



Learning in a larger group: Teaching strategies to support engagement

Why it matters

Cultivating learning for diverse groups of children is an important part of the effective implementation of two years of funded kindergarten. Children learn important social and emotional skills that help them navigate their relationships now and into the future.

With the implementation of two years of funded kindergarten, educators may be working with groups of children with quite diverse learning and development needs. While this is not a new phenomenon, and is already an established approach in many services, it 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.

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**

- 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.

Responding effectively to larger groups of children is made possible when educators understand children's individual needs and interests, and see them 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, while making sure that the learning experiences on offer, are developmentally appropriate.

In this approach, children's best interests are central. Educators and children co-construct learning opportunities that maximise each child's learning.

Practical tips to support integrated teaching and learning:

- **Make time to meet with the teaching team to develop specific strategies that will support each child's specific learning needs in the context of the whole group.** Considering how the educator's team can meet children's diverse needs requires educators to plan for, reflect on and review these strategies. You can 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 each child to engage and participate in the program being mindful of their needs and capacities.** 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 come up with these strategies and agree that they will be used consistently. It is also important to ensure that additional staff members (for example, early intervention staff) 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 unexpected 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 staggered period of time rather than all arriving at once. Dedicate an educator to the role of greeting and farewelling children and develop processes and transition routines that support children to enter and leave the program smoothly and safely and share expectations with 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.
- **Small group opportunities:** It may also be helpful to divide children up into smaller groups that work together on a regular basis or on particular projects or experiences. Smaller groups present opportunities for educators to interact with children to build skills that might help them help become more socially competent. These groups might also support collaborative project work.
- **Design responsive routines and daily transitions:** Develop approaches to routines that are responsive rather than prescriptive. Progressive meal and snack times with smaller numbers of children (inside and outside utilising multiple spaces) with the presence of an educator can support children to feel a stronger sense of belonging and strengthen 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 children to rest and experience quiet times as well as be 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 Principle **Reflective practice** invites educators to think about and challenge the practices they take for granted.

Use the following questions to support discussion with your colleagues.

- How do you identify, record and assess the individual learning needs of children?
- What techniques and strategies might you need to intentionally teach children with diverse needs and interests to help them manage being in a larger group of learners?
- What do you see as the biggest challenges to having larger groups of children with diverse learning needs?
- 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 would make this process more inclusive?

References and further reading

Department of Education and Training and the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (2016). Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework. DET and VCAA, Melbourne.

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/childhood/providers/edcare/veylldframework.pdf>.

Department of Education and Training (2019). 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>

Reflective Practice Education Resource

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/professionals/profdev/Pages/reflectivepractice.aspx>

NQS PLP e-Newsletter Newsletter No: 11,12,13,30
Search for archived issues via your web browser

DET webpage supporting educators to plan for and run Three-Year-Old Kindergarten Programs

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/Pages/running-three-year-old-kinder.aspx>

