



## Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework

### Evidence Paper

## Practice Principle 2: Partnerships with professionals

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## Practice Principle 2: Partnerships with professionals

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The Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (Victorian Framework, DEECD, 2009) guides early childhood professionals' practice in Victoria. The Victorian Framework identifies eight Practice Principles for Learning and Development (Practice Principles). The Practice Principles are based on the P-12 Principles of Learning and Teaching, the pedagogy from the national Early Years Learning Framework, and are informed by the latest research.

The Practice Principles are interrelated and designed to inform each other. They are categorised as Collaborative, Effective and Reflective:

### **Collaborative**

1. Family-centred practice
2. Partnerships with professionals
3. High expectations for every child

### **Effective**

4. Equity and diversity
5. Respectful relationships and responsive engagement
6. Integrated teaching and learning approaches
7. Assessment for learning and development

### **Reflective**

8. Reflective practice

These Evidence Papers document the research that underpins each Practice Principle. The content of the Evidence Papers will be developed into a series of practical guides – Practice Principles in Practice – which will provide practical advice to early childhood professionals on how to align their practice to the Practice Principles.

## **Executive Summary**

Practice Principle 2: Partnerships with professionals emphasises the need for early childhood professionals from a range of backgrounds to work together (collaborate) to achieve the best outcomes for children and families (Lumsden, 2005; Bruder, 2010). Partnerships between professionals are important for all children, including children with a disability, developmental delay or other additional needs, who may require the support of professionals across several settings and disciplines (Wesley et al., 2004; King, et al., 2009; Trepanier-Street, 2010).

Professionals themselves also benefit from working in partnership. Collaboration provides opportunities for professional development through formal and informal learning from peers with diverse experience and expertise (Kelley, 1996; Wesley et al., 2001; Rush et al., 2003; Green et al., 2006; McWayne, et al. 2008). By sharing knowledge and experience through collaborative partnerships with other practitioners, researchers and policy makers, early childhood professionals can contribute to new knowledge about early childhood learning and development.

Working in partnership requires professional commitment and respect for one another's roles, experience and expertise, and is the responsibility of all early childhood professionals. Early childhood professionals understand the importance of communicating and planning in collaboration in order to respond to children and to ensure comprehensive, holistic and continuous approaches to their education and care.

The implications for practice informed by the research and detailed in this paper are:

- Early childhood professionals collaborate; communicating and planning in partnership to achieve best practice.
- Early childhood professionals work together across settings to support positive transitions for children.
- Early childhood professionals are willing to learn from one another.
- Early childhood professionals understand their own and others' roles, and make referrals when necessary.
- Early childhood professionals are committed to working in partnership to achieve the best possible outcomes for children.

## Introduction

Early childhood professionals are a diverse group, reflecting the complexities of young children's learning, development and health. *Practice Principle 2: Partnerships with professionals* relates to the importance of collaboration and partnership amongst early childhood professionals, who work together to support children's learning and development.

Early childhood professionals are from diverse professional backgrounds. They use multidisciplinary approaches to provide better support to families and draw on the skills and expertise of their peers. Early childhood professionals:

- work collaboratively to share information and plan to ensure holistic approaches to children's learning and development
- understand each other's practice, skills and expertise, and make referrals when appropriate
- acknowledge the significance of transitions within and across early childhood services and schools, and ensure that children understand the process and have an active role in preparing for these transitions
- build on children's prior learning and experiences to build continuity for their learning and development from birth to eight years of age.

VEYLDF, p.10

Practice Principle 2: Partnerships with professionals emphasises the importance of collaboration and partnership amongst all professionals who work with children and their families to support children's learning and development. Early childhood professionals bring diverse cultural, educational and social backgrounds and specialisations that include early childhood education, health, social and emotional development, special education, occupational therapy, speech pathology, psychology and inclusion support. No early childhood professional is able to support children's learning, development and health alone, and all professionals are responsible for seeking opportunities to work in partnership.

The term 'early childhood professional' includes any person who works with children between the ages of birth and eight years. It includes, but is not limited to, maternal and child health nurses, all early childhood practitioners who work directly with children in early childhood settings (educators), school teachers, family support workers, preschool field officers, inclusion support facilitators, student support service officers, primary school nurses, primary welfare officers, early childhood intervention workers, play therapists, health professionals and teachers working in hospitals, and education officers in cultural organisations.

