CHCECE022
Promote children's agency

Updated for revised NQS

Learner guide

One World for Children Pty Ltd

aspire
learning resources

CHCECE022
Promote children's agency

Release 2

Learner guide

Aspire Version 2.1

Contents

Before you begin

This learner guide is based on the unit of competency *CHCECE022 Promote children's agency,* Release 2. Your trainer or training organisation must give you information about this unit of competency as part of your training program. You can access the unit of competency and assessment requirements at: www.training.gov.au

How to work through this learner guide

This learner guide contains a number of features that will assist you in your learning. Your trainer will advise which parts of the learner guide you need to read, and which practice tasks and learning checkpoints you need to complete.

Feature of the learner guide	How you can use each feature
Learning content	▶ Read each topic in this learner guide. If you come across content that is confusing, make a note and discuss it with your trainer. Your trainer is in the best position to offer assistance. It is very important that you take on some of the responsibility for the learning you will undertake.
Examples	▶ These highlight learning points and provide realistic examples of workplace situations.
Practice tasks	▶ Practice tasks give you the opportunity to put your skills and knowledge into practice. Your trainer will tell you which practice tasks to complete.
Video clips	▶ Where QR codes appear, you can use smartphones and other devices to access video clips relating to the content. For information about how to download a QR reader app or accessing video on your device, please visit our website: www.aspirelr.com.au/help
Summaries	▶ Key learning points are provided at the end of each topic.
Learning checkpoints	▶ There are learning checkpoints at the end of each topic. Your trainer will tell you which learning checkpoints to complete. These checkpoints give you an opportunity to check your progress and apply the skills and knowledge you have learnt.

Topic 1

In this topic you will learn about:

1A Designing environments

1B Providing materials and resources

Establishing a learning environment that reflects children's interests

Agency is the ability to make choices and decisions, to influence events and to have an impact on one's world. Children should be encouraged to develop and use this sense of agency in relation to how the environment is designed and used, as well as how resources and materials are included. Children's agency is the focus of Element 1.2.3 of the National Quality Standard (NQS).

The following table maps this topic to the National Quality Standard and both national learning frameworks.

National Quality Standard	
✓	Quality Area 1: Educational program and practice
	Quality Area 2: Children's health and safety
✓	Quality Area 3: Physical environment
	Quality Area 4: Staffing arrangements
	Quality Area 5: Relationships with children
	Quality Area 6: Collaborative partnerships with families and communities
	Quality Area 7: Governance and leadership

Early Years Learning Framework	My Time, Our Place
Principles	
Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships	
Partnerships	
High expectations and equity	
Respect for diversity	
✓ Ongoing learning and reflective practice	
Practice	
Holistic approaches	Holistic approaches
Responsiveness to children	Collaboration with children
Learning through play	Learning through play
Intentional teaching	Intentionality
✓ Learning environments	Environments
Cultural competence	Cultural competence
Continuity of learning and transitions	Continuity and transitions
Assessment for learning	Evaluation for wellbeing and learning
Outcomes	
Children have a strong sense of identity	
Children are connected to and contribute to their world	
Children have a strong sense of wellbeing	
✓ Children are confident and involved learners	
Children are effective communicators	

1A Designing environments

The NQS provides services with guidelines for child education and care. These guidelines offer information on how to provide a responsive learning environment. Quality Area 3 deals with the physical environment: it should be safe, age-appropriate, and offer a diverse range of experiences that promote children's learning and development.

Watch this video to learn more about fostering a child's development.

Planning environments with children

The service environment can give children a sense of belonging, especially when it is responsive to their interests and needs. Cater for different learning styles, and invite children and their families to contribute ideas, interests and questions. Children should have a say in how the environment is arranged and help to decide what experiences are provided. This helps to stimulate their creativity and imagination.

When children are given opportunities to plan and modify their environment, they can:

▶ share ideas and interests
▶ engage with each other
▶ ask questions
▶ participate in the local community
▶ interact meaningfully
▶ have control over the learning activities they are engaged in
▶ demonstrate independent actions
▶ experience feelings of self-control.

When children are encouraged to participate, they put more effort in, gain self-esteem and increase their social competence.

Engaging through interest

There is a theory that children engage more with – and therefore are more likely to learn more from – experiences that are of interest to them. When children are deeply involved in their learning they are best placed to develop skills in problem-solving, inquiry, experimentation, hypothesising, researching and investigating.

The thinking strategies children use to engage with situations and solve problems can then be adapted to new situations. This theory is referred to in Outcome 4 of *Belonging, being and becoming: The early years learning framework of Australia* (EYLF) and *My time, our place: Framework for school age care in Australia* (MTOP).

Involving children

Involving children in planning and setting up does not mean that you should take less care to ensure the play space and activities are attractive. You may find it useful to work with children to:

▶ change activities one at a time

▶ set up new areas together; for example, set up all wet area activities

▶ modify activities at different stages

▶ set up areas, such as the home corner, block area and sandpit, which are always in the same space with the same basic materials, yet are added to or adapted as required.

Your role in resetting will still apply, although children may help you do this. Choose activities based on:

▶ developmental needs

▶ your interests

▶ incorporating community events and ideas

▶ service expectations, requests and ideas

▶ ideas from other educators, students and volunteers

▶ stakeholder consultation.

When involving children in planning and modifying the environment, you might consider the suggestions outlined in the following table.

Age group	Involvement and considerations	Activities for children
Infants	▶ Take your time and make setting up and packing away part of your day rather than something you do in a rush while the children are out of the room. ▶ These times can be excellent opportunities for one-on-one interaction.	▶ Watching you set up or pack away ▶ Listening to you chat as you describe what you are doing ▶ Feeling and holding materials and watching what you do with them ▶ Helping to pack up by putting items in a tub or on a shelf
Toddlers	▶ Talk about what you are doing and discuss the materials you are using. ▶ Take your time and make this part of your day rather than something you do in a rush while the children are out of the room. ▶ These times can be excellent opportunities for one-to-one and small-group interaction.	▶ Following directions ▶ Working together on simple tasks ▶ Pushing in chairs ▶ Placing items on a shelf or table ▶ Filling a box or tub ▶ Sweeping the floor

Age group	Involvement and considerations	Activities for children
Preschoolers	▶ Preschoolers have clear interests and ask many questions that can be extended into activity ideas. ▶ They are capable of coming together in a small group and discussing the things they would like to do. ▶ They are able to listen to the ideas of others. ▶ Take your time and make setting up and packing away part of your day rather than something you do in a rush while the children are out of the room. ▶ These times can be excellent opportunities for one-to-one, small-group and large-group interaction.	▶ Planning ▶ Setting up ▶ Packing away ▶ Choosing materials ▶ Choosing settings ▶ Placing items (aesthetically or practically) ▶ Making changes or modifications ▶ Giving advice ▶ Providing information and further ideas ▶ Problem-solving how things might need to be set up or how activities can be altered
School-age children	▶ School-age children have school- and community-related ideas. ▶ They can be independent thinkers and will organise materials and resources in ways you hadn't thought of before. ▶ They often seek more responsibility. ▶ They need a sense of belonging to fulfil their social and emotional needs.	▶ Planning ▶ Setting up ▶ Packing away ▶ Following a plan ▶ Choosing materials ▶ Choosing settings ▶ Placing items ▶ Making changes or modifications ▶ Giving advice ▶ Providing information and further ideas ▶ Problem-solving how things might need to be set up or how activities can be altered to accommodate limitations

Learning theories

In order to design indoor and outdoor environments that are conducive to children's learning, it is useful to understand key theories of childhood learning. These theories represent a range of approaches that can be used to inform the provision of environments that facilitate learning.

The following table outlines these learning theories.

Learning theory	Explanation	How you might put the theory into practice
Behaviourist	The behaviourist theory relates to observable behaviour, particularly how the environment shapes the way a child behaves. It links to environmental design. The theory states the following: ▶ Activity is important as children learn more when they are active participants. ▶ Practice and repetition allows children to learn skills. ▶ Positive rewards motivate children. ▶ Learning based on objectives encourages success.	▶ Provide hands-on experiences where children learn from doing. ▶ Provide experiences over extended periods of time so children can explore, learn, practise and consolidate new skills. ▶ Give positive encouragement. ▶ Set measurable objectives for children.
Social cognitive	Social cognitive theory links a person's environment, behaviour and psychological processes, which include imagination and language. It suggests that behaviour is affected by the environment. The modelling provided by the environment does not cause learning, but rather motivates children to demonstrate what they have learnt. Self-esteem and self-regulation (controlling one's own behaviour) is combined with modelling and behaviour reinforcement to create personalities and behaviours.	▶ Modelling care for the environment and for play spaces and materials helps children learn to do the same. ▶ Allowing children to plan for, set up and modify the learning environment enables them to demonstrate and develop self-esteem and self-regulation.
Constructivist	Constructivist theory states the following: ▶ Individuals have their own background, needs and culture. ▶ Learning occurs through interacting with others and the acquisition of social meaning. ▶ You can initiate your own learning. ▶ Feelings of independence and autonomy increase the potential for learning.	▶ Adapt the environment to provide for children's needs and interests. ▶ Encourage problem-solving and decision-making. ▶ Ask questions, observe and guide to create an open learning environment. ▶ Encourage children to be independent thinkers.

Learning theory	Explanation	How you might put the theory into practice
Cognitive	Children construct an understanding of the world, then experience discrepancies between what they already know and what they discover in their environment. This process of understanding and change involves two basic functions – assimilation (recognising things through what they already know) and accommodation (realising differences and developing new ideas). For example, the child may be familiar with how to mould play dough. When they first use clay they assume that it will mould in the same way. Through experience and repetition they learn that clay moulds in a similar way, but it has different properties that allow it to be formed and manipulated differently.	▶ Provide new ideas and experiences, then allow children to explore, compare and practise, while they think about the new material or resource and how it is similar and different to others. ▶ Allow children to experiment with their ideas and modify the environment and experiences to change their meaning or function.

Vibrant, flexible and supportive environments

As stated in the EYLF and MTOP, a child needs to become a confident and involved learner so they can be curious and enthusiastic about learning, and explore ideas and theories using imagination, creativity and play. To confidently explore their physical environment, they need it to be flexible, but also safe and secure.

Element 3.2.1 of the NQS states: 'Outdoor and indoor spaces are organised and adapted to support every child's participation and to engage every child in quality experiences in both built and natural environments'. This encourages children to become flexible thinkers and investigators.

Stimulating children's curiosity

There are many ways to stimulate children's curiosity and capture their attention. Some of these are explained in the following table.

Ways to stimulate curiosity	Examples
Model interest in the world around you.	Look around the environment and wonder aloud about things; look at the birds, watch where the water goes in the sandpit, jump over the puddles.
Make use of children's natural interests.	If they are interested in the insects around the environment, bring out the bug catchers. If they are interested in construction, give them more resources for building.
Answer children's questions or teach them how to find the answers.	Show them books or posters that may answer their questions. (The book *Why is the sky blue?* is a good resource to have on hand.) You could also ask an expert or consult the internet. Respond to questions by teaching children how they can find answers. You are supporting children to become lifelong learners. Turn a child's 'Why?', into a 'Why do you think so?' or 'How do you think we could find that out?'
Follow the child's lead.	Children may not always make the best decisions, but if you work through trial and error to complete a project, they will be more engaged with the process. For example, children learning to dress themselves may find it very tricky at first, but educators should only step in when the child requests help. Even then the educator should be careful how much 'help' is given. If you stand by as a support, give your encouragement and celebrate each successful step, children will achieve for themselves.
Have a wide range of books on offer.	Books open children's minds to possibilities, feed their imagination and increase their understanding of the world. You could also take children to the library or have a book-borrowing system.
Ensure an interesting environment is available for children to explore.	Displays should be inviting and relevant. Stored materials should be easily accessible. Infants spend approximately a fifth of their waking hours in focused gazing, so there needs to be interesting items for them to look at.
Ask open-ended questions.	These questions typically begin with 'Why' and 'How', or 'Tell me about...' For example, after reading a book you may ask a child, 'What did you like about the story?'
Offer children 'causality' toys that allow them to problem-solve.	For example, they could play with a jack-in-the-box and try to figure out how it works.
Create mysteries for children to solve.	Treasure hunts, mystery objects and riddles gain children's attention. Use 'mystery bags' with items inside for the children to guess to introduce a new topic.

