



Expanding your teaching practice to engage three-year-old children

Reflecting on and critically evaluating practice is a core part of all early childhood professionals' work. It is at the heart of maintaining a learning culture in a service, setting, or network, and is linked with continuous improvement - VEYLDF, p8

Effective implementation of two years of funded kindergarten is enhanced when educators engage with the **Practice Principles of the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF)**:

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

It is recommended that educators refer to the **VEYLDF** and the Practice Guides for further suggestions and ideas about continuous improvement.

Expanding teaching practices to engage more diverse groups of children offers early childhood educators a unique opportunity to expand their professional capability.

From 2022, early childhood teachers and educators across Victoria will deliver kindergarten programs that support children's learning over a two-year period. For the first time, all Victorian early childhood practitioners will have greater capacity to support children's learning and achieve better

learning outcomes. For some professionals, two years of funded kindergarten also represents a significant opportunity to expand their practice capabilities and apply the practice principles of the VEYLDF to explore new pedagogical possibilities.

Why it matters

Early childhood practitioners exercise their ethical commitments to children and their professional expertise when they take on the challenge of developing and implementing a high-quality kindergarten program over two years. This begins with opportunities to critically reflect on our understanding of three-year-old children – what they are capable of, and what they need in order to thrive.

Ongoing professional learning builds our collective knowledge of three-year-old children; it reinforces our shared understanding of all children as competent learners from birth, innately curious and equipped with a range of capabilities and competencies that help them engage with new learning opportunities.

Adopting high expectations is not only essential to delivering outcomes for children (especially children who have vulnerable backgrounds), but it also challenges educators to explore innovative pedagogical approaches. When educators embrace opportunities to deepen their understanding of children's learning, practice quality is strengthened, and children thrive.

Taking advantage of these practice opportunities invites early childhood professionals to:

- Demonstrate a commitment to high expectations for all children's learning and development.
- Ensure that every child experiences success in their learning and development.
- Recognise that every child can learn, and that children will require different opportunities and levels of support to flourish.



- Work with families to support children's learning and development at home and in the community.
- Work in collaboration with colleagues to plan for and reflect on teaching and learning practice to ensure quality education and care.

Every child has a right to early childhood education that honours and promotes their individual learning path. Educators play an important role in supporting children to reach their full potential, while simultaneously respecting unique ways of 'being'.

Practical tips to support individual learning

Taking on new pedagogical challenges is supported when educators use reflective practice processes to plan practical strategies and adaptive approaches, including:

- Scheduling staff meetings to discuss your shared knowledge of teaching three-year-old children. If there is limited experience of teaching three-year-old children, consider inviting someone in your early childhood network who has taught three-year-old children to share their knowledge.
- Making curriculum decisions or adopting a practice for teaching three-year-old children that comes from reliable sources. Ensure your conversations are guided by contemporary research.
- Establishing protocols in the orientation and enrolment process that provide opportunities for families to share their child's capabilities and competencies.
- Using robust assessment processes and observation protocols early on to establish what children know, can do, and understand in relation to the five learning and development outcomes in the VEYLDF. From that point, establish a tailored program for each child that stretches their existing capabilities and competencies, and addresses any areas that require extra support.
- Examining the service's philosophy to ensure that the commitments reflect high expectations, and that across the service the VEYLDF practice principles are well understood in relation to three-year-old children.
- Using critical reflective practice to challenge conventional wisdom and traditional perceptions of children, particularly those which disadvantage particular groups.
- Integrating your understandings and commitment to practice principles which support high expectations, with intentional teaching strategies. For example, if you have a commitment to support the children in your program to develop the skills they will need to cook, make sure that from the beginning you are teaching those children the skills they will need to actively participate in that process.
- Undertaking some mapping work that considers the kindergarten program over two years, capturing where you would like children to be at the end of their four-year-old program. Through scoping and sequencing work, consider the skills children will need to develop early in order for them to actively participate in their learning at the end of their two-year kindergarten journey.

- At key points during the child's two years of kindergarten, check in with families to agree on strategies to grow children's established skills while supporting their areas of development.
- Using communication platforms and digital channels to promote three-year-old children as capable and competent to the families in your local community.

Questions for reflective discussion:

The VEYLDF Practice Principle **Reflective Practice** invites educators to think about and challenge their practices.

Use the following questions to support discussion with your colleagues.

- What is your current understanding of the three-year-old child? How are you using contemporary research from authoritative sources to frame that understanding?
- How are you communicating that understanding to your colleagues?
- How are you communicating to the families in your community about the capabilities of three-year-old children?
- What assumptions are you making about three-year-old children? Do these assumptions advantage or disadvantage them?
- How do the Practice Principles of the VEYLDF assist you to make equitable, knowledgeable, respectful and ethical decisions around the inclusion of all three-year-old children into your program?
- Are there aspects of the program where high expectations of children might benefit their participation and learning? For example, in relation to routines and managing the time when their parents/carers leave at drop-off?
- What assessment practices will you use to understand what children in your program know, can do, and understand? How do you involve families in this conversation?

References and further reading

VEYLDF Practice Guide | Reflective Practice:

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/childhood/providers/edcare/pracguidereflectivepractice2017.pdf>

VEYLDF Practice Guide | High Expectations:

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/childhood/providers/edcare/pracguidehighexpectations2017.pdf>

Early Childhood Australia Code of Ethics

<http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/our-publications/eca-code-ethics/>

ACECQA: Relationship with Children

https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2018-07/QA5_RelationshipsWithChildren.pdf

ACECQA: Sustained Shared Thinking

<https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-01/WhatIsSustainedSharedThinking.PDF>

