

3 Children's learning in the Early Childhood phase of development



This part of the *Early Childhood (K-3) Syllabus Working Version* describes characteristics of children as they develop across the Early Childhood phase of development, and suggests approaches to learning and teaching.



Please comment on the extent to which the information in this part of the syllabus:

- is consistent with advice in the relevant sections of the *Curriculum Framework*
- provides teachers with sufficient information about the characteristics of children in the Early Childhood phase of development
- provides advice, in the context of the *Curriculum Framework* principles of learning and teaching, pedagogical approaches that incorporate the understandings of children and learning in the Early Childhood phase of development.

3.1 The Early Childhood phase of development

Ongoing work in the area of brain research has found that brain development of young children proceeds at a rapid rate. It is in these early years that the majority of connections in the brain are made. This research underpins early childhood as a critical period in the development and growth of individuals. It is in this stage that the foundations and dispositions for future learning are built.

Children in this phase of development are active participants in constructing knowledge in their environment. They take different pathways in learning and use multiple forms of expressions to represent what they know. Children view tasks differently depending on their backgrounds and experiences. Children's learning and development takes place in a number of areas with an emphasis on social and emotional, knowledge and understanding of the world, literacy, numeracy, creativity and physical development.

Children learn to communicate and cooperate with others in a range of contexts. They learn about their place in their family and social groups and how they can use communication skills to strengthen and maintain relationships.

It is important that learning experiences build upon each child's understandings, skills, values and experiences. Schools foster strong relationships with families and communities,

and draw upon these relationships to provide culturally appropriate learning experiences.

Learning and teaching practice changes across the phase of development, reflecting children's rapid rate of growth and development and the impact of their social and cultural backgrounds.

3.2 Overview of suggested approaches to learning and teaching

The *Curriculum Framework* provides advice about approaches to learning, teaching and assessment that are based on research and professional knowledge about learning. When using this syllabus to plan, Early Childhood teachers should make reference to the sections on learning and teaching in the *Curriculum Framework* overarching and learning area statements. This will ensure that approaches to learning and teaching are relevant to children's developmental stages, as well as to learning within and across outcomes and learning areas.

A physically and emotionally secure classroom environment is fundamental to effective learning and development. Learning is enhanced through an environment that is supportive, responsive and engaging. Positive relationships and interactions underpin sound curriculum delivery.

Children's learning is experiential. They learn through observing, experimenting, problem-solving, manipulating and exploring. Play and exploratory learning are contexts for investigating, expressing emotions, developing social behaviours and for constructing knowledge.

Modelling, scaffolding, cooperative learning and explicit teaching, provided through a balance of whole-class, small group and individual contexts are included in a range of learning and teaching strategies.

The *Curriculum Framework* outlines principles of learning and teaching as follows:

Opportunity to learn

Learning experiences should enable children to observe and practise the actual processes, products, skills and values which are expected of them.

Connection and challenge

Learning experiences should connect with children's existing knowledge, skills and values while extending and challenging their current ways of thinking and acting.

Action and reflection

Learning experiences should be meaningful and encourage both action and reflection on the part of the learner.

Motivation and purpose

Learning experiences should be motivating and their purpose clear to the child.

Inclusivity and difference

Learning experiences should respect and accommodate differences between learners.

Independence and collaboration

Learning experiences should encourage children to learn both independently and from and with others.

Supportive environment

The school and classroom setting should be safe and conducive to effective learning.

In the context of the *Curriculum Framework* principles of learning and teaching, viewed holistically, pedagogical approaches could incorporate the understandings of children and learning outlined below.

Children in the Early Childhood phase of development:

- construct their understanding of the world through processes that include problem-solving, inquiry, trial and error, instruction and practise
- show emerging language and literacy skills
- recognise and understand number through experiences with their environment. They use the language of mathematics to develop and understand concepts related to space, measurement, number, chance and data and pre-algebra

- are developing the lateral thinking, flexibility and fluency of response that support creative thinking
- are developing the social competence, emotional regulation, connectedness and social dispositions that enable them to negotiate friendships, engage in meaningful relationships and participate fully in the communities in which they live
- grow and develop physically at a rapid rate. They refine fine and gross motor skills and body coordination.
- build children's cooperative working skills
- promote the development of fundamental movement skills and a healthy lifestyle.