VEYLDF, p. 5

It is widely accepted that partnership and collaboration are central to early childhood professionals' roles, with benefits not just for children, but also for children's families and the professionals themselves (Lumsden, 2005; Woodruff et al., 2005; Dalli, 2008; McWayne et al., 2008). *Practice Principle 2: Partnerships with professionals* brings together the experience and expertise of diverse professionals to meet the increasingly heterogeneous needs of young children (Lumsden, 2005; Bruder, 2010). The OECD report *Starting Strong II* (OECD, 2006) includes an emphasis on developing partnerships with professionals in early childhood settings, adding that the integration of education and care services at a local level allows professionals to better respond to local families and communities.

Professional partnerships are particularly important for professionals working with children with disabilities and developmental delays and vulnerable children, such as those who are victims of abuse or trauma. The support of professionals in several different fields may be required for children to thrive in inclusive settings (Wesley and Buysse, 2004; King, et al., 2009; Trepanier-Street, 2010). It is crucial that professionals work in a collaborative, coordinated way to support families and children, ensuring that the child's best interests are at the centre of all decisions.

Early childhood professionals benefit from professional learning opportunities provided by working with those who have expertise in another area (Wesley and Buysse, 2001; Helm, 2007; McWayne et al., 2008). Early childhood professionals can also share their expertise in order to create new knowledge and ideas about children's learning and development.

The characteristics of effective partnerships include positive communication practices, collaborative planning, and the pursuit of common goals (Kelley, 1996; Lumsden 2005). All early childhood professionals share a desire to ensure the best possible learning and development outcomes for children, and many professionals identify a need for collaboration to meet this aim (Woodruff and O'Brien, 2005; Dalli, 2008). Effective partnerships with professionals ensure that every child receives holistic and comprehensive support to meet their learning and development needs.

### **What do we mean by 'partnerships with professionals'?**

Partnerships with professionals exist where early childhood professionals communicate openly with one another, plan collaboratively and work in ways that support children's learning and development.

Participants in any partnership should have clearly articulated roles and responsibilities, and an understanding of and respect for the roles of other professionals with whom they work (Lumsden, 2005; King et al., 2009).

Successful partnerships are built upon common goals for children's learning and development informed by the needs, culture and characteristics of each child (Myers, et al., 2011).

Partnerships can be formed between individuals and between organisations or services. Kelley (1996) states that for collaboration to be successful there must be both organisational and individual support. Organisational support requires leadership that affirms and encourages partnerships and that provides professionals with the resources and the time to pursue collaborative opportunities as a central component of their roles. Partnership is, however, the responsibility of all professionals, and individuals must also be committed to practical action to achieve the goals and objectives of organisational partnerships.

Partnerships bring together the expertise of diverse professionals to meet the learning and development needs of all children and to ensure smooth transitions and continuity in children's lives. Early childhood educators, for example, may work in partnership with occupational and physical therapists, mental health specialists, maternal and child health nurses, specialist intervention workers, and other education professionals (Kelley, 1996; Rush, et al., 2003; Hopps, 2004; Kent, 2005; Green et al., 2006; Hendler and Nakelski, 2008; Streelasky, 2008; Ashton, et al., 2008).

### **Why are partnerships with professionals so important in early childhood learning, development and pedagogy?**

*Early childhood development is complex and multi-faceted; requiring professionals in a range of sectors to collaborate so that support for each child's learning and development is integrated and holistic.*

Early childhood learning and development has undergone a transformation in recent years. The Victorian Framework's Learning and Development Outcomes reflect a growing understanding of children's diverse needs. Young children develop and learn at different rates and in different ways, and therefore require different levels and kinds of support from a range of early childhood professionals (Wesley and Buysse, 2004; DEECD, 2009; Bruder, 2010; Trepanier-Street, 2010).

Increased understanding of the diverse and complex learning and development needs of young children has resulted in an equally diversified professional workforce to meet those needs (Wesley and Buysse, 2004; Bruder, 2010). Successful partnerships draw on the skills and experience of early childhood professionals in diverse fields to provide holistic approaches to supporting children's learning and development (Kelley, 1996). Evidence indicates that

children, families and professionals all benefit from partnerships in which knowledge and experience is shared (Wesley and Buysse, 2001; Tayler, 2006; McWayne, et al., 2008; Bruder, 2010).

