

INTENTIONAL TEACHING

Leading practice paper: 2

Quality preschools



Introduction

The leading practice papers are a component of the Preschool Quality Model that will help us to achieve high-quality educational preschool programs underpinned by excellence in teaching and learning.

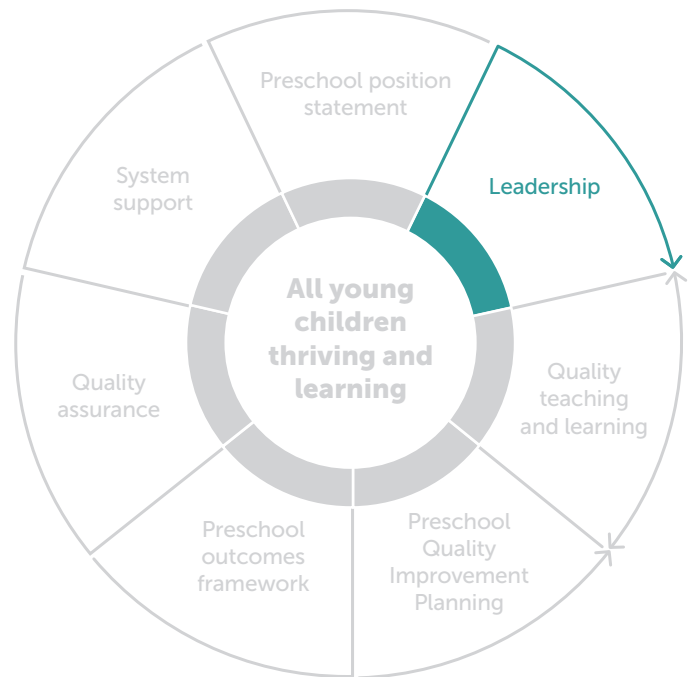
The resources aligned to the model are designed to help preschool leaders be clear about our priorities and planning for improvement in teacher and educator practice. These resources complement and support the work preschools are already doing to support all young children to thrive and learn. They also assist our system to achieve the goal of every preschool exceeding the National Quality Standard in quality areas 1, 5 and 7.

The leading practice papers are situated in the leadership domain of the preschool quality model because they support preschool leaders to lead the teaching and learning.

It is the role of the Educational Leader to collaborate with teachers and educators to promote a culture of improvement, provide guidance and direction in high quality teaching and learning programs and practices, and guide professional inquiry to build knowledge, reflect on practice and generate new ideas. The leading practice papers provide a snapshot of contemporary early childhood research applied in the context of South Australian government preschools and are designed to assist preschool leaders in this work.

Each paper defines the specific focus on practice, sets out what research tells us about why it matters, gives examples of how it can be applied, and provides provocations and prompts for reflecting on that aspect of practice, including with regards to the NQS Exceeding Themes.

The first 2 leading practice papers focus on supporting purposeful play and intentional teaching.



Our system recognises and values the work of all educators who work with children to progress learning. This includes teachers, early childhood workers, school service officers and support staff. However, we recognise the professional role and responsibility of early childhood teachers to plan for and assess children's learning and development and therefore use both 'teachers' and 'educators' throughout this resource.

INTENTIONAL TEACHING

Key Messages

Teachers and educators can challenge children, deepen their conceptual development and strengthen their dispositions for learning through intentional teaching

The more knowledgeable, purposeful, thoughtful and deliberate teachers and educators are the better outcomes for children are likely to be

Intentional teaching, particularly to build and expand children's concepts, ideas and understandings, is most effective in purposeful play

Intentional teachers and educators deliberately choose and use pedagogical practices that are most appropriate for the curriculum decisions being made and the skills, knowledge and dispositions being taught

Specific pedagogical practices include working with children's interests, sustained shared thinking and small group work

Effective teachers and educators critically reflect on intentional teaching in the preschool





Tips for using this paper in leading quality improvement

Use the content, prompts and provocations to lead reflective practice:

- in professional discussions with individuals, in teams and within your networks
- through a review of your centre statement of philosophy
- informing your challenge of practice in your Preschool Quality Improvement Plan
- within self-reflection processes and educator journaling
- when exploring connections and continuity of learning with junior primary peers
- within professional learning communities/ communities of practice
- as you engage further with other sources of research.

What is intentional teaching?

Intentional teaching underpins the pedagogical approaches in *Belonging, Being & Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (EYLF)* and is described as teaching that is 'deliberate, purposeful and thoughtful' (DEEWR 2009, p.15).

Teachers and educators 'provide young children with opportunities to maximise their potential and develop a foundation for future success in learning' (DEEWR 2009, p.5). This means tailoring teaching strategies and educator actions to be responsive to children in the moment and within learning goals, through the setting up of learning environments, routines, documentation of learning and interactions with children, both planned and emergent.

