Communication - symbols and text

Early Years Assessment and Learning Tool Fact Sheet

✓ This fact sheet supports educators' understanding of the Early Years Assessment and Learning Tool (the Tool). It highlights assessment as an everyday practice using a case study. It builds on the ideas explored in the Assessment and the planning cycle practice videos.

✓ The Tool helps teachers and educators track and understand children's learning and development in a dynamic and consistent way.

✓ It supports educators working with the Early Years Planning Cycle and their assessment of children's learning. The Tool guides observations of play-based learning and generates Learning Reports from educator observation.

✓ Analysis of the information educators collect (e.g., via observations) informs their teaching practice (Plan, Act, Reflect). Over time, educators observe, document, and assess each child's progress against the five Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF) Learning Outcomes.

✓ The 8 Tool modules align with the VEYLDF Learning and Development Outcomes *and* the Assessment for Learning and Development Practice Principle of the VEYLDF.

✓ The Tool's suggested teaching strategies have been designed to support children's learning trajectories and can be adapted to your service's resources and context.

Tool module: Communication - symbols and text and the VEYLDF

The Tool fosters strength-based assessment approaches. Through everyday observations in play-based learning environments, educators reflect on what a child can typically do with consideration to the child's cultural context and experiences. The Tool generates a Learning Report that allows educators to consider what a child is ready to learn next and offers targeted learning experiences to scaffold their learning (Plan/Act). The *Communication - symbols and text* module aligns with VEYLDF Outcome 5 – Communication: Children are effective communicators. Children engage with text, symbols, and the expression of ideas. They use visual elements to symbolise meaning e.g., scribbling, drawing, and approximations of writing. Perhaps they use leaves or bark symbolically as 'money' in a shop game. Children also create and display their own information to suit different audiences and purposes. They might, for example, gather and use natural materials to create a map and share this with friends and family.

The key components of VEYLDF Outcome 5 – Children are effective communicators are:

✓ Children interact verbally and non-verbally with others for a range of purposes.
✓ Children engage with a range of texts and get meaning from these texts.
✓ Children express ideas and make meaning using a range of media.
✓ Children begin to understand how symbols and pattern systems work.
✓ Children use information and communication technologies to access information, investigate ideas and represent their thinking.

For this module, *Communication – symbols and text,* educators observe and reflect on the learning progression of a child to make and interpret meaning using symbols such as pictures, signs, numbers, and text. For each module, educators respond to a series of questions which draw on their existing knowledge of the child. When completed, the Tool gives teachers and educators a

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Learning Report which provides them with a picture of the child's strengths and interests related to the particular module.

Case study

Alma participates in four-year-old kindergarten, in metropolitan Melbourne. She enjoys imaginative play in the bush kinder 'shop', gathering items to sell and use as 'money'. She also often uses natural materials to create maps of the kindergarten and the path that she walks to kinder from home with her grandma. At the 'shop', Alma delights in sociodramatic play with her peers and her educator notices her inviting others to participate and share their ideas, where they contribute and share their ideas collaboratively.

Collect information

Based on multiple observations, collected over time and with added perspectives from her parents, other educators, and early years professionals, Alma's educator completes the *Communication - symbols and text* module. They note that Alma can:

- use symbols in play to represent and make meaning
- draw on her experiences in constructing meaning using symbols
- ask questions and comment on illustrations in texts.

Question / Analyse

For the Learning Report in this module, the 'nutshell' and Learning Outcome Statement provides a summary of Alma's learning progression and describes how she can:

- draw meaning from symbols and text
- use language and engage in symbolic, imaginative play
- create roles and ideas or share stories and symbols
- recognise the difference between text and pictures.

The report suggests intentional teaching strategies to support Alma's next learning opportunities based on where she is currently at, such as:

- use the child's interests, strengths, and preferences to guide choices of materials, media, and topics for learning experiences. Make learning experiences personally relevant and rewarding. Build connections between experiences and their application in the child's daily life
- maintain regular communication through a variety of platforms (e.g., digital sharing applications, communication diary, emails, ePortfolios) to share information with the child's parents/family/carers.

Alma's educators reflect on the information and suggested teaching and learning strategies the report provides. This report guides their consideration, together with colleagues, of the most suitable resources and possible integrated teaching and learning experiences (see below) to advance Alma's learning. Alma's educators plan accordingly.

FIGURE 4: INTEGRATED TEACHING AND LEARNING APPROACHES

ADULT-LED LEARNING

GUIDED PLAY AND LEARNING

CHILD-DIRECTED PLAY AND LEARNING

Plan

Following a review of the Tool's suggested teaching strategies, Alma's educators add extensions to the educational program.

Alma's educators aim for her to:

- extend her understanding of how symbols are used to communicate thoughts and ideas

- draw on her experiences to further construct meaning using symbols

- learn new vocabulary focused on describing attributes of objects and materials she collects.

Act / Do

Resources include texts about shopping, money, and maps. Alma's educators model the use of simple maps. Alma will be invited to create maps of the kinder environment using materials that she is drawn to. When she gathers and groups natural items she will be supported to elaborate on how and why she does so. Educator-child sustained shared thinking will be used, an intentional approach (questioning, conversation, feedback) to extend her vocabulary.


Early Years Planning Cycle (EYPC)

Reflect / Review

The plan for Alma guides reflection and review. Repeated ongoing observation in the day-to-day program guides this. Her educators reflect on the resources and strategies (modelling, activities, teaching practices) utilised and how Alma responds to them. Alma's educators reflect on how they can continue to promote storytelling and questioning in the kinder environment and consider how they can make Alma's learning visible through documentation and reflective questions.

Communication - symbols and texts: reflective questions
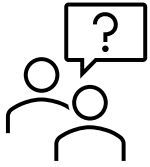
- How is children's learning assessed in your service and how is the information interpreted?
- How are observations made and recorded in the day-to-day (routine, play, transitions, child collaboration)?
- Think of a time when you have joined in a child's play and been able to support extension of their pretend play sequence, model expanded language, or make connections between storytelling and text. What did you do or say?
- What resources, intentional teaching practices (interactions/experiences) and environments might support consideration of the *Communication - symbols and text* module?

References

Early Years Assessment and Learning Tool

https://www.vic.gov.au/early-years-assessment-and-learning-tool

Assessment of Children as Effective Communicators: Literature Review 2018

https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/assessment/ey-assessment/Pages/index.aspx

VCAA Illustrative Maps
https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/earlyyears/Pages/Index.aspx?Redirect=1