Making choices

Making choices is an essential part of developing decision-making skills. The environment needs to be organised so that children can make activity choices. Be flexible to meet individual preferences and prompt extensions of play. Encourage children to participate in a variety of experiences. The following points should also be taken into consideration.

Flexibility with time	Give children the time they need to complete a task. Introduce 'work in progress signs' so children can return to a task later on. Some services have introduced progressive snack and meal times so children have the choice of when to eat.
Flexibility with space, materials and objects	Give children the freedom to move materials into other spaces. This allows for creative and collaborative play. For example, a child may take imitation food from the home corner and use it in the block area where they have built a shop.
Thoughtful arrangement of fixed and moveable items	Consider the flow of movement in the environment. Children need to move around easily, but there should also be 'rooms' where they can work in social situations and on collaborative projects.
Quiet and active learning areas	Open spaces are ideal for larger constructions, games, movement and group interactions. Smaller spaces are often adequate for dramatic play, fine motor skill activities and art/craft activities. Quiet and active areas should be available indoors and outdoors. Thought should be given as to the placement of areas; for example, avoid placing a block area next to a reading area.
Safe play equipment	The play areas should be well-equipped and audits should be done frequently to ensure the safety of the playground and equipment. NQS Quality Area 2 explores the specifics of safety. Resources need to be maintained and cleaned so they are in a fit state for children to use and enjoy.
Facilities designed or adapted to ensure access and participation of every child	For example, a child with partial blindness may need steps marked, ribbons placed on trees and items set against contrasting backgrounds to make them stand out.
Sustainable practices	When the children are practising sustainable practices, such as watering the garden with leftover water or growing vegetables, they are learning to understand and respect the environment. Understanding the environment makes them feel safe, secure and able to explore.

Individual interests and abilities

Children should be able to experience and create environments that are aesthetically pleasing to them. You should respond to their observed interests, cater to their abilities, and respect and encourage their understanding. By providing an environment that meets a child's interest and ability levels, you are encouraging the child to express opinions, requests and needs as identified through your observations and assessments.

Early childhood environments that respond to children's interests and abilities have the following characteristics.

Rich in experience	When children experience things for themselves they can explore the activity, experiment and gain knowledge.
	Children need to know how water feels, how high they can jump off a board, what different fruits taste like, and what putting your hands in paint feels like.
Rich in play	Play provides a way for children to integrate new experiences with their rapidly developing minds, bodies, emotions and social skills. Brain research supports this idea, stressing that children learn best through an integrated approach that combines physical, emotional, cognitive and social growth.
Rich in teaching	Educators will be actively involved in interacting with individuals and small groups of children – at times entering into their play, intentionally teaching, observing children at play, preparing the learning environment, talking with other adults, collecting resources and arranging them in the learning environment, both indoors and out.
	Educators will also be reflecting on their observations and their own learning, reviewing programs, and preparing learning activities and resources.
Rich with people	Interaction and socialisation are key factors in children's learning and development. While some interactions could be planned for and organised, many will be spontaneous events. This will include child–child interactions and adult–child interactions. It would also be beneficial to introduce people from the community: a police officer, the postman, a grandparent, an Aboriginal Elder, etc.
Significant to children	Children need to feel that they are important, that what they do is their 'work', and that it is valued. Give children roles in the service, whether it is setting tables for lunch or setting up experiences. Children need to feel that what they do is meaningful to someone besides themselves.
Places children can call their own	Children need to be close to people they know, have familiar and comfortable objects around them, and be in a setting that has a personal history. This supports the concept that the environment is responsive.

Practice task 1

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

Case study

Gelda is five years old. She is interested in construction materials and spends lots of time using different materials to express her plans. Most mornings she arrives brimming with thoughts and ideas. Gelda sometimes asks for materials you have provided in the current environment. Other times she asks for materials and resources that are in the storeroom or are not available at the service.

1. Explain how the environment in the photo is vibrant, flexible and supportive of Gelda's learning.

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.   .. .

.   .. .

2. How would you involve Gelda in planning or modifying the environment shown in the photo?

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.   .. .

.   .. .

.   .. .

3. Does the environment shown in the photo respond to Gelda's interests and abilities? Explain.

4. Which of the **four** learning theories presented earlier most reflects the type of learning Gelda participates in? Explain why you think this.

5. Choose an experience shown in the photograph that is not focused on construction play. Explain how you might use your knowledge of Gelda to engage her and encourage her to participate in the experience.

1B Providing materials and resources

The EYLF/MTOP encourages you to support children to develop dispositions such as curiosity, persistence and creativity as part of Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners.

It is a challenge to provide materials and resources that are familiar, yet also stimulate children's interests. Without some foundation of familiarity, the play space can be threatening or overwhelming, so you will need to balance new ideas and resources with more regular play options.

One method for ensuring that your play space is responsive is to change experiences one at a time. Look for signs that change may be necessary, such as when the children are no longer using the materials and resources, or when the children have a new interest and you need the space. Encourage the children to participate in deciding whether an experience should be altered or removed. Ask them what they would like to add to the experience or what they would like to do as a replacement.

When you involve children in making these decisions, you are provoking their interest, engaging them, encouraging their participation and responding to their interests.

Natural materials and resources

Using materials and resources that are natural and familiar to children will help them develop a sense of respect and care for the environment. Positive interactions with the natural environment are an important part of healthy development, and these interactions enhance learning.

Children who are exposed to nature often view it as a source of wonder and awe. This provides the direction and impetus for environmental education. Environmental education during the early years should be based on this sense of excitement and the joy of discovery.

The following guidelines can be used as a framework for using natural resources.

Start simple	Begin with simple experiences. Children learn best through experiences that relate to what is already familiar and comfortable. Thus, the best place to start is in the environment they know or one that is similar to what they know. For example, looking at a tree or watching a caterpillar can be a memorable moment.
Use the outdoors	Provide frequent positive experiences outdoors. Children learn best through direct, concrete experiences. They need to be immersed in the outdoor environment to learn about it. Optimally, the exposure should be provided on a daily basis. Provide ongoing, simple experiences with grass, trees and insects in environments close to or within the service.
	In addition to investigating the elements of the natural world already present in an outdoor setting, you can use many different strategies to transform a typical playground into an environmental yard. You can begin with simple additions such as bird feeders, windsocks, flower and vegetable gardens, tree houses, rock piles and logs. Then add value to the natural environment by including tools for experimenting and investigating; for example, a magnifying glass, water hose, bucket or rake.

Model caring and respect	Model caring and respect for the natural environment and request that others follow your example. Be gentle when handling plants and animals. Help children to understand that the environment is their home and that you must establish or maintain their outdoor habitats. Talk about and care for wildlife. Develop procedures for reducing rubbish and for disposing of it safely. Recycle or reuse as many materials as possible. Many services now have sustainability and recycling programs that children follow or have even developed.
Encourage connectedness	Children often develop an emotional attachment to what is familiar and comfortable to them. If they are to develop a sense of connectedness with the natural world, they need frequent positive experiences with the outdoors. Providing opportunities for such experiences and sharing them with young children is the essence of environmental education.
	Environmental education for the early childhood years focuses primarily on children exploring and enjoying the world of nature under the guidance and with the companionship of caring adults. Later in preschool and middle childhood, children take more responsibility for developing processes and programs that make a difference to their environment. They are more purposeful in their actions and understand longer-term issues and consequences.
Present materials	The presentation of materials and their accessibility to children are critical factors in facilitating children's choices and ideas. You will need to take the following points into account:
	▶ Materials and resources need to be safe. This means they are developmentally appropriate, non-toxic and they conform to Australian Standards (see Product Safety Australia's website at: http://aspirelr.link/product-safety-australia).
	▶ Containers for materials such as paint and paste need to be an appropriate size. For young children, they need to be lidded with holes for brushes.
	▶ The location of materials should allow space for experimentation and room to place all required equipment. The size and purpose of the experience and materials need to match the location; for example, craft work might be on tables, painting at easels, construction on the floor, or bike riding outdoors. However, altering the placement of materials and experiences can breathe new life into a regularly provided activity. For example, you could set up easels outside and encourage children to paint trees.
	▶ Partitioning learning areas that require different levels of activity enables children to concentrate.
	▶ The size of tools and equipment such as scissors, brushes, chairs and tables should match the age and size of the children.
	▶ Provide tools that are designed for left- and right-handers.
	▶ Children's clothes should always be protected with plastic aprons, but accidents happen and clothes may still get stained. Encourage parents to choose play-safe clothes – practical items that are washable and hard-wearing – if they are concerned about dirt or play mess.
	Provide sufficient materials for children to share, but don't overwhelm them with too many choices for their age/stage of development.

Experience nature	Focus on experiencing nature more than teaching about it. Young children learn through discovery and self-initiated activities; an educator should serve more often as a facilitator than a teacher. There will be times for intentional teaching, but young children require active involvement, so use hands-on, manipulatory activities that engage the senses and are self-initiated. Focus on what children find interesting.
Demonstrate personal interest	Your expression of interest in the natural world is critical to the child's ongoing interest in the environment. By demonstrating a sense of wonder, you will help ignite and sustain a child's love of nature. Enjoyment and curiosity will lead to lifelong learning and an appreciation of the natural world.

Using natural materials and resources

The diversity in nature provides children with many experiences of colour, texture, size and shape. Children of all ages can benefit from the use of natural materials in play. These materials enable children to feel a sense of connectedness and responsibility to the world of living things – not only animals but also plants – as they become more aware of life around them. When you show wonder and care for all life, children will imitate your behaviour. Their interest will be provoked as they explore the familiar things around them.

You can begin to develop a collection of natural materials for children to use, and expand the collection as children become familiar with the items and want to investigate more. The following table outlines some examples.

Material	Resource	Examples of use
Cloth and fabric	Plant or animal fibres such as: ▶ cotton ▶ linen ▶ silk ▶ wool. Reusable materials; for example: ▶ scarves ▶ doilies ▶ curtains ▶ leftover scraps from sewing projects.	▶ Puppets ▶ Cushions ▶ Touch/feel blankets, books or sensory mats ▶ Balls ▶ Plush toys ▶ Parachutes ▶ Dress ups

Material	Resource	Examples of use
Items from nature	▶ Shells ▶ Pebbles ▶ Rocks ▶ Twigs ▶ Leaves ▶ Feathers ▶ Tree bark ▶ Gumnuts ▶ Seed pods ▶ Log sections	▶ Craft activities: – collage/pasting – construction – painting – stencilling – rubbings – tracing – play dough ▶ Sandpit ▶ Science and wonder: – magnifying glasses – finding origins – researching – growing plants ▶ Stepping stones ▶ Partitions/borders

However, don't assume that natural items are always safe. For example, plant materials could be poisonous or a choking hazard. If children are likely to mouth items, you can wash these with warm water and detergent.

You might also make or purchase resources that are made from natural materials. Some examples are presented in the following table.

Resource	Examples	Sources
Dolls	▶ Knitted dolls ▶ Carved wooden dolls ▶ Peg dolls ▶ Cloth dolls ▶ Corn-husk dolls ▶ Rope dolls	▶ Second-hand shops ▶ Fair trade shops ▶ Handmade yourself or by a parent, child's relative or community member, such as a person living in aged care
Toy animals	▶ Wooden animals from different countries ▶ Stuffed animals made from natural materials that feel similar to the animal's fur or hide	▶ Zoo gift shops ▶ Toy shops ▶ Handmade yourself or by a parent, child's relative or community member, such as a person living in aged care
Blocks	▶ Wooden off-cuts	▶ Carpentry and joinery businesses ▶ Handmade by a parent or grandparent who enjoys woodworking

Resource	Examples	Sources
Boxes	▶ Shoeboxes ▶ Chocolate boxes ▶ Grocery boxes	▶ Greengrocer (fruit and vegetable store) ▶ Hardware stores such as Bunnings ▶ Recycled from home
Cane or wicker items	▶ Baskets ▶ Plate holders	▶ Second-hand stores ▶ Recycled from home ▶ Handmade yourself or by a parent, child's relative or community member, such as a person living in aged care

Practice task 2

Think about the following natural materials and resources, then answer the questions:

▶ a silk tablecloth

▶ doilies

▶ shells

▶ log sections

▶ wooden or fabric animal toys.