3.3 The child in The Arts

In the Early Childhood phase of development, children are introduced to many foundation activities in The Arts learning area as they begin to make meaning of the world around them and establish a sense of personal and group identity.

Therefore learning and teaching experiences should:

- be 'hands-on', interactive and relate to children's experiences
- provide a balance of adult directed and child initiated experiences, including play
- provide appropriately sequenced guidance and instruction in meaningful contexts
- include meaningful feedback for children
- encourage children to use their imagination, initiative, spontaneity and ideas to interpret experiences
- provide a range of media for children to interact with and demonstrate their learning
- foster independence and self determination to facilitate the development of autonomous learners

Play is a major source of inspiration, creative expression and imagination. Children in the Early Childhood phase of development, use directed and focused play to create and interpret their ideas and participate in activities that begin to refine and control their gross and fine motor skills.

Children's ideas tend to be concrete and practical. They learn through observation, modelling, repetition and imitation. They develop arts ideas both individually and collaboratively, drawing on observations and experiences of their immediate world.

3.4 The child in English

Language learning is a social and collaborative process for young children who are constantly refining their abilities through interaction. Play in the early years offers an important opportunity to use and

practise language skills, and children should be encouraged to negotiate, make decisions and solve problems through speech dialogue. Over time they learn the technical language to enable them to talk more comprehensively about their knowledge and understandings.

Children in this phase of development, enjoy learning through narrative and lyric verse and should be immersed in a variety of stories, poems, films and other texts. Through discussion and reflection, children become increasingly aware that texts are constructed by people to represent real and imaginary experiences.

In this phase of development, children develop an increasing interest in the print in their surroundings and are given opportunities to interpret signs and symbols. They are taught reading and writing strategies, beginning with phonological awareness, as they balance learning to read and reading to learn.

3.5 The child in Health and Physical Education

In the Early Childhood phase of development, learning in the Health and Physical Education learning area occurs in familiar contexts and settings that focus on immediate events. Children recognise that some people have different health needs. Through play, games and physical activity children gain a clear understanding of what it means to be healthy and how to enhance their own health.

In this phase of development, children learn how to keep themselves safe and reduce risks to their health. They need learning experiences that are enjoyable as well as relevant to their own lives and situations. Activities that teach children about the different stages of human development; knowledge of healthy food choices and the factors that may affect them; relationships with peers, friends and families; as well as safety in a variety of environments will optimise their understanding of their own lives. Learning situations need to provide opportunities for children to make decisions, enhance communication and practise their interpersonal and self-management skills in a safe environment.

Physically, children are at different rates in their development and need a range of activities that allow them to enjoy success and participate with increasing confidence. Teaching fundamental movement skills provides the foundation for the more complex movement patterns and advanced activities that are required in the Middle Childhood phase of development. The emphasis in the Early Childhood phase of development, is regular participation in cooperative rather than competitive, physical activity. Locomotor skills, such as skipping, hopping and running; body management skills, such as balance and motion; and object control skills, such as working with balls and bats are practised in safe, supportive environments and taught through cooperative activities.

In the early part of this phase of development, Health and Physical Education activities are structured to provide scope for creative play whilst still teaching children how to move their bodies in different ways and respond to teacher instructions. As skills and coordination develop, students learn to link movement patterns with greater success.

3.6 The child in Languages (LOTE)

In this phase of development, children have a good ear and a natural enthusiasm for language. This makes them receptive to learning a new language.

Because listening is the first skill to develop it is vital that opportunities for listening are maximised. Children at this stage benefit from hearing the target language from a variety of sources including videos, songs, teacher modelling during lesson time and background speakers. Young children need the target language to be accompanied by a range of body language, gestures, visual props and cues to give them the support they need to make meaning from the language they hear.

Like listening, reading and viewing are receptive skills and these should be the focus of learning, teaching and assessment programs. Exposure to a print-rich environment in the target language will support their learning (*eg signs, posters, charts, labels and other visual material*).

Children in the Early Childhood phase of development need to use their five senses and tasks should be short, concrete and enjoyable (*eg memory games, tactile activities and action songs*). Children can demonstrate their understanding of the target language in many ways including drawing pictures, dramatising sections of stories or situations, responding in English or by using other alternative modes.

As speaking is a productive skill, it will develop more slowly than the receptive skills of listening and reading. Children know and understand more than they can say in the target language.