Collaborative partnerships support inclusive practice. Universally available services are inclusive of all children, including those with a disability or developmental delay and other children who may access additional support (Wesley and Buysse, 2004; Trepanier-Street, 2010). Early childhood educators of children who require additional support may need to work in partnership with occupational therapists, physical therapists, mental health professionals, literacy specialists, social workers, and other professionals with health or educational expertise (Kent, 2005; Hender, 2008; Myers, 2008; Streelasky, 2008; Myers, et al., 2011). Research evidence emphasises the value of working in partnership to share expertise in early childhood settings (Trepanier-Street, 2010), and the importance of these professionals' ability to build collaborative relationships (Green et al, 2006).

Professionals work together both within and between services. Early childhood services are also increasingly diverse, and most children attend several different education, health and other services during their early development. This diversity can result in fragmentation for children and families, who often face more than one issue or need at any given time and thus may be accessing several services at once (McWayne et al, 2008). Inter-agency partnerships, as well as partnerships between individual professionals, can help to overcome this fragmentation (McWayne et al., 2008; Bruder, 2010). Both individual and organisational partnerships are essential in providing comprehensive support for children and families.

*Collaboration enhances the professional learning of early childhood professionals.*

The complexity of early childhood learning and development and the changing nature of the field mean that early childhood professionals need to constantly reflect on and update their skills. This can be done by professionals working in partnership with other professionals who have different backgrounds, experience and expertise (McWayne, et al., 2008).

A recent study undertaken by Farrell and Walsh (2010) found that early childhood student teachers felt more confident in their knowledge following collaborative learning activities, and qualified teachers can similarly benefit from sharing their expertise with peers. Working in partnership allows early childhood professionals to draw on one another's knowledge to solve problems and plan effective approaches to responding to children. Partnership also provides professionals with opportunities for critical reflection, a key component in the creation of knowledge about early childhood learning and development.



Collaborative problem-solving and planning have benefits for early childhood professionals working in partnership. McWayne, et al. (2008) found that collaboration helped professionals working in partnership to achieve personal goals. Collaboration also contributed to their professional learning as well as providing them with new perspectives of early childhood learning and development. Guo and colleagues (2011) also reported that early childhood educators' sense of efficacy was increased by a sense of community in their settings, as well as opportunities to participate in decision-making. Early childhood professionals have valuable experience and knowledge about children's learning and development needs, and partnership provides important opportunities for sharing this expertise.

Collaboration also supports reflective practice (see Practice Principle 8). According to Wesley and Buysse (2001), engaging in mutual reflection on one another's practice assists early childhood professionals to refine their knowledge about early childhood learning and development. Early childhood professionals are uniquely placed to understand the issues confronting young children, and have valuable roles to play in the creation of knowledge. Working in partnership with other professionals and with early childhood researchers may help to bridge the research-practice divide, because collaboration means that early childhood professionals are at the centre of knowledge generation (Potter, 2001; Buysse et al., 2003). Partnerships between early childhood professionals and researchers ensure that professionals' voices are heard (Potter, 2001).

Partnerships can lead to informal or formal professional learning opportunities. Informal professional learning occurs through communication and reflection between professionals (Wesley and Buysse, 2001; McWayne et al., 2008). Formal professional learning opportunities include coaching or mentoring (Rush et al, 2003; Green et al., 2006) and formal programs (Kelley, 1996; Green et al., 2006). Continuing professional learning is essential to promote the sharing and extension of knowledge among early childhood professionals.

*Effective partnerships can ensure continuity in learning and development in early childhood.*

Young children and their families make transitions daily, both within and between early childhood settings and schools. Children move between settings for many reasons, including progression between education and care services and schools, moving to a new area, and in order to have needs met in appropriate settings. Transitions may occur at any stage of a child's development. Transitions are complex and can be difficult for young children and their families (Branson and Bingham, 2009; Myers et al., 2011), and poor transitions can result in negative discontinuity for children (Hopps, 2004; Tayler, 2006). The formation of partnerships between professionals within settings, and with professionals in

other early childhood settings, can help to ensure that these discontinuities do not occur (Hopps, 2004; Myers et al., 2011).

