sense of their social worlds, as they engage actively with people, objects and representations (DEEWR, 2009c) with the FSAC using the same definition for 'meaningful play and leisure' in relation to activity undertaken by children in outside schools hours services (DEEWR 2009c).

Barblett (2010) argues that for the EYLF to be implemented properly, all early childhood educators need to know what play is, why it is important, how to implement and assess a play-based program and their role in it. Barblett states that while there is no one definition of play there are a number of characteristics that describe play. These are, play is pleasurable, symbolic, active in a physical, verbal or mental sense, voluntary, process-oriented and self-motivating (play is considered its own reward to the player).

While the characteristics described by Barblett form a widely accepted view of play; play is not necessarily pleasurable for all players but may be a means for children to exercise power and control over each other (McNaughton, 2009, cited in Brooker & Woodhead, 2013, p. 4). Concerns have also been expressed that adults may use play as a means of achieving their intended outcomes for children or use playful activities and routines to enforce their rules (Ailwood, 2011 cited in Brooker & Woodhead, 2013, p. 4).

Learning through play is a long held belief of early childhood education and care educators developed through theorists and education pioneers, for example, Froebel (1782 – 1852), Pestalozzi (1746 – 1827) Montessori (1870 – 1952), Steiner (1861-1925) and Isaacs (1885 – 1948). Broadly speaking these pioneers emphasised play as a means for the child to experiment and discover the world around them, as a way of expressing emotions safely and where cooperation with others could develop. They stressed the importance of a rich and stimulating environment for young children's learning to occur, purposefulness in the provision of environments and activities, allowing children time to complete activities over extended periods and encouraging children's sense of responsibility for themselves and their environment.

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There is substantial evidence that through play children demonstrate improved verbal communication, high levels of social and interaction skills, creative use of play materials, imagination and divergent thinking skills and problem solving capabilities. Play and playful forms of activity potentially lead towards increasingly mature forms of knowledge, skills and understanding. (Moyles et al., 2001 cited in Anning, Cullen & Fler, 2004, p. 21). Bodrova and Leong (2005) (cited in Barblett 2010) state that young children's play allows them to explore, identify, negotiate, take risks and create meaning. Children who engage in quality play are more likely to have well-developed memory skills and language development and are able to regulate their behaviour leading to enhanced school adjustment and academic learning.

While play has always been regarded as a critical element in early childhood education in recent years evidence has shown that the least successful learning environments are often those where children are regularly left to their own devices to engage in long periods of undirected free play (Broadhead, 2006; McLachan, Fler & Edwards, 2010; Walsh et al., 2006 cited in Mangione et al., 2011). Citing the work of Shore (2006), Mangione et al., (2011) state that this is particularly true for infants and toddlers. Contemporary evidence shows that the best outcomes for children occur when there is an integrated approach to teaching and learning. (Sylva, Siraj-Blatchford & Taggart, 2003; Hamre, Pianta, Mashburn & Downer, 2009; Sylva et al., 2007 cited in Mangione et al., 2011)

The findings of the research studies outlined in this paper support and extend the theories of early education pioneers. While learning through play was evident in the work of the early pioneers, the combination of the terms 'play-based learning'/'meaningful play and leisure' and 'intentional teaching'/'intentionality' of the EYLF and FSAC emphasise the importance of the educator's planning, assessment, interactions and implicitly, their content knowledge, in children's learning and development, as shown in research findings.

Intentional teaching/intentionality involves educators being deliberate, purposeful and thoughtful in their decisions and action.
(DEEWR, 2009b, 41; DEEWR, 2009c, 15)

Pedagogy in practice

For their pedagogy to fully reflect the research findings it is important for educators to:

- understand that intentional teaching/intentionality can occur in child initiated and educator directed learning experiences and intentional teaching can be planned or spontaneous (Mangione et al., 2011);
- understand that intentional teaching/intentionality is based in knowledge of children's cultural contexts gained through interactions with children and their families and children's skills, knowledge and understandings gained through interactions and assessment of children's learning and development (OECD, 2006);
- develop a range of teaching techniques including modelling, facilitating, questioning, telling and instruction, scaffolding and co-construction as described in McNaughton and Williams (2004). The skill of the educator lies in using these strategies, ensuring a balance of child and adult initiated experiences and in using assessment of children's learning in all types of experiences to plan for children's future learning;
- draw on their content knowledge to extend children's thinking and inquiry and to support children's cultural identity and sense of contribution and belonging. When they do not have the necessary content knowledge to support children's learning educators need to access information with children, for example, through books, the internet and by asking community and family specialists (Farquhar, 2003);

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- have high expectations for every child, every day. This affirms that children have multiple learning styles, cultural belief systems and personal interests and to reflect this educators need to plan varied and stimulating experiences that take account of children's individuality (Arthur, Beecher, Death, Dockett & Farmer, 2008 cited in Mangione et al., 2011)

Intentional teaching includes creating a learning environment that is rich in materials and interactions with opportunities for children to use thinking skills, to choose, negotiate, problem solve and take risks. It encourages children to explore materials, experiences, relationships and ideas through a variety of open ended materials and creates opportunities for inquiry where children can ask questions, investigate, gather information, consider possibilities and test hypotheses. Intentional educators join in children's play and respond to children's views and ideas, model thinking and problem solving and challenge children.

While research findings emphasise a balance between child and adult initiated experiences there is no definitive mix. Brooker and Woodhead (2013) raise important policy questions to support play-based learning and intentional teaching for example:

- what is an appropriate balance between proactive planning for children's play and respecting children's autonomy to play without interference?
- what should be the role of adults in supporting, partnering or regulating young children's play activities in different context?
- how can an awareness of cultural diversity in play be used to inform play provision in early childhood education and care setting?
- what can be learned from children themselves about the importance and meaning they attach to their play, and how can this inform policies and practices?
- how can the potential of 'play as pedagogy' be applied in ways that maintain a balance between children's freely chosen activities and educators' wish to plan and structure play towards specific goals?

Pedagogy evolves through ongoing research and reflection at all levels, including service and educator level. This ensures continuous improvement in educators' practice with the aim of supporting the best possible outcomes for all children and recognises the importance of the educator in children's learning and development.

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