1. Which of these natural materials and resources are familiar to children in your play space?

2. How could each of the materials be used in the current play space?

3. Which materials/resources do children show a greater interest in? How do you know? Why do you think they show a greater interest in these?

4. Choose **two** of the materials/resources listed and explain how you would encourage children to use them.

Summary

▶ The service environment can give children a sense of belonging, especially when it is responsive to their interests and needs.

▶ The right balance of experiences ensures children find both the environment and the program inviting and engaging.

▶ In order to design indoor and outdoor environments that are conducive to children's learning, it is useful to understand key theories of childhood learning.

▶ There are many ways to stimulate children's curiosity and capture their attention.

▶ Making choices is an essential part of developing decision-making skills.

▶ Children should be able to experience and create environments that are aesthetically pleasing to them.

▶ It is a challenge to provide materials and resources that are familiar, yet also stimulate children's interests.

▶ Using materials and resources that are natural and familiar to children will help them develop a sense of respect and caring for the environment.

Learning checkpoint 1
Establishing a learning environment that reflects children's interests

Part A

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

Case study

Keira, three years old, attends your service. She is interested in numbers and letters, and has a high level of counting and pre-reading skills due to her interest. She enjoys including numbers and letters in most of her activities and can recognise the numbers 1 to 99. She knows the letters of the alphabet and recognises some marketing symbols, such as Coles and Big W. Keira is now reading simple words and provides a story with her drawings.

Until recently, Keira had been grouped with children that are not as advanced as she is in numeracy and literacy. You have spoken to your supervisor because you feel that Keira's indoor and outdoor activities may need to be adjusted.

1. Describe **four** experiences you could create for Keira that would provoke her interest, be responsive to her abilities and support her learning. Include:

   ▶ one indoor experience

   ▶ one outdoor experience

   ▶ one experience that includes natural materials

   ▶ one experience that includes familiar materials.

2. Choose one of the experiences you described. Explain how you would ensure it was presented in a vibrant way.

3. Choose one of the experiences you described in question 1. Explain what you might say and do to let Keira know she is able to modify the experience.

Part B

Choose one of the following learning theories:

- ▶ behaviourist
- ▶ social cognitive
- ▶ cognitive
- ▶ constructivist.

Describe how the theory influences the way you design indoor and outdoor environments. Reflect on how the theory:

- ▶ encourages you to be responsive to children's interests and abilities
- ▶ encourages you to allow children the opportunity to plan and/or modify their environment.

Topic 2

In this topic you will learn about:

Providing opportunities that stimulate learning and development

Play provides a supportive learning environment where children can ask questions, solve problems and engage in critical thinking. In order to extend socially, emotionally and cognitively, children need a great deal of free, unstructured play. This type of play allows them to discover, create, improvise and imagine. It is also a time for children to interact with their peers, create social groups, test out ideas, challenge each other's thinking and build new understanding.

The following table maps this topic to the National Quality Standard and both national frameworks.

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✓	Quality Area 1: Educational program and practice
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	Quality Area 7: Governance and leadership

Early Years Learning Framework		My Time, Our Place
Principles		
	Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships	
	Partnerships	
	High expectations and equity	
	Respect for diversity	
	Ongoing learning and reflective practice	
Practice		
	Holistic approaches	Holistic approaches
✓	Responsiveness to children	Collaboration with children
✓	Learning through play	Learning through play
✓	Intentional teaching	Intentionality
✓	Learning environments	Environments
	Cultural competence	Cultural competence
	Continuity of learning and transitions	Continuity and transitions
	Assessment for learning	Evaluation for wellbeing and learning
Outcomes		
	Children have a strong sense of identity	
	Children are connected to and contribute to their world	
	Children have a strong sense of wellbeing	
✓	Children are confident and involved learners	
	Children are effective communicators	

2A Directing own play and leisure

The promotion of children's agency is directly linked to NQS Element 1.2.3, which states: 'Each child's agency is promoted, enabling them to make choices and decisions and influence events and their world'. You can encourage children to gain new skills, celebrate their learning, actively construct their own understanding and to contribute to others' learning.

If you view children as capable and active participants, you can offer them opportunities to take control of their own play and leisure time. By allowing them to interact freely with their peers, you will provide them with the chance to initiate play and participate in peer scaffolding.

Play initiated by children

When play is initiated by children, they take the lead in making it happen. Sometimes they will have ideas and need your help to fulfil them; other times they will initiate their play using the resources and materials that are on hand.

Children who initiate play are demonstrating signs that they:

▶ feel safe, secure and supported (EYLF/MTOP Outcome 1)

▶ are developing their emerging autonomy, inter-dependence, resilience and sense of agency (EYLF/MTOP Outcome 1)

▶ have a disposition for learning with curiosity, cooperation, confidence, creativity, commitment, enthusiasm, persistence, imagination and reflexivity (EYLF/MTOP Outcome 4).

As identified in the NQS Elements 1.2.3, 3.2.2 and 5.2.1, children need the following to be able to initiate play:

▶ resources, materials and equipment that allow for multiple uses

▶ a sufficient number of resources, materials and equipment to enable every child to engage

▶ support to initiate ongoing collaborative projects

▶ the opportunity to make choices and decisions that influence their world.

As children develop the skills to confidently initiate play, you may be able to facilitate their ability by providing for these aspects.

Aspect	What you can do	Example
Physical environment	▶ Provide: – space for play – a layout that supports the type of play and the area needed to explore and extend – quiet places or safe loud zones – furniture that fits the child and the play – resources that match the play – aesthetically pleasing materials.	A child initiates pretend play with another child while working with play dough; they need additional space to play out their dramatic ideas, and additional materials, such as dolls, cars and open-ended craft materials.
Social and emotional environment	▶ Provide: – security – predictability – warm and trusting relationships – support for developing friendships and social behaviour – behaviour regulation support.	A child wishes to take part in an activity, but does not have the social skills to do so. A child has an idea, but is using inappropriate equipment; she is banging a spoon on her cup at morning teatime. Take the opportunity to initiate a music experience. Encourage the exploration and provide musical instruments rather than focusing on behaviour issues.
Intellectual environment	▶ Provide times: – where you do not intervene – with intentional discussion. ▶ Understand when it is an appropriate time for questioning and exploring, and when the play is of greatest importance.	A child is engrossed in creative play with natural materials. Question if this is the right time to ask questions and extend the child's thoughts. Is it more important for the child to explore, manipulate and discover for themselves?
Temporal environment	▶ Provide time to initiate.	A child is watching but does not need help to initiate. Wait to see what is happening prior to intervening. A child is participating in a challenging activity and needs more time. Provide this time or develop a method for extension, such as allowing the play to continue later or using a 'work in progress' sign to enable the work to stay untouched overnight.

Peer scaffolding

Arising from the work of the theorist and psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934) is the notion of a learner's zone of proximal development (ZPD). This is defined as the development between a child's current skill level and their potential learning capacity. In a care and education environment, scaffolding often occurs from the first emergence of a skill until its actual development.

Scaffolding occurs when the child is in the ZPD; this learning occurs through information, technology, modelling, experience, support, helping and demonstration. Parents, educators, carers, teachers, experts, technology and peers all contribute to this learning.

Scaffolding by peers (other children) usually occurs when a child is more advanced in the skill, ability or knowledge that the task involves. Peer scaffolding involves the decisions and actions of peers that build on children's existing knowledge and skills to enhance their learning.

Peers can assess, anticipate and extend other children's learning via open-ended questioning, providing feedback, challenging their thinking and guiding their learning. They make use of spontaneous 'teachable moments' just as an educator might do, as they ask why, where, what, when and how questions in relation to other children's activity.

Peer scaffolding can work in many situations. For instance, some children seem to know how to scaffold another child's attempts at negotiating meaning through verbal language; they will ask questions to understand more and model the language back to them.

Children usually accept peer scaffolding readily as part of their play. If an adult was to scaffold in the same manner, it might cause the play to cease, alter the play to be an intentional teaching moment or frustrate the children.

Peer scaffolding:

▶ makes it easier for the child to undertake a task successfully
▶ expands the possible learning activities and experiences
▶ increases the rate at which learning may be achieved
▶ extends what is possible for a child to perform
▶ enables greater participation.

The most valuable way to ensure peer scaffolding occurs is to stand back and allow children to play uninterrupted. When you allow children to participate in play that does not involve adults, the play is open and exploratory. The dynamics in changing groups of children allow for learning to take place. To encourage peer scaffolding, you may introduce children into groups and encourage them to learn and teach other, rather than answering questions or helping with learning yourself.

Example

Scaffolding

Example 1: This illustrates how a child is learning to remove her socks.

Jovita, 18 months, is learning to undress. She is beginning to take interest in removing her socks. She is being scaffolded in the following ways.

Her parents, educators, carers and relatives encourage her and praise her by:

▶ placing her sock on her foot so it is easily removed
▶ giving her help so she feels successful
▶ demonstrating how they take their socks off
▶ praising her attempts and encouraging her with enthusiasm and excitement.

Jovita's peers are also trying to take their socks off; in fact, some are already able to demonstrate this skill. Jovita watches her peers and notices their actions.

Example 2: This illustrates peer scaffolding as part of natural play.

Freddie, four years, and Charo, three years, are playing a chasing game. Freddie races around the yard, then starts to climb the A-frame. Charo follows Freddie, but she stops at the base of the A-frame. Freddie calls out, 'Charo, climb after me!' Charo grasps the frame and moves her feet to the first rung, then stops. 'Do it again with your hands and feet and then you go up!' says Freddie, sitting on the top of the frame. Charo moves up another rung and says, 'I told you it was easy. I will come down that way and you can chase me again.' Charo gets back down and says, 'I climbed it, I climbed it!' to herself, and runs off after Freddie.

Example 3: This illustrates encouraging children to learn and teach each other.

Shawna, three years, is attempting to hammer a nail into a soft piece of wood. She is not sure how to hold the long, slim nail and tries to balance it before hitting it with the hammer – it falls over. Shawna comes to her educator, Nanda, and asks for help.

Nanda notices that Yim, three and a half years, is nearby. She decides to make use of peer scaffolding because Yim is unoccupied and Nanda knows that she is good at working with wood. Nanda calls Yim over and asks if she will show Shawna how to hammer in a nail.

Yim takes over and shows Shawna what to do, then tells her to try it herself. Yim encourages Shawna's attempts and gives directions. When Shawna succeeds, Yim praises her. Nanda encourages Shawna, but does not participate directly. Nanda thanks Yim for her help.

Practice task 3

1. Observe children at play and record **three** occasions when play is initiated by children.

2. For each record, answer the following questions.

   a. What aspects allowed children to initiate this play?

   b. What support was provided to enable this play to continue?

3. Observe children at play and record **three** occasions when peer scaffolding occurs.

4. For each record, answer the following questions.
   a. How did peer scaffolding occur?

   b. Did the peer scaffolding influence the flow of play?

c. Did the child learn from the peer scaffolding experience? If so, what did they learn? If not, why do you think they did not learn from the scaffolding?

2B Encouraging perseverance

Certain experiences are necessary for children at particular stages of their development. These are activities that support development in significant areas, and provide building blocks for learning outcomes. Children will achieve skills such as:

▶ walking

▶ using scissors

▶ expressing their needs with words

▶ problem-solving.

These skills, once achieved, open the child's world to a progression of new ideas and experiences, such as:

▶ walking leads to running

▶ scissors can lead to collage

▶ self-expression leads to asking for what they want and telling others how they feel

▶ problem-solving leads to making suitable choices and understanding consequences.

Watch this video to learn more about encouraging children to solve problems.

Developmentally significant activities

When significant milestones approach, the activities that you provide to support children are known as 'developmentally significant activities'. These activities are scaffolding actions. Some examples are presented in the following table.

Significant development	Scaffolding examples
Learning to walk	▶ Ensure there is sturdy furniture for the child to walk around. ▶ Hold the child's arms as they walk. ▶ Encourage the child to walk short distances to you.
Learning to cut with scissors	▶ Provide activities that develop fine motor skills in the fingers, such as: – tearing paper – using an eye dropper – using clothes pegs. ▶ Provide activities that involve scissors, such as: – snipping edges of paper – snipping play dough.