Effective transitions provide continuity by building on children's prior learning and experiences, and are best supported by respectful communication and partnerships among all early childhood professionals within and across settings, and with families and children. In successful partnerships, professionals effectively communicate children's prior knowledge and experience, their strengths, abilities and interests to promote continuity for children within and across settings. Early childhood professionals also work together to ensure continuity in pedagogy and behavioural expectations within and across settings. Positive relationships between professionals built on a foundation of communication and shared responsibility for children's learning and development are likely to result in smoother transitions for children and families (Hopps, 2004; Brandes et al., 2007).

Collaborative approaches to transition also benefit professionals; working in partnership allows for the sharing of skills, knowledge and experience and results in the best outcomes for children and families. Hopps (2004) found that in children's transitions from preschool to school programs, educators saw a range of advantages in a collaborative approach to transition. Collaboration allowed primary school teachers to better understand preschool settings, as well as the behavioural expectations of the early childhood educators working there. The primary school teachers were better able to meet the needs of individual children when they understood more about the preschool setting, received information about individual children prior to their transition, and were able to exchange knowledge and ideas across settings.

*Effective partnerships ensure the best use of professionals' skills, knowledge and experience.*

Early childhood professionals encounter many opportunities to engage in collaborative problem-solving with those who have different professional backgrounds and knowledge, helping to ensure the best possible outcomes for children (Farrell and Walsh, 2010). Several studies have highlighted the benefits of holistic and multidisciplinary approaches to meeting children's learning and development capabilities and needs (Kelley, 1996; Anning et al., 2006, King, 2009; Silverman, 2010,). Holistic approaches that make the best use of each professional's skills, knowledge and experience occur in partnerships that involve effective communication and shared goals (Kelley, 1996; Lumsden 2005; Woodruff and O'Brien, 2005).

No two early childhood professionals have exactly the same skills, knowledge and experience. Partnership plays a key role in ensuring children's diverse

learning and development needs are met. Kelley (1996) found that partnership approaches can result in faster and more personalised responses to child and family needs, including establishing eligibility for special education programs, or meeting emergency family needs for shelter, money and medical treatment. Similarly, Odom and Diamond (1998) found that collaboration supports inclusive practice in early childhood settings, and conversely that a lack of time or opportunity to work collaboratively can actually be a barrier to inclusion. In partnership, service providers are able to bring together different philosophies and professional backgrounds to provide a more comprehensive service for children and families (Bruder, 2010). Professionals who respect one another's experience, and understand one another's roles and settings, are better able to achieve the best outcomes for children and families (Hopps, 2004; Ashton, et al., 2008).

### **How can we achieve best practice?**

*Early childhood professionals communicate positively with one another to support children's learning and development.*

Research into early childhood professional partnerships highlights the importance of communicating effectively within and between settings (Hopps, 2004; Lumsden, 2005; Brandes et al., 2007; McWayne, et al., 2008; Mogharreban and Bruns, 2009). Research undertaken by Hopps (2004) identified nine specific strategies to assist open communication between settings. These included:

- mutual respect
- collegial meetings
- reciprocal visits between settings
- willingness from both sides to collaborate and communicate
- formal and resourced processes that support collaboration
- newsletters to facilitate information sharing
- collaboratively developed child profiles.

When sharing information about children and families it is critical to respect the rights of the child, the rights of the family to privacy, and relevant privacy legislation.

Communication is essential for professionals to work in partnership, however the diversity of professionals working within the early childhood sector may lead to challenges, as professionals with different backgrounds may not share a common language or way to describe young children's learning and development (Wesley and Buysse, 2001; Lumsden, 2005; Weiner and Murawski, 2005). Lumsden (2005) suggests that challenges of communication can be overcome by professionals who are committed to achieving best outcomes for children, and are willing to share specialist knowledge. For early childhood professionals in

Victoria, the Victorian Framework provides a common language for communicating about learning and development outcomes for children from birth to eight years.