3.7 The child in Mathematics

At the beginning of this phase of development, the personal world for many young children centres on the family network. Children should be assisted to recognise that mathematics is inherent in their home life, encompassing everyday activities such as stacking toys to fit in a box and setting out the correct amount of plates for each person. Activities should be structured to use a wide variety of familiar situations and materials that have meaning for them.

During this phase of development, children will build their mathematical ideas based on their personal knowledge of the world. Children should learn to pose mathematical questions about their world and seek ways

to solve the questions independently and in collaboration with their peers. They will represent problem 'stories' with concrete materials, pictures and 'the mind's eye'. Children should be able to investigate objects to directly compare size and attributes and to share their investigations with others.

Towards the end of the Early Childhood phase of development, children should be able to create their own mathematical patterns and find ways of describing the rules that produce them. They should also be using a range of mental strategies for addition and subtraction problems as well as extending their range with physical materials, pictures, calculators and informal pen-and-pencil strategies.

3.8 The child in Science

At the beginning of this phase of development, features of their personal world fascinate young children. They have a natural curiosity and are keen explorers of their environment. They like to build, invent, make and solve practical problems of their own choosing. They learn through direct experiences with objects using all of their senses. Young children actively construct their knowledge and understanding of the world. Provision should be made for children to work on self-initiated activities as well as in cooperation with others.

Typically, young children ask questions to seek information and gain immediate satisfaction. They often interpret phenomena separately rather than holistically.

During the Early Childhood phase of development, rich experiential learning and teaching programs will enable young children to develop a repertoire of encounters with, and knowledge about, their world that can be built on in the future. Working Scientifically is central to learning, teaching and assessment programs. Children should be provided with opportunities to practise and develop their investigative skills using everyday materials and organisms. Young children should be encouraged to use all of their senses to develop the skills of observing, labelling, comparing, describing and sorting, and to wonder about the differences and changes they observe in their everyday world.

While young children develop concepts and vocabulary from their experiences, many science concepts remain abstract. During the early years, learning and teaching should be designed to give young children frequent opportunities to begin exploring concepts which provide the foundation for later understandings.

3.9 The child in Society and Environment

In the Early Childhood phase of development, children explore and interact with familiar environments. As they gain confidence in the concepts and processes used they are able to present a personal perspective on their understandings.

Children become aware of differing human habitats around the world and compare them

with the local community. They recognise the need to care for environments and explore the ways people use particular places. They investigate cultural beliefs, customs and practices, with the main cultural emphasis being families and how culture influences behaviour and identity. Children explore the past through family and community history and compare these histories with those of other cultures. When exploring social systems they investigate decision making, the effects of decisions made and the dependence that families and social groups have on each other.

Learning, teaching and assessment programs enable children to explore and investigate for themselves. Learning is scaffolded so that children begin to make connections between relationships within the family, school and community. The development of the skills of social inquiry, decision making and cooperative behaviours and learning are encouraged. Children are assisted to demonstrate respect for others and to respond using culturally appropriate conventions.

3.10 The child in Technology and Enterprise

Children in the Early Childhood phase of development come to school having experienced technologies commonly available in their homes and immediate communities. They have an understanding of what technology can do, but less knowledge about

how it works or how it is developed, created or modified.

Knowledge of technology in the Early Childhood phase of development, can be developed through play. Learning, teaching and assessment programs should encourage children to recognise that needs and wants can be met through technology. Children should be encouraged to produce approximations of their intentions for new designs and to use trial and error to generate ideas.

Many manipulative skills are introduced to children as they learn to use tools such as scissors, saws, hammers, staplers, glue guns, cooking equipment and paint brushes safely and correctly. Children learn to share materials and equipment and begin to understand that resources and materials may be limited.

Children will select and use materials such as clay, paper, plastic, wood and fabric to build models or products that will meet special needs or perform specific functions. They practise manipulating materials by shaping, moulding, joining, colouring and finishing them in ways that are suited to their designs, production methods and use.

In Technology and Enterprise children find, gather and store information. They use oral language, text, photographs, diagrams, maps, photographs and other forms of information.

They examine how people use information at home, work and for recreation. Children need opportunities to use information technologies such as telephones, calculators, cameras, computers, recorders and photocopiers to assist them to demonstrate ways they can construct, present, store and transmit information to others.

Working Version