Significant development	Scaffolding examples
Learning to express themselves	▶ Provide puzzles showing faces expressing various emotions ▶ Sing songs such as 'If you're happy and you know it' ▶ Play a facial emotion matching game ▶ Talk about emotions and how you feel ▶ Allow for dramatic play ▶ Allow for puppet play
Learning to problem-solve	▶ Provide board games ▶ Allow to participate in planning and modifying the environment ▶ Provide puzzles ▶ Provide construction activities

Perseverance

Perseverance is the ability to stick with things even when they get challenging. As a learning disposition, it is vital to children's success. Through perseverance children are able to increase their wellbeing and self-discipline. It helps them approach new experiences positively, demonstrating confidence and gaining satisfaction from their achievements.

Perseverance seems to come naturally to some children, but it is also a skill that is learnt through practice and reinforced through seeing its results. As a lifelong learning skill, perseverance helps children succeed and to gain competence when involved in developmentally significant activities.

You can encourage children to persevere by:

▶ viewing them as capable and competent beings, and providing appropriate challenges

▶ believing in each child's ability to succeed

▶ supporting children to finish things they start, even if they need some help

▶ providing positive feedback and encouragement for extra effort

▶ believing that mistakes are opportunities to learn, teaching this belief to children and supporting them when they make mistakes

▶ teaching children that sometimes you need to stop, take a break and start over

▶ motivating children to try new things

▶ encouraging children to take responsibility and to make decisions and choices

▶ modelling perseverance

▶ directing energy into productive activity.

Sometimes perseverance – being steadfast despite difficulty – becomes linked with persistence – continuing an action in the face of difficulty or opposition.

Example

Perseverance

Ian is five years old. He wants to use the easel, but two other children are already painting there. Each time a child puts their brush in a paint pot, Ian asks if they are finished yet. He approaches the other children, moving quite close to their faces. He says, 'You know I need a turn next. Don't forget, I am waiting here! How long until you finish?'

Clio, an educator, approaches the children. She moves to their level and explains to Ian that the other children are working hard on their painting and need time to concentrate and develop their ideas.

Clio asks if Ian has an idea in mind. Ian tells Clio that he needs to paint a truck that he wants to build. Clio expresses interest in his plan. She makes a suggestion: 'Ian, what if you plan the truck by making a drawing?' Ian agrees but says that there are no pencils or paper.

Clio is pleased. 'Well, we can soon fix that,' she says. 'Let's go to the storeroom and choose some materials!' Ian follows Clio to the storeroom and they choose materials.

Ian channels his enthusiasm into designing his truck. His persistence in creating the idea continues; in the afternoon he chooses more materials from the storeroom and begins to build the structure.

Clio encouraged persistence in the children at the easel when she respected and explained their need for time to think and develop ideas. She also encouraged persistence by redirecting Ian and supporting him by providing materials as required. Clio ensured that all children's needs were respected and their activities valued. She also supported Ian to start a project that encompassed much of his day, an experience that was developmentally significant.

Practice task 4

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

Case study

Risa is learning to sew. First she cuts a length of wool and threads the large-holed needle. Then she holds the fabric while she pushes the needle in and out of the open-weave material. Risa is working toward a developmentally significant milestone.

1. List **three** activities you could provide for Risa that would help her gain greater skills in this developmentally significant activity.

2. What strategies or techniques could you use to engage, support and encourage Risa during her sewing experience?

3. If Risa had trouble persisting with the sewing activity, how could you encourage her to keep trying?

2C Creating opportunities for learning

There are many ways for children to learn – they manipulate, listen, watch and they explore. They have an innate inclination to find out, to develop one skill and build on it to achieve the next.

This inclination is important to the child's ability to develop, but the environment plays a large part as well, because it is where the learning takes place. Without a stimulating environment, children cannot learn. A stimulating environment provides resources and ideas for extending knowledge; it is a place where educators support development, provide encouragement, and model new ideas and skills.

Opportunities for learning in the service environment come from:

▶ play
▶ intentional teaching
▶ routines.

Learning through play

Play is an activity that children choose freely. It is enjoyable, engaging and the process is more important than the end product. It has some rules, but these are decided by the child who engages in the play.

The education and care industry is built on the EYLF/MTOP principle of learning through play. This principle is one that educators believe in and express consistently in their personal, professional and service philosophy, and in their pedagogy.

Although play is led by the child, you still have a role to perform. You can:

▶ provide materials and resources
▶ encourage and support children to explore, solve problems, construct meaning and extend their thinking
▶ take advantage of spontaneous teaching moments as opportunities to extend children's thinking.

Play-based learning is about children making sense of their world as they engage with people and objects, and use these experiences to build new ones. It spans all development areas and, regardless of the activity being undertaken, value can be identified in nearly all play. The following table presents some examples of common play activities and their value for learning.

Activity	Developmental value
Manipulating play dough with a rolling pin and cutters	▶ Physical: developing fine motor skills through rolling dough, cutting shapes and manipulating pieces. ▶ Verbal: talking about the shapes, the actions and how it feels to use the dough. ▶ Social: talking with others using dough, incorporating dramatic play, working in parallel and sharing materials. ▶ Emotional: how it feels and whether they enjoy dough play. ▶ Cognitive: considering how to roll dough, how to cut dough into shapes and whether there are enough materials.
Sand play with water, buckets and shovels	▶ Physical: digging, moulding and carrying. ▶ Verbal: sharing ideas and plans with others, talking about what has been made and asking for resources. ▶ Social: working with others to achieve a goal, teaching others new skills, working in parallel or cooperatively, sharing materials and incorporating dramatic play. ▶ Emotional: feelings of success, frustration, calm and challenge. ▶ Cognitive: working to a plan, solving problems, deciding if the sand is too wet or too dry and working out how to keep water in place.
Jigsaw puzzle	▶ Physical: manipulating the pieces. ▶ Verbal: talking about the task and asking questions. ▶ Emotional: achievement if completed, challenge if learning, frustration if too difficult. ▶ Cognitive: thinking about which pieces match by colour, shape, size, etc.; discovering which way the pieces go.

Example

Supporting play

Amanda, an educator, is watching Lev and Sundra play in the home corner. They are dressing up in the clothing and discussing plans for their roles. Now and then they move into dramatic play, with one child telling the other what to do in character: 'Mum, you need to make the bed before you go to work!', 'Dad, it's time to do the dishes so we can take the baby to kinder'.

As the play unfolds, Amanda notices an opportunity to provide materials. Sundra is looking for a nice sunhat to wear while she hangs out the washing. Amanda finds her a spare hat in the storeroom with a flower on it.

Amanda also notices an opportunity to extend meaning and the children's thinking through a spontaneous teachable moment. Lev finds a child-sized kimono in the dress-up cupboard and asks Sundra what it is. Sundra says she doesn't know. Amanda explains and points out a picture of a child wearing a kimono on the wall display of children around the world.

Learning through intentional teaching

Intentional teaching is purposeful and carefully thought out. It is a response to information you notice will be valuable to the children. It occurs when you identify a 'teachable moment' and wish to focus on this learning in a deliberate way. Intentional teaching is about finding out what children want to know, and planning to provide them with this information in a way they will find informative and engaging.

When you notice that organised additional support or knowledge is appropriate for children's learning, you are identifying an intentional teaching opportunity. You might act on this opportunity by preparing to model, demonstrate, question, explain, speculate, discuss or problem-solve to provide the children with further understanding or knowledge.

The EYLF and MTOP describe intentional teaching as a practice that is implemented each day in order to extend children's learning. Intentional teaching is also covered in the NQS, particularly in Element 1.2.1: Educators are deliberate, purposeful and thoughtful in their decisions and actions, but also in Element 1.1.3: All aspects of the program, including routines, are organised in ways that maximise opportunities for each child's learning, and Element 1.3.2: Critical reflection on children's learning and development, both as individuals and in groups, drives program planning and implementation.

Intentional teaching will make up an important part of most group sessions you prepare and deliver. The topic or focus of your group should be information to challenge and extend the children's learning.

Intentional teaching may be less formal, as in the previous example, where Amanda supported the children's use and understanding of a kimono. Amanda saw that the children needed further information, and took advantage of the teachable moment to provide her readied details.

Learning through routines

Effective and responsive routines allow children to become safe, secure and supported (EYLF/MTOP Outcome 1) and to feel a sense of belonging (which is a goal of the EYLF/MTOP). Just as children learn through play and each play experience has a range of developmental learning values, so do routine experiences. An example is when children are eating healthy snacks. Learning occurs as you talk about the foods and how they are healthy (cognitive, verbal) and when you model healthy eating (physical, social, emotional, cognitive) and identify the feelings of having a healthy and strong body (physical, emotional).

The NQS sees routines as times when educators can support and maximise learning, either spontaneously or through intentional teaching. Element 1.1.3: All aspects of the program, including routines, are organised in ways that maximise opportunities for each child's learning, highlights the importance of routines and how, through routines, children can learn about:

▶ their identity
▶ interactions
▶ time and expectations
▶ self-help
▶ health, safety and personal care

▶ designing routines and modifying plans
▶ nutrition
▶ sustainability
▶ communities.

To enable children to have the greatest chance of learning through a routine, you need to consider:

▶ time

▶ space

▶ materials and equipment

▶ people

▶ safety.

Time

When children are rushed through routines, they miss opportunities to participate fully; this may cause frustration and lessen the learning potential. Routines should be unhurried and uninterrupted.

Children need time to:

▶ make choices and decisions

▶ become involved

▶ change direction

▶ become involved again

▶ practise and master skills.

When you allow children enough time for their routines they will become involved and engaged, and will feel challenged and stimulated. Children may become frustrated or disruptive if they are not allowed to see a routine through to its conclusion so, whenever possible, allow a routine to be completed before changing activities or moving on. The length of time any routine continues for is difficult to judge, as children acquire skills at their own pace and show interest in their own time.

Space

You have some control over the amount of space available for children's routines. Although regulations set minimum standards regarding the amount of space that must be provided in a particular service, routines do not usually require particular settings or spaces – apart from toileting and routines requiring water. You may occupy any space that is useful to ensure children have room to move or spread out to make sense of their routine. For example, when a child is learning to get dressed, they may need space to lay out all their clothing so they can see what they have, and then decide what to put on first, second and so forth.

The following table identifies some things to remember when planning your routines.

Children need hands-on experiences	▶ Children need to explore, touch, smell, move, create and build on current skills.
	▶ Encourage them in these activities by setting out their environment appropriately and logically.
Children need opportunities to be alone	▶ Children need space where they can think about the routine and how they will complete it.
	▶ Older children need privacy at times.
Children need choices	▶ Allow children to decide how much or how little help they want from you.
	▶ Most children know when they are hungry or tired, so allow some flexibility.

Children need challenges	▶ Encourage children to solve problems and make decisions.
	▶ The space should be flexible to allow children to spread out if needed.
Children need safety and security	▶ They need to feel safe without feeling overprotected.
	▶ They need to feel that you will help if needed, but also that you trust them to try to do their best.

Materials and equipment

When children are undertaking a routine, they need easy access to the resources that facilitate it. Everything that the child uses in their routine should be safe, age-appropriate and in good condition. Look at the routine setting from the child's point of view and ensure that everything present sends positive messages about how the children should participate.

The materials and equipment (resources) that are made available to children have a bearing on the quality and types of routines children can engage in.

It is important that:

▶ furniture and equipment matches children's needs and abilities: for example, taps are at the right height, steps are provided so children can reach sinks and beds are comfortable

▶ there are enough resources for the number of children in the group: for example, four taps for four children in the bathroom

▶ good-quality resources are provided: for example, soap dispensers work and toilets flush

▶ materials and equipment are regularly rotated to ensure children are provided with a variety of activities.

People

Staff–child ratios and the qualifications and experience of the adults working with children affect how routines are presented to children; therefore, you must understand the importance of providing for and supporting children's learning through routines. Allow space and time to interact with children to enhance routine learning, to model appropriate actions and to extend routine learning where possible.

The educators in a team all contribute to the effectiveness of the routine environment. They influence:

▶ how the area is set up

▶ what resources and materials are used

▶ how safe and well-supervised the areas are

▶ whether children are encouraged to take on challenges

▶ the level of belonging the child feels

▶ how time and learning are prioritised.

Safety

Look at the basic environment and identify how it needs to operate to ensure safety. You need to consider the developmental abilities of the children in regard to:

▶ understanding of safety and danger

▶ spontaneous behaviour

▶ ability to follow limits and guidelines

▶ curiosity

▶ interest in adult-modelled behaviour

▶ independence and attempts at greater independence

▶ understanding of consequences

▶ mobility and stability.