Effective communication requires support at an organisational level. This means leaders and professionals all take responsibility for creating time and opportunities to communicate and share their expertise (Lumsden, 2005; Green et al., 2006). Green and colleagues (2006) found that formal and informal training, coaching and mentoring supported close communication between professionals, and time allocated for professionals (in this case mental health workers) to spend in the classroom was particularly effective in building collaborative relationships. Likewise, other research found that it can be beneficial for professionals to plan together, collectively, for children's learning and development (Case-Smith and Holland, 2009; Mogharreban and Bruns, 2009).

*Early childhood professionals work collaboratively by planning and sharing information with each other*

Collaborative planning supports continuity and positive transitions within and between early childhood settings, as well as enhancing holistic and integrated approaches to achieving learning and development outcomes. Within settings, continuity relies on careful planning and a conscious and considered approach to curriculum development that is motivated by the strengths, abilities, interests, and culture of the child. Collaborative planning is essential to allow educators to develop a comprehensive and continuous learning pathway.

Early childhood professionals also collaborate and share information across settings. For example, schools build on children's existing knowledge and experiences, including those gained in early childhood education and care settings prior to school. Evidence indicates that primary school educators benefit from knowledge of children's capabilities, interests and culture and an understanding of their prior learning (Hopps, 2004; Ashton, et al., 2008; Myers, et al., 2011). Many teachers consider this knowledge to be particularly important for children who require additional support as they settle into their new environment (Ashton, et al., 2008). Transition Learning and Development Statements are one example of how early childhood professionals, families and children share experience and expertise to support continuity.

Early childhood professionals supporting children through transitions also share information to develop an understanding the behavioural expectations within each others' settings (Hopps, 2004), in order to ensure a balance between old and new expectations and experiences (Ashton, et al., 2008). For example, early childhood educators at early childhood services and schools may have different

ideas about what children need to know in order to be ready for school. Professional partnerships assist children to be ready for school, and for schools to be ready for children (Hopps, 2004).

Collaborative planning across settings can ensure the best possible support for vulnerable children. For example, McWayne et al. (2008) found that a collaborative approach between agencies provided comprehensive support for children whose parents were experiencing substance abuse, as well as supporting the rehabilitation of mothers. It identified a number of actions that supported greater collaboration, including: the identification of common goals and objectives, joint decision making, conflict resolution, and joint training. Time and appropriate processes for the team to connect was also identified as essential. Similarly, it was identified that the leadership needed a formal way to collect feedback from the staff to facilitate joint problem solving (McWayne et al., 2008).

*Early childhood professionals share a common goal in supporting the learning and development of children*

The motivation to form partnerships with professionals in early childhood comes from a shared desire to achieve the best outcomes possible for children. All successful partnerships are built on a foundation of shared goals, which must be clearly articulated and understood by all participants (Lumsden, 2005; Walker, et al., 2007; Mogharreban and Bruns, 2009). Studies have shown that common goals can overcome barriers and smooth the way for collaborative approaches between professionals and community (Kelley, 1996; Tayler, 2006).

One way professionals can work together is through the formation of communities of practice, or learning communities, where a shared vision or goal can lead to the development of common tools, language and understandings to achieve best practice (Wesley and Buysse, 2001). In communities of practice, professionals find opportunities to build knowledge by participating in collaborative reflection about practices. These opportunities, and the learning communities themselves, arise from what early childhood professionals have in common with one another – a focus on the child’s learning and development outcomes, and a commitment to achieve best practice. Early childhood professionals who are committed to improving and refining their own practice can form these learning communities, connecting with others who share a commitment to continual reflection and improvement (Wesley and Buysse, 2001).

All early childhood professionals have a role to play in determining appropriate goals and outcomes for children’s learning and development. The process of articulating these goals is one of collaboration, and relies upon respectful and

open communication. The development of common goals and a shared philosophy is important in building teams in early childhood where membership and ownership is strong for all participants (Mogharreban and Bruns, 2009). Early childhood professional partnerships work best where the approach is transdisciplinary – where professionals work together to develop integrated approaches – rather than where individual professionals hold specific responsibility for selected elements of children’s development as is the case in multidisciplinary practice (Bruder, 2010, Lumsden, 2005). A transdisciplinary approach ensures that children’s learning and development goals are at the centre of the planning process, and the child benefits from expertise across a range of sectors.

