



Differentiation: Implementing approaches that respond to children's individual needs

Knowledge of individual children, their strengths and capabilities will guide educators' professional judgement to ensure all children are engaging in a range of experiences across all the Learning Outcomes in ways that optimise their learning - Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF), pg 22

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.

Providing for individual needs and responding to the individual curiosity of every child are hallmarks of quality early childhood education.

With the implementation of two years of funded kindergarten, educators will continue to work to support children's diverse interests, capabilities and needs, and design programs that extend their learning and development.

Educators who use individualised or differentiated approaches to respond to children's diverse abilities stand the best possible chance of maximising learning, development and wellbeing outcomes.

Why it matters

Children bring diverse experiences, knowledge, and skills to their learning; this requires educators to offer specific supports that enhance children's learning opportunities and respond to their varied learning needs.

Differentiated teaching and learning approaches involve altering the design and delivery of a program to ensure it appropriately engages each child's curiosity and meets their individual learning needs.

Rather than a one-size-fits-all method of teaching and supporting learning, this approach is about tailoring the program and the environment to engage and excite young learners at their individual level. This provides children with different pathways to explore and learn, using integrated teaching and learning approaches.

Coupled with high expectations for all children, differentiation promotes greater collaboration among children and supports higher levels of self-sufficiency and resilience. It's a flexible and adaptable method to teaching that enhances each child's learning and development, and lays a positive foundation for lifelong learning.

Practical tips to support differentiation in your service

Teachers and educators can embed differentiated approaches in their practice by considering the following actions:

- Ask families to share their goals, hopes, and concerns for their child as part of the enrolment and orientation process. This can be done formally as part of the documentation they complete, and/or informally through general discussions and conversation. Make a record of this information and use it to create tailored learning experiences for that child. Respect the information gathered in enrolment and orientation and showcase how it has been used



to support the child's learning. You could design a process to share children's progress with families at key points during the year; for example, at parent-teacher interviews.

- Offer families the opportunity to meet with all the educators during the orientation process, so they can be a part of developing strategies that involve educating and supporting their children in partnership with the service.
- Communicate with families about the strategies you will use to maximise and differentiate their child's learning experience. This might take place at an information evening or welcome event, or through an online communication platform. You can also continue to build on this communication throughout the rest of the year as new information arises. By sharing these practice insights, families will have a greater understanding of the intentions behind program decisions and they will be able to support their children's learning at home.
- Take note of families' concerns or questions, especially when learning strategies are incorporated within mixed-aged group models, and provide evidence of the learning outcomes and progress of their child. It might also be valuable to demonstrate examples of when and how the mixed-aged group model has enhanced their child's learning.
- Make time for the teaching team to meet and develop specific strategies that will support each child's specific learning needs in the context of the whole group. These strategies should address all elements of the program, including arrivals, routines and learning experiences. Continue this discussion with the team, drawing on and revisiting your collective understanding of the VEYLDF Practice Principles; with a focus on Reflective practice, Assessment for learning and development, Integrated teaching and learning approaches, and Partnerships with professionals.
- Share the agreed strategies and diverse learning pathways that support children at your service with families. This builds trust and confidence in the program. These strategies, added to over time, could support teaching teams to plan for a child's learning and development pathway across two years of funded kindergarten. Being clearer about learning expectations over time will provide an opportunity to track each child's progress.
- Provide families with specific examples or evidence of the success of the agreed learning strategies throughout their child's kindergarten journey. You can also provide clear and accessible summaries of children's learning in line with the five learning and development outcomes.

Questions for reflective discussion:

The VEYLF Practice Principle **Reflective Practice** invites educators to stop, think, challenge and change their practices.

Use the following questions to support discussion with your colleagues.

- What does differentiation mean to you? How do you currently use different approaches for different children?
- 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 or mixed-age group?
- What are the features of the learning environments that could support differentiation? How can you maximise these features?
- What does it mean to be responsive to all children? Why is this important?
- How do you communicate your strategies to families?

- Differentiation is a way of teaching in which our educators modify the program, as well as the teaching methods, resources and learning experiences, to respond to your child's individual needs. Here are some of the ways we do this [insert examples].
- Whether the learning is inside or outside, formal or informal, child-initiated or teacher-led, our teaching practices change in response to your child's unique needs and interests.

References and further reading

Wellbeing Practice Guide

<https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Documents/earlyyears/EYWellbeingPracticeGuide.pdf>

NQS PLP e-Newsletter: Relationships with children – Commonwealth of Australia

<https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-12/RelationshipsWithChildren.PDF>

Transition: A Positive Start to School

Promising Practice #8: Learning programs responsive to children

<https://education.vic.gov.au/Documents/childhood/professionals/learning/trkpp8.pdf>

Explaining differentiation to families

Sharing positive messages with families about how individual learning is supported enhances outcomes for all children. The following key messages might help your service explain differentiated approaches to families. These can be adapted and enhanced by using local practice examples and including images that bring these ideas to life.

- We are committed to meeting the diverse needs and interests of every child in our service. Here are some ways we meet individual children's needs and interests [insert examples].
- No matter your child's background, abilities and development needs, our service is committed to providing a flexible learning environment that will lead to the best educational outcomes.