A safe environment is also non-threatening. This means children feel comfortable sharing thoughts and ideas, asking questions and making mistakes as part of learning. In a non-threatening environment, children and educators interact without put-downs, punishments or ridicule.

Practice task 5

1. Research NQS Elements 1.1.3, 1.2.1 and 1.3.2 and the EYLF/MTOP Practice: Intentional teaching. What do these tell you about intentional teaching? Write about **two** points you feel are important. You can find the *Guide to the National Quality Framework* at the ACECQA website: http://aspirelr.link/nqf-guide

2. Observe a child-focused hand-washing routine in your service. Answer the following questions.

   a. What did the children learn during your observation?

   b. What intentional teaching was provided or could be provided?

c. How could aspects of time, space, materials and resources, people and safety support children's learning?

Summary

▶ If you view children as capable and active participants, you can offer them opportunities to take control of their own play and leisure, and to demonstrate agency.

▶ When play is initiated by children, they take the lead in making it happen.

▶ Scaffolding by peers usually occurs when a child is more advanced in the skill, ability or knowledge that the task involves.

▶ When significant milestones are approaching, the activities that you provide to support children are known as 'developmentally significant activities'.

▶ As a learning disposition, perseverance is vital to children's success. It allows them to increase their wellbeing and self-discipline.

▶ Play-based learning is about children making sense of their world as they engage with people and objects, and use these experiences to build new ones.

▶ Intentional teaching is about finding out what children want to know and planning to provide them with this information in a way they will find informative and engaging.

▶ Just as children learn through play, with each play experience having a range of developmental learning values, so they learn through routine experiences.

▶ Time, space, materials and equipment, people and safety all determine a child's ability to learn through routines.

Learning checkpoint 2
Providing opportunities that stimulate learning and development

Part A

Consider the routine of snack time, including preparation, eating and cleaning up.

1. Provide one example of how each of the following are considered during snack time to promote children's learning and development.

   a. Time

   b. Space

   c. Materials and equipment

   d. People

   e. Safety

2. How might peer scaffolding occur during this routine?

3. List the tasks in this routine that may require a child to persevere.

.   ...

.   ...

.   ...

4. Choose one task that requires children to persevere during this routine and describe one way you might support them.

.   ...

.   ...

Part B

Describe a time when you have supported children to implement an idea they have initiated. Include:

▶ the original activity children were involved in

▶ how the children expressed their ideas

▶ the materials or resources you gathered for the idea to occur

▶ the resulting activity or experience.

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Part C

Demonstrate how you have made changes to existing activities or experiences to stimulate learning and development.

1. Describe a time when you have allowed children to direct their own play and leisure experience with their peers. Include:
    ▶ the original activity or experience
    ▶ what the children did
    ▶ what the outcome was.

2. Describe a time when you have implemented intentional teaching. Include:
    ▶ the original activity or experience
    ▶ what happened to initiate your intentional teaching
    ▶ the intentional teaching that you provided
    ▶ why you decided to apply the intentional teaching.

Topic 3

In this topic you will learn about:

Designing, implementing and evaluating learning experiences for children

To provide a balanced curriculum, you will need to plan activities and experiences that meet the needs and interests of each child in your service. Children require variety and they each show their own interests and strengths. By providing a holistic curriculum you are ensuring that children can explore areas that they choose for success as well as new areas.

The following table maps this topic to the National Quality Standard and both national learning frameworks.

National Quality Standard	
✓	Quality Area 1: Educational program and practice
	Quality Area 2: Children's health and safety
	Quality Area 3: Physical environment
	Quality Area 4: Staffing arrangements
	Quality Area 5: Relationships with children
	Quality Area 6: Collaborative partnerships with families and communities
	Quality Area 7: Governance and leadership

Early Years Learning Framework		My Time, Our Place
Principles		
	Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships	
	Partnerships	
✓	High expectations and equity	
	Respect for diversity	
✓	Ongoing learning and reflective practice	
Practice		
	Holistic approaches	Holistic approaches
✓	Responsiveness to children	Collaboration with children
✓	Learning through play	Learning through play
	Intentional teaching	Intentionality
	Learning environments	Environments
	Cultural competence	Cultural competence
✓	Continuity of learning and transitions	Continuity and transitions
✓	Assessment for learning	Evaluation for wellbeing and learning
Outcomes		
	Children have a strong sense of identity	
	Children are connected to and contribute to their world	
	Children have a strong sense of wellbeing	
✓	Children are confident and involved learners	
	Children are effective communicators	

3A Developing the curriculum

A curriculum embraces the skills, performances, attitudes and values that children are expected to learn from an educational program. It should include learning outcomes, materials that will be used and the planned sequence that will be implemented to help children attain the learning outcomes. For most of us, a curriculum includes everything that happens during the day, from planned elements to implemented interactions.

To create a responsive curriculum, you must consult with others and reflect on the implementation and planning you do to meet children's needs.

Children's observations and views

Children's ideas about the curriculum can reveal much about their development and learning, and about their desire to extend and try new ideas. Element 1.1.2 of the NQS states: 'Each child's current knowledge, strengths, ideas, culture, abilities and interests are the foundation of the program'.

Educators must get to know individual children as well as the group. The information that each child can contribute demonstrates their view of the play space. A sense of 'belonging' comes when they own the plan of activities and experiences. An opportunity for 'being' arises when the spaces reflect their current interests and needs. The ability to 'become' is gained with ideas realised and new challenges met.

Ultimately, you should include curriculum development as an activity/experience that children may choose to participate in each day or week. The depth of this shared planning will depend on the age of the children and their experience in participating. Of course, the more opportunities they are offered, the better they will get.

Your ability to link developmental stages with knowledge of each child's capabilities will enable you to identify the level of participation a child is capable of in the planning process. In addition, you will consider the effect children have on others and see these outcomes as opportunities to extend interests and skills.

Including children's ideas

Brainstorming with children about how they would like their play space set up, or which experiences they would like provided, enables you to gather a range of ideas. From this list you can involve children further to develop the environment to match their expectations. Ask them questions to discover their thoughts. The following table outlines ways that you can include children's ideas.

How to include children's ideas	Examples	Why
Involve the children and their community in constructing the environment	Materials are needed for decoration in the play area. Children bring items from home and posters are put up asking for donations or loans.	Children feel a sense of belonging when they contribute to the service's environment.
Reflect the work of the children	Children's work is made into display books that are kept in the room. Children can look at the books and educators incorporate them in activities. Artwork is displayed on the walls. Digital frames display processes and activities that the children have been involved in.	This helps children to feel that the environment is their own.
Include people that are familiar and important	Drawings and photographs of children's families are displayed.	This gives the environment a sense of familiarity, and the children gain a sense of belonging. Children share and develop their identities.
Incorporate celebrations	Children give their perspective on how they celebrate an event in their family or culture. Their ideas are used to plan a special activity for the service.	Children share and develop their identity.

When activities and experiences are being set up, children can participate. This is an excellent time to ask them questions, either as a group or individually. When children are used to being asked their opinion on the curriculum, they will begin to approach educators without any prompting to give their views. For example, if you have a dolls area set up, a child may come and ask for beds or more blankets for the dolls.

By using children's observations and views, you are giving each child a 'voice' in the physical and social environment. This will support the development of their personality and independent thinking. It will support critical aspects of the young child's imagination and higher-order thinking. Collaboration will lead to a wide range of materials and experiences, which can be freely adapted by children.

The right balance of experiences ensures children find the environment and program inviting and engaging. It is imperative that environments be organised in such a way as to empower and enable children to be in control of their own learning. An environment rich with open-ended experiences that allows children to actively and independently engage in activities lends itself to positive interactions.

Educator and stakeholder consultation

When you involve others in your curriculum development, you will learn important details. The details that parents, colleagues and others who have a relationship with the child are able to provide will extend on areas that you have noticed already. They will also alert you to areas that you have not considered or were not aware of.

When you consult others about your curriculum design, you will be gathering information from people with beliefs, values and expectations that are different to yours. They might view things from a different perspective or have ideas you haven't thought about before.

As part of the consultation process, you may use a range of consultation methods, including:

▶ forms and documents

▶ records from previous attendance at education and care services

▶ regular information exchange discussion

▶ telephone conversations

▶ letters, notes or emails

▶ meetings

▶ social occasions

▶ community events

▶ service events

▶ communication books.

Remember to respect confidentiality and privacy when consulting with others. You must have parents' permission prior to gathering or sharing information with others not directly caring for the child.

The following table highlights the people you may consult with and the things you may find out about the child.

People to consult	Information to find out
Parents, family members and carers	▶ Values ▶ Beliefs ▶ Home life ▶ Culture ▶ Special interests ▶ Needs ▶ Family support services ▶ Expectations ▶ Favourite toys, games, songs and activities ▶ Concerns ▶ Guidance
Community members	▶ Culture ▶ Special interests ▶ Family support services

People to consult	Information to find out
Other educators and colleagues	▶ Home life ▶ Culture ▶ Special interests ▶ Needs ▶ Family support services ▶ Favourite toys, games, songs and activities ▶ Concerns ▶ Guidance
Specialists	▶ Culture ▶ Special interests ▶ Needs ▶ Family support services ▶ Expectations ▶ Concerns ▶ Guidance

To ensure that you gain detailed, clear and relevant information from these people, you must:

▶ be non-judgmental

▶ be open to different perspectives

▶ apply empathy

▶ demonstrate active listening

▶ check understanding

▶ follow organisational standards, philosophies, policies and procedures.

Remember to record the information you gain from consultation. Simple records are most suitable and anecdotal forms are best. Other records that may be useful are:

▶ samples of work provided by others

▶ checklists completed in different settings or by different people

▶ diaries, journals, logs and communication books

▶ records of questioning, such as graffiti sheets, evaluations, surveys, questionnaires and forms.

Practice task 6

Discuss the current curriculum with the educator who is responsible for planning the play space or the educational leader, and record their responses to the following questions.

1. What role did children take in developing and evaluating this curriculum?

2. How have other educators or stakeholders been consulted in relation to this curriculum?

3B Fostering learning through interests

Educators gather information about children and use this information to plan play spaces, routines, experiences and interactions that suit individual children and groups of children. These aspects of the curriculum are based on children's interests.

Reflecting children's interests

Each child has their own set of interests, which link to their capabilities and their potential. An interest is a wonderful medium for extending skills or developing areas of need. A variety of experience choices can originate from the interests of children. Options will occur through your careful preparation and the understanding of children and families, while others will emerge spontaneously.

To respond appropriately to interests you need to be active in your educator role – observing, listening and asking questions. You need to think creatively and be open to new ideas and different ways to use materials. This does not mean you should allow materials and resources to be damaged or misused; they must be respected. It does mean that materials and resources can be used flexibly and creatively to enhance and extend children's interests, thereby enriching the children's program of activities.

Example

Adding interests to a program

The following example shows how you can add children's interests to a program.

Stella, an educator, uses a planning system. She changes the activities in the room based on the following three criteria:

▶ The children show the need for an extension to an experience.

▶ The children show no further interest in an experience.

▶ New ideas seem important.

The plan for the week is as follows:

▶ On Monday, the children do not use the play dough at all. Stella adds bark and smooth pebbles to the play dough table. She had planned this in case the children showed less interest in the dough on its own.

▶ On Tuesday, she notices the children are playing 'Masterchef' in the home corner. She asks if they need more pots and pans. The children agree and help to gather and set up the materials. Some children want to make food. One child asks for wool to make spaghetti, other children cut out pictures of food.

▶ On Wednesday, the play dough is still not popular. Stella moves the play dough to the home corner. The children playing 'Masterchef' mould the dough into foods they need to create their dishes.

▶ On Thursday, the children participate busily in all activities.

▶ On Friday, Stella incorporates Anna's interest in a community event that will take place on the weekend. She holds group time and talks about the event, what it means to Anna, and why it is important to other people in the community. Stella provides posters and materials as part of the group discussion. Stella also provides a note to parents explaining that the children have been learning about this event, what the event is, and when and where they can go to participate.

Fostering learning and development

Regardless of the age range of the children you work with, the environment must accommodate all aspects of their development. Family life and children's interests can be explored to increase the link between community, home and care. This also extends the experience of each child as they share their knowledge and skills.