*Early childhood professionals respect and value the expertise of their peers, and know when to make referrals*

Achieving positive partnerships requires professionals to respect and appreciate the diverse skills and experience of their colleagues (Hopps, 2004; Ashton, et al., 2008; Myers, et al., 2011). Having regard for the expertise of others means that early childhood professionals are more likely to refer children and families to others where necessary, and are likely to be willing to work together with professionals from other sectors in order to support the needs of children (Lumsden, 2005; Myers, et al., 2011).

Working in partnership requires commitment, and it is the responsibility of professionals to sustain collaborative working environments (Wesley & Buysse, 2001). Collaborative relationships are central to professionalism (Dalli, 2008). Effective early childhood professionals work to build positive relationships with their peers. These relationships rely on understanding one another’s roles, and overcoming misconceptions about different sectors (Hopps, 2004; Ashton, et al., 2008). For example, Myers, et al. (2011) found that therapists who felt that early childhood intervention professionals and early childhood educators valued their skills and experience were more likely to be willing to work in collaboration during transition planning.

Several studies also highlight the importance of leadership in facilitating partnerships and collaborative activity. These studies suggest that organisational support is key (Moran et al., 2007; Kelaher et al., 2009; Valentine et al., 2009; Johns, 2010). Griffin (2010) describes an unsuccessful attempt at working collaboratively in early childhood, where a panel brought together agencies working within a community with an aim to increasing referrals between services. Griffin suggests that the collaboration’s lack of success, and lack of increase in referrals, reflects the need for administrative and personal commitment, as problems were often related to structural and organisational issues such as time and salary. Such issues can be overcome with support from

leadership. For example, as the Centre for Community Child Health (2008) suggests, effective leaders can work to span boundaries and overcome traditional barriers to collaboration. Importantly, developing leadership skills in professionals can encourage collaborative activity (Couse and Russo, 2006). Shared goals help to overcome challenges in collaboration, but leaders must be able to inspire and empower other professionals to work toward those goals.

The diversity of early childhood professionals means that partnerships may not always run smoothly (McWayne et al., 2008). Difficulties may arise in partnerships where two agencies with different philosophies and expertise come together (McWayne et al., 2008) and when individuals with different expectations work together (Lumsden, 2005; Dalli, 2008). In cases where difficulties arise from hierarchical or power differences, professionals report that respect, responsiveness, honesty and openness can help to overcome issues (Dalli, 2008). Lumsden (2005) supports this idea, arguing that issues should be dealt with openly and honestly in order to improve professional relationships and increase understanding of the beliefs and expertise of those involved. Integrated and holistic partnerships occur when professionals are able to work across the traditional service boundaries (e.g., across regions or local government authorities). In this way they overcome concerns of individual organisations or employers, and can focus on the children's quality of experience, and the accessibility of information for families (Broadhead and Armistead, 2007).

Early childhood professionals who respect and value one another's expertise, experience and understanding of children's learning and development, are well placed to achieve best practice. Willingness to share specialist knowledge for the benefit of children is a requirement of professional partnerships in early childhood (Lumsden, 2005).

*Early childhood professionals are committed to working together to advance knowledge about children's learning and development.*

Early childhood professionals have a key role to play in the advancement of knowledge about young children's learning and development. Many professionals are involved in university-professional partnerships, either formal or informal, and such partnerships have resulted in an improvement of the quality of care and education for young children (Clark and Stroud, 2002; Wesley and Buysse, 2004). Communities of practice, or learning communities, may include researchers as well as early childhood professionals, helping to overcome the divide between research, policy and practice. In effective learning communities of researchers and professionals, early childhood professionals are co-producers of knowledge, as they share their valuable expertise and

experience (Welsey and Buysse, 2004). All such partnerships are established with consideration of standard ethical procedures for human research.

Trepanier-Street (2010) describes a partnership between a university training pre-service early childhood teachers and a hospital working with children with special needs. In this study, pre-service teachers and medical professionals shared knowledge about their fields by making a commitment to teach, learn, and work together across discipline boundaries. All professionals involved took time to understand the role of different professionals, to participate in research and data dissemination together and to work together with children and families. Through this the parties were better able to prepare early childhood teachers to work with children with additional needs.