Intentional teaching supports children's learning progress through holistic and interrelated development across all domains (social, emotional, language, cognitive and physical) and dispositions in the EYLF learning outcomes and the Indicators of Preschool Numeracy and Literacy (IPNL). The primary focus of intentional teaching is on learning as a *process* of knowledge building and constructing, rather than rote learning or prioritising the explicit teaching of *content*.

Teachers and educators can challenge children, deepen their conceptual development and strengthen their dispositions for learning through intentional teaching. They may observe, intervene, engage in the play or inquiry, reflect with the children or offer a new or different direction. Having a clearly articulated and authentic centre philosophy supports the intentional choices that teachers and educators make as it reflects the beliefs and theories that they draw on individually and within a team.



What does the research tell us about why intentional teaching matters?

Whilst we have traditionally seen early childhood education as being child led it is clear that children's learning is enhanced through adult interactions, including intentional teaching (Greishaber, Krieg, McArdle & Sumison 2021).

Several researchers write that teachers, and the teacher/child relationship, are the elements that have the most impact on outcomes for children (Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva 2004; Tayler 2016; Torii, Fox & Cloney 2017). It is teachers who make the choices of experiences, routines, and methods of documenting and planning for individuals and groups of children. The more knowledgeable, purposeful, thoughtful and deliberate the teachers and educators, the better outcomes for children are likely to be.

The E4Kids study (Tayler 2016) found that supporting children's cognitive development through building everyday concepts and understandings, connecting to the child's experiences, back-and-forth exchanges, and modelling and expanding language is vital for high-quality outcomes for children. Intentional teaching is present across the preschool day and in both child led and adult guided experiences, and draws on teachers' knowledge of the children, and their professional expertise.

Socio-cultural theorists, including Lev Vygotsky and Barbara Rogoff, see children and their learning and development as deeply rooted in and shaped by the people and contexts in which they live and play. These theorists argue that teachers can and should take a role as 'knowledgeable participants alongside children during and inside play' (Hedges & Cooper 2018, p.371).

Vygotsky articulated that children learn in the Zone of Proximal Development, essentially in the space between what they can do independently and what they can do with a more knowledgeable other, and that they develop the everyday concepts that form the foundation for later academic and science concepts through their play. Intentional teachers support this as they engage the child's everyday learning with more complex ideas and build knowledge, learning strategies and thinking skills (Edwards 2017; Hedges & Cooper 2018; Lewis, Fler & Hammer 2019).

What this means in practice

Children's play lies along a continuum from unstructured child initiated free play at one end to highly structured adult directed play at the other.

Intentional teaching, particularly to build and expand children's concepts, ideas and understandings, is most effective in purposeful play, which is in the centre of the continuum.

Purposeful play is where teachers and children work together to co-construct theories and knowledge and to build high level thinking skills. Although the most effective learning for children occurs in the middle sections of the play continuum, both free play and adult led play continue to have a role in a preschool program and should be considered amongst teachers' and educators' intentional strategies and actions where appropriate. (see also [leading practice paper 1: supporting purposeful play](#)).

Child led interactions might involve teachers and educators setting an environment for the children or observing the children's play and joining them to enhance their play through questioning, extending ideas or language, challenging, supporting or reflecting. Adult guided interactions might include invitations or provocations or the introduction of different materials, people or ideas.

Intentional teachers and educators deliberately choose and use pedagogical practices that are most appropriate for the curriculum decisions being made and the skills, knowledge and dispositions being taught. As a 'knowledgeable other' you might be intentionally setting the scene for play, guiding play or even explicitly teaching some content. Explicit instruction and intentional teaching are not interchangeable concepts. Explicit instruction is one of many teaching strategies and may be included amongst a repertoire of other intentional strategies. The intentionality will be based on deep knowledge of each child and their development, interests and learning, as evidenced through analysis of data in the moment and within the planning cycle, and what the next steps are for them.

With **children's interests** forming the basis for planning in preschools, Hedges (2007; Hedges & Cooper 2016) reminds us to look deeper than 'the what', as children's interests offer a blend of skills, knowledge and dispositions that come together to form working theories and authentic lines of inquiry.

Following children's interests means children have a voice in their learning, leading to internal motivation. A child's interests reflect what is important to them and are influenced by family and community life. From their interests can come inquiry and investigation into who they are, how their world works and how they connect with others, drawing on their funds of knowledge through purposeful play and engagement with others, including peers and educators. Effective intentional teaching means recognising some of the questions and ideas that children are engaged in through their interests and supporting children to explore and extend these.