The following table shows how aspects of development can be linked to children's interests and personal culture.

Aspect of development	What you can incorporate into the learning environment
Physical fitness and skill	▶ Sporting events attended by the family ▶ Physical activities children are familiar with ▶ Sports watched on television ▶ Games played with peers, siblings and other family members
Cognitive development	▶ Games played at home ▶ Toys they possess or enjoy ▶ Responsibilities they manage ▶ Home tasks they participate in, such as cooking, cleaning, hanging washing, shopping, gardening, etc. ▶ Events and celebrations they participate in ▶ Entertainment they enjoy or are exposed to ▶ How they are involved in family decision-making ▶ Access to a computer or electronic games
Social development	▶ Places where they are cared for during the week, such as grandparents' or family friends' house, family day care, long day care and occasional care ▶ Relationships they have with different people ▶ Adult environments they are part of ▶ Celebrations and events they participate in ▶ Rules and expectations of children by their educators and parents ▶ Provision of play ▶ Structure of the family ▶ Behaviour guidance strategies used ▶ Travel experiences

Aspect of development	What you can incorporate into the learning environment
Creative and aesthetic development	▶ The style of decoration in their home and their role in creating this ▶ Creative abilities and pursuits of their family, friends and relatives ▶ Activities the family participate in: visiting galleries, going to concerts, gardening, etc. ▶ Creative activities the child is encouraged to participate in: singing, drawing, painting, collage, clay modelling, etc.
Language development	▶ Languages used and understood ▶ Songs, rhymes and stories familiar to or special to the family ▶ Family size and structure, and the opportunities to verbalise ▶ Responsibilities and the need to follow directions ▶ Access to television or radio ▶ Participation in family activities: cooking, gardening, cleaning, washing up, etc. ▶ Access to a computer and electronic games
Moral development	▶ Family rules and expectations ▶ Behaviour guidance or discipline techniques used ▶ Family events experienced ▶ Television shows they watch or books they read
Emotional development	▶ Stress-management techniques used by family members ▶ How emotions are expressed ▶ Key events experienced ▶ Behaviour guidance or discipline techniques used
Spiritual development	▶ Religious customs ▶ Events and celebrations valued by the family ▶ Travel experiences ▶ Activities the family enjoy: visiting museums, watching thunderstorms, going camping, etc. ▶ Discussions they hear or are involved in: politics, nature, conservation, recycling, etc.

Flexible programs

Every program must respond spontaneously to interests that arise. This means more than just a quick word of acknowledgment; it means taking the interest to a depth of challenge and consideration that the child indicates they would like.

When new interests or reflections on life arise, the attention and extension that you provide will indicate to the child that they are valued and included. In addition, a flexible program involves children in modifying their environment so that it is relevant, which leads to belonging, being and becoming.

You can respond flexibly to ideas that come up by:

▶ allowing children time to explore their ideas

▶ providing appropriate materials and resources

▶ enabling children to continue play or investigation when the rest of the curriculum (program or timetable) is changing

▶ encouraging children to investigate.

Example

Flexible program

Ramona, an educator, is at the sandpit with three children when they find an insect. Ramona has a choice – to ignore the children's interest in the insect, respond to it, or remove the insect and redirect the children to sand play.

She chooses to respond to the interest. She is able to:

▶ respond with enthusiasm

▶ ask questions

▶ offer information

▶ link with children's current knowledge of insects

▶ add new ideas and investigations

▶ involve the children in creating an investigation area

▶ tell them how another child keeps stick insects at home.

Ramona decides to invite a parent to bring in their stick insects next week to show the children.

Practice task 7

The following aspects should be catered for in the curriculum:

▶ emotional development

▶ creative and aesthetic development

▶ moral development

▶ language/communication development.

1. For each aspect, list **two** relevant experiences provided in your service.

2. For every item on your list, describe how it links to a child's interests, including how you know this.

3. If an experience does not link to a child's interest, explain how you could alter the experience so that it does link to the child's interests.

3C Evaluating teaching and learning

A responsive program evolves constantly. In order to identify how effective the curriculum is, you must assess and evaluate it. This should be an ongoing and consistent process as planned and unplanned (spontaneous) events occur daily.

A changing curriculum is usually a sign that your curriculum is responsive to children, a practice highlighted in the EYLF/MTOP.

Planned teaching and learning

Planned teaching is prepared in advance; planned learning is the outcome of this.

Planned teaching and learning can be based on observation records that you collect and analyse, or it can build on an interest you notice and take time to prepare before offering it to the children. Planned teaching includes the intentional teaching you provide, the group experiences you develop and the deliberate ways in which you set up the environment, interact or demonstrate a task.

Unplanned teaching and learning, on the other hand, results from spontaneous activity. It is a result of an unexpected event that you choose to develop into a learning experience.

Assessment and evaluation methods

Documentation and planning are an important part of working with young children. In order to effectively meet their needs, educators need to consider practical and meaningful ways to document what they notice. They also need to share this information with children and families. When documentation is a shared experience between children, families and staff, it has many benefits for all three groups.

Assessments and evaluations provide educators with the opportunity to reflect on their pedagogy. This is a chance to reflect on their teaching strategies and the learning environment. Assessment and evaluation can occur in a variety of ways at various times in a curriculum planning process.

Assessment

The EYLF/MTOP describes assessment as the process educators use to build up a picture of children's learning to support curriculum planning and learning.

Educators look at a child's unique strengths, knowledge and interests – this is assessment – and then that information is used to make decisions about how we respond to each child.

As demonstrated in the EYLF/MTOP practice, assessment for learning is a process. It is used to:

▶ gather information about a child

▶ help others see the child's process of learning

▶ record progress

▶ reflect on the child's development, reactions to experiences, and progress in relation to learning outcomes and interests.

Assessment for learning relies on information gathered about current planned and unplanned teaching and learning, and then uses this information to support further teaching and learning.

To collect assessment information there is a range of useful documentation methods. These methods are identified in NQS Element 1.3.2, which states: 'Critical reflection on children's learning and development, both as individuals and in groups, drives program planning and implementation'.

Documentation method	Details	Useful for recording
Learning stories	▶ Learning stories can be subjective ▶ They tell a story of what learning you noticed happen ▶ The child's own words can be used to make the record more meaningful	Planned and unplanned teaching and learning
Anecdotal records	▶ Brief narratives describing an incident or behaviour that is important ▶ Written in a factual, objective manner ▶ Can be used to see how well a certain task can be performed, such as painting	Planned and unplanned teaching and learning
Running records	▶ Everything that occurs to a specific child over a specific period of time is written down; includes all behaviour	Planned teaching and learning
Jottings and incidental records	▶ Noting children's questions, brief transcripts of their conversations or comments, quick details of a play situation, ideas and knowledge ▶ Notes of what two children are saying to each other ▶ Information provided to you by another person; for example, the child's parents	Planned and unplanned teaching and learning

Documentation method	Details	Useful for recording
Photos or recordings	▶ Capture children's learning effectively with digital photography ▶ Delete, choose and print photos required or set up recordings (voice or video) ▶ Photos need to be linked to anecdotal records or learning stories to provide the background and information about the learning ▶ The child's own words can be used to make the record more meaningful ▶ Sometimes a series of photos showing a developing skill or idea or a project is a more useful evidence of learning than a single photo	Planned and unplanned teaching and learning

Samples of work	▶ A sample of the child's writing, drawing, painting, etc.
	
	▶ Photos of sculptures or constructions. If children prefer not to allow you to keep their work, photos can be taken for your collection
	
	▶ Samples of work need annotations about the context and the important factors in the experience, such as:
	  – how the work was completed
	  – challenges the child experienced
	  – how they negotiated or solved problems
	  – how the work demonstrates their interests and knowledge.
	
	▶ The child's own words can be used to make the record more meaningful
		Planned and unplanned teaching and learning

Checklists	▶ Record behaviours, actions, skills, processes or attitudes ▶ The actions and interactions can be checked off against a predetermined list to record the presence, attainment or absence of these	Planned and unplanned teaching and learning

Documentation method	Details	Useful for recording
Forms	▶ At enrolment families might complete a 'getting to know you' form ▶ Brief, general questions about children's interests and friendships encourage families to share their unique knowledge	Planned teaching and learning
Sociograms	▶ Webs that demonstrate who children interact with, how often and in what way	Planned and unplanned teaching and learning

The assessment process is cyclical: you collect assessment information, analyse it, then use your conclusions to provide further teaching and learning experiences. This is supported by Element 1.3.1 of the NQS, which states: 'Each child's learning and development is assessed or evaluated as part of an ongoing cycle of observation, analysing learning, documentation, planning, implementation and reflection'.

Evaluation

Programs should be constantly evaluated to identify problems, develop interventions, identify opportunities and improvements, and design strategies for implementing new and innovative ideas. This is called continuous improvement.

Under the NQF, education and care services are required to establish and review programs to ensure ongoing quality. Standard 7.2 of the NQS defines leadership, stating that: 'effective leadership builds and promotes a positive organisational culture and professional learning community'. This standard is concerned with the establishment and maintenance of a culture of ongoing reflection and self-review that offers challenge, provides motivation and increases educator, coordinator and staff member satisfaction.

Once teaching has occurred, evidence should be gathered to evaluate the effectiveness of the teaching and to identify the learning that has taken place. Ask yourself: How well did the experience, setting and environment work?

You will use evaluation to identify:

▶ spontaneous interests catered for through unplanned teaching and learning – this provides further assessment records and information that may be used to extend teaching and learning in other areas

▶ extensions and/or changes – this enables you to clarify needs or see ways children prefer teaching and learning to occur

▶ what worked, what didn't work, if the teaching and learning met the objectives set, if the teaching was age-appropriate, if you provided enough props and equipment and what you can do to extend on this teaching

▶ another person's thoughts on:
  – the value of the teaching and learning
  – how you provided it
  – how you might improve this teaching
  – whether they thought the teaching was suitable
  – any other areas they feel will help your development.

When evaluating, ask yourself the questions in the following table.

What worked? What didn't work?	By evaluating the learning that occurred, you are reflecting on experiences and developing knowledge of which experiences were successful with different children and groups.
	When writing your evaluation, you will note whether there are any factors that may have influenced the effectiveness of the experience.
	These influences may involve: ▶ children's needs ▶ the sequence of activities ▶ the resources or materials (including staff) ▶ the time ▶ available space: too much or too little ▶ aesthetics: presentation of the materials, space, experience as a whole.
Who did and did not participate?	By noting who did and didn't participate in learning experiences, you are gaining important information about the interests, strengths and needs of children. By recording this information, you can monitor each child's level of interest.
	It is also useful to ensure that the children that you have planned learning experiences for are actually participating in them and are meeting any objectives.
Was the experience age-appropriate? What can you extend on?	Any ideas you have for modification and suggestions from the children should be noted. They are great ways to extend the children's development and further enrich the learning to increase the interest levels of the children involved.
Was the experience effective and enjoyable for the children?	When evaluating the effectiveness of the teaching, look at whether the learning you planned for was achieved, whether the children enjoyed the learning, and whether the level of participation was as you predicted.
What feedback have I received?	Consultation with parents and the child, if possible, is an essential part of evaluation. This may occur in daily discussion, through meetings or as part of in-depth discussions.
	Colleagues, others who care for the child, and resource and referral bodies can also be included and consulted. All educators working with the plan of learning need to be consulted in order for them to feed back to you their perspectives on implementation and the likelihood of future success.
How does this affect my future teaching plans?	A teaching and learning experience does not stop at evaluation – the cycle continues. Evaluation allows you to take further assessment records and to make future plans.
	Using the information from your evaluations, you are able to gather ideas from the teaching and learning that you can use to meet a new set of objectives and to identify things that are appropriate or inappropriate for the group or individuals.

Practice task 8

The EYLF/MTOP requires that you plan, document and evaluate children's learning. Read the section titled 'Assessment for learning' and explain how this guides your assessment and evaluation of planned and unplanned teaching and learning.

3D Following up activities of high interest

Children thrive and learn best when their interest is captured. This allows learning to occur naturally and to be enjoyable.

You will notice that when children are participating in activities of high interest, they will engage with the experience. They may demonstrate engagement by:

▶ paying attention

▶ listening

▶ asking questions

▶ answering questions

▶ following the plan, actions or guidelines

▶ interacting

▶ being excited

▶ being curious

▶ taking responsibility.

