



# learning in a larger group: teaching strategies to support engagement

The ideas and suggestions in this tip sheet connect with the Practice Principles of the **Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework**.

- Partnership with families
- Partnerships with professionals
- High expectations for every child
- Equity and diversity
- Respectful relationships and responsive engagement
- Integrated teaching and learning approaches
- Assessment for learning
- Reflective practice

It is recommended that educators refer to the **VEYLDF** and the Practice Guides for further suggestions and ideas about continuous improvement. (See over for website details.)

**Cultivating learning in a group setting is an important part of effective early childhood education and care. Children learn important social and emotional skills that help them navigate their relationships now and into the future.**

With the change to the educator to child ratio, educators may be working with larger groups of children. This presents educators with opportunities to collaborate with colleagues, children and families to implement new approaches to teaching, especially those that re-think the use of space, routines, planning and learning experiences.

Responding effectively to larger groups of children is made possible when educators view children as competent and capable. Maintaining high expectations for all children enables curriculum decisions to be made that develop higher levels of self-sufficiency and collaboration among children.

In this approach children become co-constructors of learning and educators act intentionally to teach children to care for and support each other, self-regulate as well as look after the spaces, equipment and resources that are used throughout the day.

## **Suggested strategies to support collaborative teaching**

**Make time to meet with the teaching team to develop specific strategies that will support children working together in a larger group.**

This may be quite new to some team members so it could be helpful to plan a regular meeting to reflect on and review these strategies. Consider this to be an inquiry research process where you find out more about how to be effective educators in a new context. Make some notes about your strategies and review and reflect on them as the year progresses. »



**Develop a set of specific teaching strategies that support children to engage and participate in the program being mindful of their capacity to lead learning.**

These strategies can address all elements of the program including arrivals, routines and learning experiences. It is helpful if you work together as a team to develop shared strategies to guide children's learning and agree that they will be used consistently. It is also important to ensure that additional staff members (early intervention staff for example) who support the program are also briefed on the strategies.

*The following strategies might be considered:*

**Home Groups:** create specific 'home groups' for smaller numbers of children that act as their 'nest' or 'hub'. These groups will become the place where children meet and think together, make plans, learn new skills and where educators can build and nurture relationships between children and themselves. Educators would consider how the work of these small groups could be extended and how individual children's learning could be supported.

**Skill development:** work with groups of children and individuals to develop a suite of skills that will support children to more effectively participate in the program. For example, managing their own belongings, self-regulating behaviour when something untoward happens, using key pieces of equipment, packing up, setting up and organising spaces.

**Staggered arrival/departure:** offer the families an opportunity to arrive over a period of time rather than all arriving at once. Dedicate an educator to the role of greeting and farewelling children and develop processes and routines that support children to enter and leave the program smoothly and safely and share expectations for children on how to manage their belongings. Accompany the above strategy by placing the sign-in book further into the room to encourage families to enter into the service with their children.

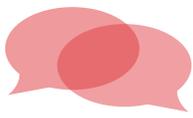
**Limit whole group movements:** with a larger number of children group transitions can become problematic. Limit these to times when it is absolutely necessary

– practising fire evacuations for example – and instead form smaller groups to transition children from one experience to another.

It may also be helpful to divide children up into smaller groups that work together on a regular basis. Smaller groups present opportunities for educators to interact with children intentionally to build skills that might help them work in larger groups. These groups might also support collaborative project work.

**Design responsive routines:** develop approaches to routines that are responsive rather than prescriptive. Progressive meal times with smaller numbers of children (inside and outside utilising multiple spaces) can support children to feel a sense of belonging and allow educators to support and monitor their participation. It might also help to redesign the way that group times and arrival and departure routines are managed to make them more flexible.

**Develop flexible spaces:** work with children and educators to create multiple spaces that support them to rest and be quiet as well as being busy and active. Larger groups may mean that some children will need 'down time' or time to just 'be'. Spaces to rest and relax may be offered either indoors or outdoors and have resources that support children to manage themselves.



## Questions for reflective discussion

The VEYLDF practice principles invites educators to think about and challenge their current practices. Use the following questions to support discussion with your colleagues.

- What is your understanding of how children learn to be part of a group setting?
- What techniques and strategies might you need to intentionally teach children to help them manage being in a larger group?
- What do you see as the biggest challenges to having larger groups of children?
- What could you do to address these challenges? What strategies might you develop?
- What part of the program do you think you might have to revisit or redesign?
- How might you do this?
- How can you maximise the benefits?
- Consider how you establish and maintain relationships – who is advantaged or disadvantaged by this way of working? Are there other ways that makes this process more inclusive?

## References & further reading

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (2009). Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework. DEECD and VCAA, Melbourne.  
<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/childhood/providers/edcare/veyldframework.pdf>.

Department of Education, Employment, and Workplace Relations for the Council of Australian Governments (2009). Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia. Australian Government, Canberra.  
<https://docs.education.gov.au/node/2632>

Resources on the Practice Principles

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/edcare/Pages/profresource.aspx#link93>  
<https://docs.education.gov.au/node/2632>

Reflective Practice Education Resource

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/professionals/support/Pages/reflectivepractice.aspx>

NQS PLP e-Newsletter Newsletter No: 11,12,13,30

<http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/nqsplp/e-newsletters/>

DET webpage supporting the Improved Educator to Child Ratio in Funded Kindergarten Programs

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/funding/Pages/improvedchildratioinkindergarten.aspx>