Intentional teaching focus

Explore what intentional teaching looks like in a range of contexts. Find some great resources to extend your understanding or provoke your thinking.

Examples of practice: Thoughtful, deliberate, purposeful ...

‘Intentional teaching and curriculum decision-making are often seen as at odds with a child-centred, play-based approach. This is another myth to debunk. Intentional teaching can be responsive to both children and the learning outcomes identified in the approved learning frameworks. The term ‘intentional teaching’ is not used to describe a formal or structured approach to teaching. It is used to describe teaching that is purposeful, thoughtful and deliberate.

When we look at the practice of intentional teaching through this lens, we can see how it complements rather than contradicts the emergent approach to curriculum decision-making. Intentional teaching offers a rich opportunity to actively promote children’s learning and knowledge building.’

– Livingston, R. (2016). Emergent curriculum ... doesn't mean no need to plan; ACECQA

A good starting point for thinking about the diversity of approaches has been included in the Talking about practice videos on the ECRH website. Judy Radich of Tweed Heads Cooloon Children's Centre explains:

‘Intentional teaching, for me, is the deliberate decisions that we as educators take every day. It’s really about everything that we do – it’s not just the experiences and the activities that we provide for young children. It’s how we design and set up our environments, it’s the type of experiences we give children as well. But it’s all of the things that we plan – it’s our daily routines, it’s the structure of the day. It includes how we group children. So it’s many things, really, I see ... I guess intentional teaching for me really is the educator being active in their engagement with children – it’s not just passive.'
Sometimes the educator, in intentional teaching, might lead the experience and set the scene. And other times, that educator will take their lead from children and be part of the children's play and experiences and be guided by what the children are wanting to do. I think it's important to say both children and educators have intentions.

Victorian educator Siobhan Hannan reinforces the importance of balancing teacher judgement about curriculum with children's interests:

‘Intentional teaching can also be child-initiated, I believe. Out of all the things that children do and say, the teacher selects some to respond to. The choice is usually driven by the teacher's curriculum. But intentional teaching also means doing things that the children do not initiate that we want them to learn.’

Another Queensland-based educator, BB Hunnybun from Coomera Playschool ELC, stresses the importance of the planning cycle to strengthen intentional teaching:

‘A strong planning cycle incorporates child-led interest, educator-supported learning, family input, community focus, and a strong critical reflection from each educator to make the cogs turn, and a program that reflects on not only child-led activities but factors from each set of observations. ALL these factors help setting of goals and intentions ... Spontaneous learning also plays a key role in planning. Build on what they have and you will achieve a meaningful cycle of learning.’

Jenny Radich provides two examples of practice in her service.

The first example centres around food and the lunchtime routine. One of the children did not like the food that was on offer.

‘It raises a whole lot of different issues for people, perhaps based on what happened to them as children. And so it ranged from educators thinking that the child should eat what's put in front of them, because that's what they had to do, to ‘at least have a try’, and also to others like myself that would say, ‘Well, I don't eat anything I don't like, so why should young children eat things that they don't like?’

One of the other things was that if we offered an alternate meal to that child, that the very nature of toddlers would mean that they would all want that meal as well – that alternative meal. So in the end we talked about a number of solutions ... I guess what it's allowed us to really think about is, you know, there's more to a lunchtime routine than just eating lunch.’

Find out what worked in their context by watching the video.

Video 2 shows educators thinking about types of play and how to shift children's thinking about what is possible.

‘At our service, we have a shared yard. We believe that it’s important that our younger children have opportunities to be with our older children. So that’s something about our values and beliefs about young children and childhood ... After a little while, we noticed it was going to be a bit of a safety issue, we felt, with
some of our toddlers. We had some lovely four-wheel-drive (toy) trucks and ... we noticed that a lot of the preschoolers were just tearing around the yard.’

What the service did next was to involve the children in discussion about a solution to the problem, followed by enacting the solution as a group.

Victoria-based Julie focuses on how the educator can extend children’s learning through targeted use of questioning:

‘I use certain language and words in the context of different play and the children’s interests. I try to use non-patronising language, new vocabulary, longer sentences and longer explanations. Intentional teaching is building on what they know and extending it. If you listen carefully, it’s amazing what some know already.’

Intentional teaching can be planned or occur through teachable moments. Queensland-based educator Annette Anido provides an example:

‘I saw a wonderful example of intentional teaching whilst assessing a student in a centre. The very experienced educator was extending the children’s play with some fairy gear she’d brought in that day. One little girl ‘read’ the safety pictorial on the packaging, saying it said that it wasn’t safe for children. The educator realised what she was referring to, and invited her to look more carefully at the picture. It was, in fact, not safe for babies, as the child then read. It was a wonderful spontaneous moment, and a fab example of intentional teaching. I can only imagine how the educator will extend on this.’

The final ECRH video featuring Jenny Radich exploring what happens in a small group activity after a child brings seeds to the group.

‘So a small group for a few days might be planting and nurturing those seeds. It might be we have some new equipment, and so the educator will talk to the children about – and demonstrate even – how we might use that piece of equipment. Or it might be that a nest fell out of the tree that morning and so as part of a small group, they might do some research to think and find out about what sort of bird belonged to that nest.