When you notice children are showing high interest, you can attempt to extend this interest by:

▶ allowing them to explore the ideas by providing appropriate or additional materials and resources

▶ enabling them to continue with the activity

▶ encouraging them to investigate.

Sometimes you will find that asking questions can further the children's understanding or involvement. You might ask questions when:

▶ an investigation is stalling

▶ children are not able to take investigation further independently

▶ children have moved on to another topic without completing their investigation

▶ exploration is unsafe.

Whenever possible, continue providing for any area of high interest based on the continued interest of children. Provide follow-up activities and help children to extend their learning.

If they want to find out more, you can support this through:

▶ reading or using books, including dictionaries, atlases and topic books

▶ searching the internet

▶ asking others, including their peers, siblings, parents, other adults they interact with and people in the community

▶ inviting people to come to the service to share their knowledge

▶ calling an information service on the phone (perhaps a speaker phone could be used)

▶ sending away to an organisation for information.

Example

Extending learning

Philomena excitedly tells Ryan, her educator, that she has a shadow. She is moving about and making various postures while watching the changing shape on the ground. Ryan watches and encourages her movements. Later, he asks Philomena why she thinks the shadow is there and whether she knows why it moves. Ryan talks about how the shadow occurs and gets Philomena to try standing in different places to try to 'lose' her shadow, 'catch' her shadow, and make it larger and smaller. Later in the day he follows up by bringing out a picture book about shadows called *Whose shadow is this?*

He plans various activities to implement over the following days, including:

▶ measuring shadows at different times of the day

▶ drawing around each other's shadows with chalk on the path

▶ making shadow puppets, which evolve into shadow puppet plays

▶ providing an art experience with charcoal on white paper, to encourage the children to draw shadows.

Practice task 9

Identify a child who is showing high interest in an activity.

1. How do you know the child is showing high interest?

2. What is one way you could be flexible and extend this interest immediately?

3. List **four** questions you could ask the child about the activity.

4. List **three** activities that you could provide to follow up on this area of high interest.

Summary

▶ A curriculum embraces the skills, performances, attitudes, and values that children are expected to learn from an educational program. To create a responsive curriculum, you must consult with others, and reflect on the implementation and planning you do to meet children's needs.

▶ Children's ideas about the curriculum can reveal much about their development and learning, and about their desire to extend and try new ideas. When you involve others in your curriculum development, you will learn important details.

▶ Educators gather information about children and use this information to plan play spaces, routines, experiences and interactions that suit individual children and groups of children.

▶ To respond appropriately to interests, you need to be active in your educator role – observing, listening and asking questions.

▶ Regardless of the age range of the children you work with, the environment must accommodate all aspects of their development.

▶ Every program must respond spontaneously to interests that arise. This means more than just a quick word of acknowledgment. It means taking the interest to the depth of challenge and consideration that the child indicates they would like.

▶ A responsive program evolves constantly. In order to identify how effective the curriculum is, you must assess and evaluate it.

▶ Whenever possible, continue providing for any area of high interest based on the continued interest of children. Provide follow-up activities and help children to extend their learning.

Learning checkpoint 3
Designing, implementing and evaluating learning experiences for children

Part A

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

Case study

Sofie, an educator, is implementing a planned group experience. Her focus is on the children's current interest area of plants and gardening.

The group is sitting outdoors under a tree. Sofie has read a story about planting seeds and the children have planted sunflower and bean seeds in cotton wool held in egg cartons. Now they are watering the seeds and placing them in the sun.

Sofie is preparing to teach the children a song about a seed growing. The song includes movement actions where the children can grow like seeds. Sofie has sung the song once to the children when the gardener walks into the yard. The gardener is planning to build a garden bed. The position has been chosen, and now he needs to measure the space, develop a list of required materials, shop for the materials, build the garden bed and dig it out ready for planting.

As the gardener walks to the proposed area, the children turn to see what is happening and one child calls out, 'Hey mister, what are you doing?'

What would you do next? Explain your response in detail, considering the children's interests and how you would demonstrate flexibility.

Part B

1. Design a teaching and learning experience.

   a. Provide a description of the experience.

b. How might the experience be linked to a child's interests?

c. What learning and development would you expect to occur during the experience?

d. Which EYLF/MTOP sub-outcome does the experience link to?

2. Consult with an educator about your experience. Record their responses to the following questions.

a. What learning and development might be the most valuable during the experience?

b. How would they alter the experience to increase learning and development?

3. How did you alter the experience based on the consultation that occurred with an educator?

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4. Implement the experience with a child or children, then gather their views and observations. Ask them:
   - ▶ what they liked about the experience
   - ▶ what they would change about the experience.

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5. What sort of recording method would you use to document the learning that occurred during the implementation of the experience?

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6. Evaluate the experience by answering the following questions.

   a. What worked well during the experience?

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   b. What did not work well during the experience?

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c. What unplanned teaching or learning took place?

d. Which areas did children show high interest in?

7. What would you do next to follow up on one area of high interest? Give details of an experience.

Topic 4

In this topic you will learn about:

4A Consulting to include uniqueness

4B Supporting children's efforts

4C Encouraging participation

Supporting children to participate

Early childhood educators need to support the access, participation and achievement of all children in their service. You will need to consider the functional needs of the child and the strategies you can employ to make your program inclusive. This means finding out what the child needs to learn and develop in order to participate.

The following table maps this topic to the National Quality Standard and both national learning frameworks.

National Quality Standard	
✓	Quality Area 1: Educational program and practice
	Quality Area 2: Children's health and safety
	Quality Area 3: Physical environment
	Quality Area 4: Staffing arrangements
✓	Quality Area 5: Relationships with children
	Quality Area 6: Collaborative partnerships with families and communities
	Quality Area 7: Governance and leadership

Early Years Learning Framework	My Time, Our Place
Principles	
Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships	
Partnerships	
✓ High expectations and equity	
Respect for diversity	
✓ Ongoing learning and reflective practice	
Practice	
Holistic approaches	Holistic approaches
Responsiveness to children	Collaboration with children
✓ Learning through play	Learning through play
Intentional teaching	Intentionality
Learning environments	Environments
Cultural competence	Cultural competence
Continuity of learning and transitions	Continuity and transitions
Assessment for learning	Evaluation for wellbeing and learning
Outcomes	
Children have a strong sense of identity	
✓ Children are connected to and contribute to their world	
Children have a strong sense of wellbeing	
✓ Children are confident and involved learners	
Children are effective communicators	

4A Consulting to include uniqueness

NQS Quality Area 5: Relationships with children underpins the involvement of children in educational services. This quality area focuses on relationships with children being responsive and respectful, and promoting children's sense of security and belonging.

Consulting with children

If you communicate with children frequently in meaningful and authentic discussions, you should be able to gain a genuine understanding of each child. Children know that their contributions, ideas and interests are valued and appreciated when you speak to them as equals. When you take the time to get to know each child, and when children are able to participate in a program that genuinely reflects their needs, they will feel a sense of 'belonging', enjoy 'being' themselves and extend themselves into 'becoming'.

Consultation allows you to find out about children's abilities or willingness to participate. What are their ideas about experiences and how do materials influence their participation?

The following are useful topics to consult about:

- Play preferences: where the child prefers to play, what play the child is involved in and who the child plays with.
- Social interactions: the child's peer and adult interactions, including the purpose of their interactions and how they use these in various ways.
- Communication: verbal and nonverbal communication skills and abilities, including who the child communicates with and how effectively.
- Language: how language is used and at what level the child has mastered language abilities.
- Learning styles: some people prefer to learn by doing; others like to observe or gather information first.
- Physical abilities: fine motor, gross motor and fundamental skills.
- Emotional status: temperament and personality; how the child copes with fear, enjoyment, excitement and change.
- Out-of-character behaviour or events.

The information you gain from consultation about these points can be supported by direct questioning about specific activities, experiences and materials. You can consult with children and gather responses through:

- group or individual discussion or questioning
- spontaneous discussion or suggestion
- formal and informal requests
- anecdotal discussion (such as sharing stories and experiences).

One-on-one interaction with each child offers an appropriate setting to consult with the child on a diverse range of topics. It is an opportunity to learn more about the child. You may be able to ask about their experiences and they may disclose more in these interactions than in the group setting. This one-on-one time allows a child to identify their own needs and communicate them to you.

Watch this video about interacting with children.

> ### Example
> ### Consulting with children
>
> Shaheen, an educator, notices that Nyla sits down at the collage table with two other children, but leaves again almost immediately. Shaheen asks, 'Nyla, wouldn't you like to make a collage today?' Nyla says that there is no spare paper to paste onto, the glue brush is all sticky on the handle and she can't access the sparkles (the other children have moved all the glitter to their side of the table, making it inaccessible). Shaheen adjusts the experience and materials and Nyla returns to paste.

Acknowledging uniqueness

The Early Childhood Australia Code of Ethics states that educators have an ethical responsibility to 'learn about, respect and respond to the uniqueness of each family, their circumstances, culture, family structure, customs, language, beliefs and kinship systems'. Therefore, you need to recognise and respect the individual qualities and potential of each child.

When you acknowledge that children are unique, you are respecting diversity, which may include differences in:

- culture and ethnicity
- linguistics
- gender
- socioeconomics
- family lifestyles
- abilities, disabilities and health status

- personalities
- appearances
- interests
- experiences of trauma
- experiences of dislocation and resettlement.

Demonstrating respect for uniqueness

Children will feel more comfortable with uniqueness and see their differences as a positive rather than a negative if you encourage open exploration. Be constantly aware of opportunities that arise, and have children explore issues and questions as they occur.

By focusing positively and openly on similarities and differences, uniqueness becomes an exciting experience. Through positive interactions, you can call attention to other points of view. You can encourage communication through small group activities and social situations, which then encourage problem-solving and conflict resolution.

Role-modelling is an effective method for children to learn desirable behaviour. Through modelling, adults can teach children and others how to respect uniqueness by:

▶ empathising with others

▶ showing affection

▶ helping and sharing

▶ respecting others' opinions and needs

▶ following cultural customs.

You can demonstrate respect for uniqueness by including resources in your curriculum, such as:

▶ photos of community and cultural events

▶ books, magazines, music and brochures in other languages

▶ a variety of cultural items in the home corner

▶ mirrors so that children can look at themselves and others

▶ multicultural toys and mobiles

▶ multicultural, gender-specific and special-needs dolls

▶ puzzles, posters and decorations depicting people of different cultures and abilities

▶ words in languages other than English

▶ art using colours or materials common to a culture

▶ stories that reflect non-stereotypical attitudes

▶ visitors

▶ small group activities

▶ activities that encourage boys and girls to play together and cooperate

▶ not presenting activities as gender-specific

▶ photos of children, staff and families

▶ handbooks and brochures in languages other than English.

Example

Representing diversity

Iva, an educator, notes that the photographs of the children and families displayed in her room show a diverse range of cultures, ethnicities, religions and family structures; however, the posters in the room show the following:

▶ the mum doing the cooking

▶ Indigenous Australians doing dot paintings

▶ the dad mowing the lawn

▶ a family with a mother, father, son and daughter

▶ pale-skinned children at school.

Iva changes the posters to show:

▶ the dad doing the cooking

▶ children of all races doing dot painting

▶ the mum mowing the lawn

▶ an extended family of mixed race

▶ Indigenous children at school.

This better represents the diverse group of children she works with.

Supporting children's identity

Help children develop an accurate picture of themselves, their abilities and their behaviour. Do this through encouragement and by demonstrating that their abilities are recognised. You might also talk positively about the child's work, provide measures that are appropriate and eliminate competition with others. You could try the following strategies:

▶ Have children measure their own achievements. Rather than measuring themselves against other children, encourage children to measure themselves so they can see how they have improved. Include factors such as enjoyment.

▶ Rotate games so that skilled players are not always the focus. All players should assume an important part in an activity they are involved in. This will most likely mean changing the rules or developing a new game from an old one.

Make sure the standards aren't set too high; otherwise you will set the children up to fail. On the other hand, if you set the standards too low, they will be meaningless. You can get the balance right if you observe the children regularly and ensure you are aware of their skill levels. A challenging experience is one that fits with Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD). When a child is able to do something with support from scaffolding, they are demonstrating that they have a 'window of opportunity' you can take advantage of. If you respond to this by scaffolding their skills, they are being challenged. If a child is not in the ZPD, or you have not noticed a 'window of opportunity', you may be setting up the child to fail or become frustrated and feel negatively about the activity or their abilities.

