

6 Integrated Teaching and Learning Approaches



Integrated teaching and learning approaches

- Combine guided play and learning, adult-led learning, and child-directed play and learning
- Involves the adult *intentionally* engaging with the child in play



ng and learning approaches



The diagram above shows these three elements woven together, or ‘integrated’, because in the most effective learning environments, all three of these things happen



What is play?

- Through play, children learn to make sense of and construct ideas about the social and natural world - the people, places, objects and experiences they encounter every day
- Often described as child-directed, active, with a minimum of rules



What is play? (cont.)

- Often described as child-directed, active, with a minimum of rules (an exploratory process rather than a focused activity to learn a particular learning outcome)
- Current thinking however is that adults have a critically important role in children's play, even when the child directs it



Adult-led learning

- Occurs when adults introduce an experience or an idea, concept, topic for exploration and direct the learning by taking charge, giving instructions, setting rules, asking questions, and providing structure
- Is about making judgments about what is worth children knowing by promoting ‘worthwhile and challenging experiences and interactions that foster high-level thinking skills’



Child-directed play and learning

- Occurs when children lead their learning through exploring, experimenting, investigating and being creative in ways that they initiate and control



Guided play and learning

- Occurs when adults are involved in children's play and learning, following children's interests and responding to spontaneous learning opportunities as they arise



Intentional teaching

- Refers to professionals making decisions that are thoughtful, deliberate and purposeful as they broaden and deepen children's knowledge, skills and experience to take them beyond what they already know, can do and understand
- Is essential for children's learning



Why is integrated teaching and learning important?

- Children are capable of learning on their own, but adults extend and increase that learning and stimulate new learning through their intentional involvement
- While play can be child-directed, adults' involvement can increase its value
- Research indicates that the least successful learning environments are those where children are regularly allowed to spend a lot of time in undirected free play



Effectiveness of integrated approaches

- Play and experiential learning are engaging for children, and children learn best when they are fully engaged
- In play and experiential learning children are engaged for longer, which promotes learning
- Child-led and guided play and learning support children's sense of agency - of being active contributors to their learning and that of others



Effectiveness of integrated approaches (cont.)

- Observing and participating in child-directed play and learning allows professionals to identify children's strengths, abilities and interests, which they can build on by guiding or leading the learning
- When adults are attuned to children through their involvement in child-led and guided play and learning, they are able to respond to individual children and make the most of learning opportunities as they arise (adult-led learning)



Effectiveness of integrated approaches (cont.)

- Adults have an important role in developing children's understanding of concepts in literacy, numeracy and science
- When adults lead learning, they extend children's learning beyond what they can know, do and understand on their own



Tools and examples for integrated teaching and learning

- Engaging with children in play
- Having conversations and interactions that support learning
- Planning experiences to deepen and extend children's knowledge, understanding and skills
- Differentiating learning opportunities for individual learners
- Planning a balanced curriculum using all five learning and development outcomes
- Creating physical environments that promote learning



Engaging with children in play

- **Modelling or demonstrating** e.g. How children can join in the play or share ideas or equipment
- **Facilitating** play by providing resources or materials to support play and designing environments that provide flexible, inclusive play spaces
- **Extending** children's learning by asking open-ended questions, making suggestions, asking children to make predictions, or discussing how their ideas could be developed further
- **Responding** to spontaneous learning opportunities, especially to develop children's understanding of literacy, numeracy and science concepts



Engaging with children in play (cont.)

- **Monitoring** to ensure that every child is included and that the environment is safe, interesting and able to support every child's learning and development
- **Documenting and assessing** to track how every child's learning across the learning and development outcomes is being promoted through play
- **Reflecting** on children's play and their role in promoting children's learning in play
- **Advocating** for play-based learning by talking with children, families and other professionals about the value of play for learning



Conversations and interactions

Outcomes for children improve when professionals:

- listen carefully to children's comments, responses and questions, and respond to them, sometimes described as *serve and return*
- use questions, prompts, reminders, close attention and encouragement in conversations with children
- pay attention to the quality of their interactions, going beyond token comments such as *good boy* or *well done*. For example, *tell me about why you did it that way*, or *what do you like about this?*



Conversations and interactions (cont.)

- Combine words with pictures and actions
- Are consistent in the ways they help children learn to manage their behaviour
- Establish a positive atmosphere where everyone feels supported and valued
- Establish warm relationships with children
- Are sensitive to diversity and difference in their responses and interactions with children and families



Intentional teaching of communication skills

- Model language, such as asking a question with raised intonation
- Show children they understand their communication attempts or cues with words and actions: ‘yes, I’ll get the teddy for you’ in response to a baby pointing to the teddy on a shelf
- Spontaneously use songs and rhymes



Intentional teaching of communication skills (cont.)

- Use key words in children's home language and encourage families to use the home language with their child
- Combine actions or simple signs with words, especially for children who have conditions that affect communication
- Encourage enjoyment of and experimentation with language



Techniques for Shared sustained conversations

- Ask open-ended questions (what/why/how) and giving children time to respond
- Reflect in words to children what they are doing in action
- Use questions and explanations and linking together different events to help children remember what they know and use it to understand new situations
- Ask children to predict, hypothesise, question and problem-solve



Differentiating learning opportunities for individual learners

Differentiating learning opportunities means providing opportunities and environments that respond to each child's unique strengths, abilities, interests, and their cultural, language and family background



VEYLDF

Children learn at different rates, in different ways and at different times. Their development is not always easy or straightforward. For some children and families, learning and development involves considerable struggle and requires much perseverance (VEYLDF, p. 17)



Differentiating learning opportunities

- Some children require more intervention from professionals than others.
- Professionals encourage children's learning by identifying their strengths, learning styles and interests and planning experiences based on them



Planning a balanced curriculum

Effective professionals provide a balanced curriculum - that is, they plan for a wide range of curriculum or content areas including:

- literacy
- numeracy
- expressive arts
- technology
- science
- physical education
- health
- environmental and social studies



Effective Provision of Preschool education study

- A balance across a range of curriculum areas rather than an excessive focus on creative or physical development experiences
- A deliberate effort to plan, scaffold and progress children's learning in mathematics, literacy and science
- Use of small group experiences, games and other play-based approaches to promote children's sustained, active engagement as learners



Effective Provision of Preschool education study (cont.)

- Understanding of the need to plan experiences that build on children's interests
- Use of a range of strategies to sustain children's interest and to promote meaningful learning - strategies such as questions, prompts, reminders, close attention and encouragement
- No evidence of children wandering around aimlessly or flitting from one activity to another



Successful learning environments

- Provide an *enriched curriculum* that both follows and leads children's interests and responds to individual differences
- Pay attention to developing dispositions that support learning, including concentration, confidence, persistence, curiosity, independence and resilience
- Engage in meaningful interactions with children's learning as they participate in diverse experiences including play, projects, practical and written tasks



Creating physical environments that promote learning

- Creating physical learning environments where children feel safe to take risks with learning, cope with challenges and solve problems for themselves or with help from others is an important element of integrated approaches to early childhood education