And so the small group that we are going to see was really based on an educator listening and watching children and hearing them talk about things like measurement and length and comparing who was taller, who was shorter. And for this educator, I guess she knew that there was some maths and numeracy things that we have an obligation to talk about with children. And so she was really building on their interest.’
The *video* shows the ways in which the educator builds on existing knowledge, but also how she prepares these almost school-aged children for activities expected of them at school.

Judy sums up the approach of the service by saying:

‘I think the term ‘intentional teaching’ does give us a whole lot of things to think about. It’s everything that we do. It does make us stop and think. It’s not just about children’s experiences. It’s about the way we set up. And it is underpinned by what we believe in, how we view children. And I think that’s really significant. How we think children should have childhoods in care. And it’s all of those things.

I think for a number of years, perhaps, in early childhood, we said, ‘Oh, anything goes.’ And perhaps we just let children do what they feel like doing. But intentional teaching is really about active engagement with the educator, having a plan, being able to adapt that plan as the needs of children change and grow. But it is about saying, ‘There are some things to teach in early childhood,’ and being able to express that and teach them.’

Use the ECRH videos as the basis for a professional conversation, with support from the accompanying handout. Discover more detail about the work of Judy and her staff through this summary.

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**Resources**

**Intentional teaching: So many possibilities**

Find seven great *videos produced by QCAA* exploring this concept, including perspectives on learning through routines, group work, camping as an activity and the late Professor Collette Taylor’s exploration of the concept.

**Making sense of ‘intentional teaching’**

This *resource* defines intentional teaching and explains why it has been included as a pedagogical practice in the EYLF. It outlines the role of play, and suggests some first steps that educators can take towards intentional teaching.

**Thinking about intentions**

This *resource* unpacks the tension between having clear intentions and taking over, and where emergent curriculum and explicit teaching fit. Two scenarios clarify intentional teaching in practice.

**Responding to children’s play**

This *National Quality Standard newsletter* focuses on EYLF thinking around three key practices: responsiveness to children, learning through play, and intentional teaching. Examine strategies for being responsive and intentional with children and babies, think about the connections between these practices and play-based learning, and see how they relate to the National Quality Standard.

**Intentional teaching**

This *worksheet* could be used in a staff meeting or professional learning to begin a discussion about intentional teaching, accompanied by other video resources or practical examples to stimulate thinking about this topic.
Creating a rich curriculum through intentional teaching

This New Zealand-based slide presentation explores some of the key elements of intentional teaching and challenges educators to be more assertive through thoughtful and intentional pedagogy.

What is a schema?

This PDF outlines some basic information about schemas (patterns of repeated behaviour that allow children to explore and express developing ideas and thoughts through their play and exploration). This knowledge enables educators to enhance observations of children, which can in turn support the assessing and planning for next steps in development.

Integrated teaching and learning approaches

This guide explains the difference between adult-led learning and child-based learning, and strategies for extending the learning of children and practical examples. Use it to support individual critical reflection on your practice, for discussion with a mentor or critical friend and as a guide for discussion with colleagues.

Supporting agency: Involving children in decision-making

When educators are intentional, purposeful and plan for children's learning, this helps children to be active agents in sourcing their own learning. This brief PDF provides more information about this topic, especially in regard to differing age groups of children, and key considerations for assessment and rating.

‘It will be a wasteland if we don’t recycle’: Sustainability and intentional teaching in early childhood

Through the theme of sustainability, this article explores ways to balance the role of intentional teaching with children, as opposed to setting up environments for open-ended play.

A time of learning, a time for joy: Teaching and learning strategies

Understanding the zone of proximal development (ZPD) for each child assists educators to provide rigorous learning activities for individual children. This Canadian-based PDF aims to support early years educators to diversify their teaching techniques and to extend children's learning in response to the ZPD for each child. It includes practical ideas for scaffolding activities and supporting intentional teaching.

Intentionally broadening and deepening curriculum:

Choose a child from your centre/service who you are unsure of the extent to which s/he is experiencing a broad, deep curriculum in your centre/service.

Think about this child.

- What you know and don't know about this child.
- What information do you need and how might you gather this?
- Think across the curriculum – are there strands, goals or learning outcomes that are harder for you to think about in relation to that child?
- How can you intentionally build upon what you know about this child to broaden/deepen his/her curriculum experiences?
  - What to teach?
  - When to teach?
  - How to teach?

Source: Institute for Early Childhood Studies
Something to think about

Does intentional teaching discourage actual teaching?

This article is intended to provoke a discussion about the ways in which intentional teaching may have been misinterpreted.

Are we too interested in children’s interests?

Liam McNicholas writes:

‘I’d like to encourage educators to think about it in this way. We don’t teach about children’s interests, we teach through children’s interests. Children’s interests can illuminate the way for us as teachers and educators, and provide some roadmaps for the outcomes we’re heading towards. To use an old cliché – interests are a part of the journey, not the destination.’