Specific pedagogical practices including **sustained shared thinking**, or the interactions between two or more people who work together 'in an intellectual way to solve a problem, clarify a concept, evaluate an activity, extend a narrative ... (where) both parties must contribute to the thinking, and it must develop and extend understanding' (Siraj-Blatchford et al. as cited in Department for Education 2022), are associated with high-quality teaching. Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva (2004) argue that learning can be understood as cognitive or intellectual construction and that actively working together with children through sustained shared thinking is a powerful way to construct meaning or knowledge. This is conversation to make meaning and will usually involve you asking open-ended questions which might range from simple to complex and abstract. High-quality interactions include you tuning in to what the child is thinking, being genuinely interested and respecting the child's ideas and theories, decisions and choices. Comments and questions like 'why do you think that?' or 'how do you know?' support this process.

Providing opportunities for children to play and collaborate in **small groups** is another effective intentional teaching strategy. When you work with small groups of children, as opposed to whole group experiences, you are better able to engage with each child and to nudge or stretch their learning most effectively. Small groups can occur throughout the preschool day through emergent and planned curriculum, offering opportunities for back-and-forth conversation, which is crucial for children to build on ideas, express and clarify understandings and extend vocabulary. Children are more likely to take social, emotional and intellectual risks in small groups, and they enable belonging, as individuals have their ideas heard and responded to. Small groups help you to closely assess children's learning as you observe (Leggett & Ford 2016).

Intentional teaching - being deliberate, purposeful and thoughtful - will occur throughout each day and across all areas of the preschool. Being intentional, knowledgeable and using reflective practice means that you can effectively employ a range of both planned and emergent strategies as you engage with individuals, small and whole of preschool groups of children, inside and outside.



Reflecting on and leading intentional teaching in your setting

The following prompts can be used to lead reflection on intentional teaching in your preschool. You might use them with your team as discussion starters or to guide your thinking as you reflect and plan for individuals, small groups and whole of preschool groups of children.

- How do we collectively understand intentional teaching in our preschool?
- What aspects of intentional teaching do we use most, which do we use least, and why might that be the case? Who might be disadvantaged?
- Do we plan for intentional teaching strategies? How are our learning goals for children enhanced by the intentional strategies that we use?
- Do we genuinely have deep knowledge of the children in this preschool? How do we discover their interests as a 'blend of skills, knowledge and dispositions' and then authentically build on these?
- Does our centre philosophy enable us to draw on our shared beliefs and understandings of how children learn, and how we teach with intention?
- Do we need to increase our knowledge of intentional teaching strategies such as sustained shared thinking and small group work?

NQS Exceeding themes

- What research and guidance do we utilise to critically reflect on intentional teaching strategies in our planning cycle?
- How is practice embedded – do our teachers and educators understand intentional teaching and use the strategies across the day and throughout the site?
- How are we building capacity and extending the practice of teachers and educators to plan for, use and critically reflect on intentional teaching strategies and educator actions?
- How can families be genuinely involved in the analysis of teaching and learning to support the intentional teaching decisions being made, and to build partnerships and shared understanding?

Useful resources

Australian Children’s Education & Care Quality Authority 2018, National Quality Standard Information Sheet Quality Area 7: The role of the educational leader

https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-05/QA7_TheRoleOfTheEducationalLeader.pdf.

Department for Education, Intentional teaching

<https://edi.sa.edu.au/educating/curriculum-pedagogy-frameworks/early-years-learning-framework/nqs-above-and-beyond-quality/intentional-teaching>

Department for Education, Preschool literacy guidebook – actions for educators

<https://edi.sa.edu.au/educating/literacy-and-numeracy/guidebooks/preschool-literacy-guide-actions-for-educators>

Department for Education, Preschool numeracy guidebook – actions for educators

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Department for Education plink.sa.edu.au to find out more about ‘sustained shared thinking that supports language learning’ and ‘strengthening meaningful conversations’.

Early Childhood Australia 2021, Finding the balance: play-based learning and intentional teaching

<http://thespoke.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/finding-the-balance/>

Siraj, I., Kingston, D. and Melhuish, E. ed., 2022. Assessing quality in early childhood education and care: sustained shared thinking and emotional well-being (SSTEWS) scale for 2-5 year olds provision. London: Trentham Books.

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The Australian Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), 2009. Belonging, Being & Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia. Canberra: DEEWR.

Torii, K., Fox, S. and Cloney, D., 2017. Quality is key in early childhood education in Australia. Mitchell Institute Policy Paper No. 01/2017, Melbourne: Mitchell Institute. Available at: <<https://www.vu.edu.au/sites/default/files/quality-is-key-in-early-childhood-education-in-australia-mitchell-institute.pdf> >



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