Building learning relationships with children

The Victorian Advancing Early Learning (VAEL) Study is developing and testing a professional learning model focused on improving the quality of educator-child interactions in order to improve young children’s learning outcomes in their first four years of life.

The model under development is designed around the teaching and learning strategies of the Abecedarian Approach Australia (known as 3a), and progress on the quality of interaction is being charted through checking the levels of emotional, organisational and instructional support evident within the talk. Children's outcomes are also measured at the start and completion of the professional improvement activity.

Abecedarian is a research-validated set of teaching and learning strategies developed and tested over 30 years of randomised trials that demonstrated effectiveness in promoting positive and long-lasting changes in children’s life outcomes.

The principles of 3a are readily adaptable to a variety of early childhood education and care (ECEC) settings and focus strongly on the adult-child interactions that occur every day to enhance outcomes for children. The effects are strongest for children from vulnerable backgrounds. This evidence-based pedagogical intervention uses purposeful adult-child interactions as the key to children's learning, with a focus on language and cognition within play-based learning environments. The strategies include language priority, enriched caregiving, conversational reading and learning games. These strategies support educators in interacting intentionally and frequently with individuals and small groups of children during play and caregiving routines, to support learning and development. The fact that 3a is founded on sensitive interactions and relationships between adults and children provides a strong, natural relationship to the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF).
The professional learning program focuses on the role of the lead educator as vital to children's learning and development. Everyday interactions that are individualised, warm and encouraging, support verbal communication, facilitate attention to learning and scaffold children's understandings are at the core of effective educational programs.

Evidence from the E4Kids study indicates that there is a low presence of play-based instructional support offered to young children in ECEC settings. The VAEL study is collecting evidence of how children's development changes when particular strategies are present within play settings. In collaboration with its partners, the Melbourne University team has provided an intensive professional learning program to the educators, supported by coaching and observation of practice, to implement the 3a teaching and learning strategies. Based on initial analyses, the effect of this professional learning program indicates positive change in the frequency and type of interactions between educators and children. The role of the educational leader is essential as an intentional support for the implementation of the 3a strategies within the early years' services in the context of continuous improvement. Capturing evidence of the experiences of educators, families and children, the team uses the data to support ongoing reflection about how best to make a positive difference in children's lives each day, and ensure children's ongoing wellbeing and development.

Professor Collette Tayler holds the chair in early childhood education and care in the Melbourne Graduate School of Education.

Dr Jane Page is a senior lecturer in the Melbourne Graduate School of Education at the University of Melbourne.

Nicole Pilsworth is the Alfred Felton research fellow at the Melbourne Graduate School of Education.

Gracie Pupillo is an educational leader and kindergarten teacher at Flemington St Children's Centre.

Share this:

LEAVE A REPLY

Your email address will not be published. Required fields are marked *

Name *

Email *

Website

Post Comment