Encourage children to reward themselves and discourage negative self-talk. Support children to do this by giving them words to use and by telling the child what you think. Celebrate achievements and help children to see that mistakes are ways to learn rather than failures.

Practice task 10

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

Case study

Kerryn finds the new floor puzzle too hard. She decides that she is no good at doing puzzles and avoids them in her play. In fact, Kerryn is good at puzzles for her age and can complete complex board puzzles.

1. If you noticed Kerryn's reduced interest in puzzles, how could you consult with her to find out about the experience and materials?

2. If you found out that Kerryn was avoiding puzzles due to this setback, how could you acknowledge her uniqueness in a way that helps her see her strengths?

4B Supporting children's efforts

Learning is more effective and skill transference is more likely when a child has a sense of satisfaction and pride in their own ability. Part of implementing experiences is about ensuring that children participate and feel supported, assisted and encouraged. Each child will need a different level of support and attention.

Assisting and supporting children

Giving support and encouragement to children helps them to build confidence, self-esteem and a sense of belonging. Children need to know they are doing well at something, so if they receive reinforcement and constructive, positive feedback, they will be motivated to keep going. If they do not receive support and encouragement they could lose motivation.

Assistance occurs when you help a child to complete a task or to feel good about what they are doing. You need to time your assistance carefully to allow the child to work uninterrupted and complete the task in their way, as far as they can manage. However, you should support them before they get frustrated and give up.

To pick the best time to assist, look for signs that the child is starting to become frustrated or is too challenged. Some examples and suggestions for assistance are outlined in the following table.

What the child might say	What cues they might give	How you can assist and support them
▶ 'I can't do this.' ▶ 'This is too hard.' ▶ 'I don't want to do this.' ▶ 'This is stupid.' ▶ 'I am stupid.' ▶ 'You need to do it for me.' ▶ 'I am no good.' ▶ 'Why can't I do it?'	▶ Frowning ▶ Growling or making aggressive sounds ▶ Stopping work ▶ Working on the task, but not progressing ▶ Asking you to do the task ▶ Telling you they can't do it ▶ Being aggressive; for example, throwing materials, sweeping the activity off the table or interrupting others	▶ Stay with the child and offer help or assistance ▶ Simplify the activity if possible ▶ Provide strategies or techniques ▶ Give hints ▶ Change the activity to another one more suitable ▶ Ensure that the next activity meets the child's level of ability ▶ Provide successful experiences to rebuild confidence

Your service has a responsibility to plan a curriculum that provides relevant:

- equipment and activities
- precautions
- activity selection
- additional support
- specialist resources.

At times, children will need additional support or attention. You will develop awareness of this need through the assessment records you gather relating to the child, or through information you gather from others. The child may be:

- having difficulty reaching developmental milestones
- showing frustration quickly or easily when attempting activities
- avoiding particular areas of the curriculum.

Watch this video about working with children who need additional support.

> **To create an inclusive program that responds to all children, you will need to:**
>
> - ensure that children are provided for in a safe, effective, healthy way that takes into account their emotional wellbeing – their feelings, state of mind, perception of risk, self-esteem and self-confidence
> - provide tasks, games, activities or exercises that promote enthusiastic, safe and cooperative participation
> - avoid activities that are competitive or can only be enjoyed by the most skilled children
> - remove barriers from the program to ensure that children feel accepted and that your service is as inclusive as possible; for example, adapt games so all children can participate.

By following these guidelines and taking account of choices, interests and abilities as well as the child's culture, you will be able to ensure that all children can participate fully. By involving children in the modification of their environment, as well as the development of the program, you will ensure that they become aware of their abilities and have the opportunity to adapt their environment to suit.

Watch this video about taking account of a child's ideas, knowledge and skills.

Encouraging children

Acknowledgment and encouragement show children that you value them and their efforts. Praising effort motivates children to do things for intrinsic reasons (to please themselves or because the task is worth doing). Acknowledgment and encouragement focus on the process of doing something, rather than the results. The aim is to help children feel good about themselves when they try hard at something.

You can acknowledge and encourage children by:

▶ providing feedback on work by commenting on the effort that is being made, the structure or colour, the materials used, and the aspects you are interested in or attracted to, and asking questions that demonstrate your interest and appreciation, such as 'How did you do that?', 'What materials did you use?' or 'What do you think of your work?'

▶ thanking children for their contribution; for example, after a child has helped pack away the toys you could say, 'Matilda, thanks for putting all the toys away, it was a big job'.

Practice task 11

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

Case study

Lim is trying to mould a dog from play dough. She forms the dog's legs, but each time she tries to stand them up, they fall over and roll onto the floor. Lim's educator, Quanda, notices that Lim is frowning, throwing up her hands, and saying, 'I can't do this!'

1. How do you suggest Quanda should assist and encourage Lim?

2. If Lim had a vision impairment, how could Quanda develop awareness of Lim's needs and provide additional support and attention while Lim uses play dough?

4C Encouraging participation

Children are more likely to be engaged by activities that relate to their interests and strengths. They are also likely to maintain a sense of agency when they have participated in developing the plan of activities, and when they are inspired to be curious.

Curiosity is about finding things out and experimenting. Curiosity is excellent for initiating a new activity or experience and for encouraging participation.

Some children will choose not to participate in activities. You should respect this choice as you would any decision they make about their personal needs.

Encouraging children to participate

When you set up experiences for children, try to imagine how the child is going to see the experience. What message will your set-up send? An ideal set-up says: 'Come and play! Join in!'

You can use the physical environment to welcome and encourage children.

Message	How you can demonstrate this
This is a good place to be.	▶ Children's senses are not bombarded by colours, noise or clutter. ▶ The environment is clean, bright and well prepared. ▶ Materials and furnishings are child-focused. ▶ All children and parents are made to feel welcome by having their culture and community reflected in the room.
This place is safe and interesting.	▶ The environment has boundaries that are easy to understand. ▶ There are inviting and attractive displays and experiences. ▶ Materials are changed in line with children's interests. ▶ Safety is important, but children are still able to develop a sense of independence. ▶ There are familiar staff.
I belong here.	▶ Each child has their own space, bag, towel, hook, etc. ▶ There is child-appropriate furniture and children can access materials. ▶ Children's work is displayed. ▶ Children are encouraged to bring things into the environment.

To encourage children to participate, you should include relevant choices for each child. Children will then be able to move between activities and be inspired to finish a project that they enjoy.

Note that providing choice and ensuring that children participate in a variety of experiences does not mean that they have to complete a set number of tasks or participate in all activities you provide. The individual child should be your guide.

Just as in creative development, engagement is about the process (doing things) rather than the product (the result). You will notice when you have engaged a child's interest as they will concentrate on their activity, ask questions and stay involved for some time.

As part of engagement, your interactions can help to:

▶ initiate play or activity

▶ encourage a child

▶ make them feel comfortable and safe

▶ introduce new language

▶ involve them in setting up and modifying activities

▶ assist them to participate in different ways

▶ co-construct.

Example

Encouraging children to participate

Hugh, an educator, sets up a new activity. He provides marbles, paper and paint. He also places trays on the table. Hugh plans to pique the children's curiosity and creativity through his interactions. Instead of telling the children, 'This is marble painting and this is how it is done', Hugh says things like:

▶ 'Can you work out how to use these things?'

▶ 'What do you think you could do with these?'

Hugh thought about how to engage children and encourage them to participate. He realised that engagement is not just an exercise in having them complete an activity; it relates to them exploring, experimenting and being engrossed in what they are doing.

Respecting a child's choice not to participate

When you focus on the individual child's interests and strengths, and make an effort to involve them, provide relevant choices and encourage enthusiasm and curiosity, you will be providing a high-quality, responsive program. Nonetheless, you will still find that some children will choose not to participate. The following table provides some reasons why.

A momentary decision	▶ The child wishes to be alone.
	▶ They want to look at others participating, to see what will happen before they decide to join in.
	▶ There are too many choices.
	▶ They are not sure whether they are interested.
	▶ They could be learning the rules.
	▶ They are not interested in the activity.
The result of an event	▶ The child feels anxious due to past failure.
	▶ They want to watch because last time it was enjoyable to do so.
An ongoing choice	▶ The child feels positively about not participating or is not interested in the activity or experience.
	▶ They enjoy watching others participate, but do not wish to join in.

An ongoing difficulty	▶ The child lacks confidence or feels uncomfortable with particular peers or activities and experiences. ▶ They are uncertain about their skills and abilities. ▶ They feel that they need to perform, and do not wish to do this.
Health	▶ The child is tired or unwell.
Relationships	▶ The child does not feel welcome.

You need to be aware of individual differences, such as learning preferences, the way each child approaches new things, and the degree to which they will normally participate. Some children do not mind making mistakes, while others are concerned about getting things wrong. A child may prefer to work on an activity on their own before they participate with their peers. A child's culture may play a role or they may be embarrassed.

In a situation where children choose not to participate, consider the following.

What you can do	How you might do it
Respect their decision.	▶ Accept their decision. ▶ Tell them that they can join in if they change their mind. ▶ Let them know the opportunity won't be available later if that is the case, but do not use this as a challenge or threat. ▶ Check they are well and do not need support in other ways. ▶ Avoid nagging or asking continuously.
Offer simple suggestions and choices without pressuring the child.	▶ Check whether they know how to participate. ▶ Ask if they would like to do something else – then follow this up. ▶ Find out if they would like to participate later. ▶ Ask if they are happy to watch and be on their own.
Identify why the child does not wish to participate, if possible.	▶ Ask them if there is a reason, and if you can help them with it. ▶ Make a suggestion based on your knowledge of the child; for example, 'Are you feeling tired?'
If the child is having difficulty or has had a negative experience, plan support strategies to help them overcome this.	▶ Develop new or altered experiences based on skills and interests you know the child will respond to. ▶ Involve the child in changing the environment or experience to suit them.
Accept the child's reasoning if not participating is part of their personality.	▶ Understand that choosing not to participate is part of the child's normal pattern of behaviour. ▶ Support their participation when they are involved. ▶ Find out more about the child and see if you are missing important information.

If you are working with a child who often decides not to participate, it may be helpful to document their interests and assess their behaviours. This may inform discussions about the child with the family or with specialists to address any deeper reasons the child may have for making this decision.

Practice task 12

Access the following NQS elements:

▶ Element 1.1.3

▶ Element 1.2.2

▶ Element 1.2.3

▶ Element 1.3.1

▶ Element 1.3.2

▶ Element 3.2.1

▶ Element 3.2.2

1. Write a statement that describes how these elements support you to encourage each child to participate in a variety of experiences.

2. If a child chose not to participate in a planned experience, how would you respond to this?

Summary

- ▶ If you communicate with children frequently in meaningful and authentic discussions, you should gain a genuine understanding of each child.

- ▶ Children will feel more comfortable with uniqueness and see their differences as a positive rather than a negative if you encourage open exploration. Be constantly aware of opportunities that arise and have children explore issues and questions as they occur.

- ▶ Learning is more effective and skill transference is more likely when a child has a sense of satisfaction and pride in their own ability. Part of implementing experiences is ensuring that children participate and feel supported, assisted and encouraged.

- ▶ Giving support and encouragement to children helps them to build confidence, self-esteem and a sense of belonging.

- ▶ Acknowledgment and encouragement indicate to children that you value them and their efforts. Praising effort motivates children to do things for intrinsic reasons (to please themselves or because the task is worth doing).

- ▶ Children are more likely to be engaged by activities that relate to their interests and strengths. They are also more likely to maintain a sense of agency when they have participated in developing the plan of activities.

- ▶ Some children will choose not to participate in activities. You can find out their reasons while respecting their choices.

Learning checkpoint 4
Supporting children to participate

Part A

1. Consider a child who needs additional support or attention, and who does not want to participate in experiences.

   a. What are the child's needs?

   b. How should you respond to the child's needs?

   c. How should you respond when the child does not want to participate?

Part B

1. Provide a brief description of an experience and explain how you would encourage children to participate in it.

2. Consult with two or more children about the experience and materials.

    a. What feedback did they give you?

    b. How did each child's unique view influence you?

    c. How could you adjust the experience in response to the feedback?

3. Explain how you can support children's efforts at this experience, and provide assistance and encouragement.