Early childhood professionals also learn from one another informally, in settings where they work in partnership. The literature highlights the need for collaboration between therapists and teachers working with children with a disability, and argues that working in partnership is important to help build inclusive peer environments for all children. For example, in a case study with a four-year-old girl with cerebral palsy, Case-Smith and Holland (2009) describe the use of small-group activities as a way of encouraging interaction with peers. In this case, teachers and therapists worked together to develop a tailored learning and development program using assistive technology that reflected the child's abilities and interests. They also ensured that she was provided with opportunities to work with peers. The approach drew on the specialist knowledge of both teacher and therapist. Wesley and Buysse (2004) describe consultation as a method of collaboration and professional development. In consultation, where expertise is transferred between professionals, the professionals achieve the goal of building knowledge about child development and optimal professional support.

Building knowledge in early childhood learning and development requires both personal and administrative commitment (Hopps, 2004; Griffin, 2010). Professionals from different fields must understand each other by using commonly understood language in order to share their expertise, and it takes time for collaborative relationships to develop (Trepanier-Street, 2010).

## **What are the implications for achieving best outcomes for children?**

### **1. Early childhood professionals collaborate; communicating and planning in partnership to achieve best practice.**

Young children and their families benefit from holistic and integrated approaches. Such approaches can only be realised where professionals communicate and plan in partnership, sharing their expertise and developing systematic and comprehensive approaches to children's



learning and development. When sharing information, early childhood professionals are careful to respect and preserve the privacy of children and families. Victorian privacy legislation includes the *Information Privacy Act 2000*, the *Health Records Act 2001* and the *Public Records Act 2002*. The *Commonwealth Privacy Act 1988* may also apply to early childhood services.

**2. Early childhood professionals work together across settings to support positive transitions for children.**

Transitions within and between settings can be stressful for young children and their families. Early childhood professionals understand the importance of ensuring continuity in children's education, and they work together to build upon children's prior knowledge and experience.

**3. Early childhood professionals are willing to learn from one another.**

Knowledge and understanding of young children's learning and development is constantly growing and evolving. Early childhood professionals can benefit from sharing their diverse expertise and experience. Professionals are committed to ongoing professional learning, and look for both formal and informal opportunities to further their understanding of best practice in early childhood.

**4. Early childhood professionals understand their own and others' roles, and make referrals when necessary.**

Effective professional partnerships are built on foundations of understanding and respect for one another's complementary expertise. Early childhood professionals recognise the need for clearly defined roles and responsibilities, in order to achieve the best use of diverse professionals' expertise and experience.

**5. Early childhood professionals are committed to working in partnership to achieve the best possible outcomes for children.**

Early childhood professionals share a common goal: to achieve best practice in advancing children's learning and development. Achieving this goal requires commitment to professional partnerships and holistic approaches to meeting children's aspirations and needs. They use practices that enhance positive working relationships, and they commit to work in partnership to best support children's learning and development.

## **Appendix A: Methodology**

The majority of resources used in this paper were found through an online database search, using the following search terms:

- professional partnership
- collaborative/collaboration
- expertise
- holistic
- transitions and continuity
- referral
- agency cooperation
- cooperative planning
- integrated services
- multidisciplinary approach

The search terms were combined with the keywords 'early childhood' and 'children' to limit results to literature relevant to this paper.

Online databases were searched using the University of Melbourne's SuperSearch. SuperSearch provides access to a wide range of online journals and papers both nationally and internationally. Within SuperSearch, databases were selected with relevance to early childhood education, with a focus on Australian settings, though international settings have also been addressed in this paper to provide a broader scope. Most of the literature used is peer-reviewed and was published within the last ten years, with several older articles included for their relevancy. The databases searched were:

ERIC (CSA)

A+ Education (Informit)

Web of Science (ISI)

Education Research Complete (EBSCO)

Expanded Academic ASAP (Gale)

Family & Society Studies Worldwide (EBSCO)

JSTOR

Finally, several other texts and documents have been included in this review due to their relevance to, and impact on, Australian early childhood education and care. These include the chapter by Lumsden (2005) in Waller (ed.) *An Introduction to Early Childhood*; the *Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework* (DEECD, 2009), and the OECD report on early childhood education and care, *Starting Strong II*.

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