Case study
Effective pedagogy and practice from a regional perspective

Why effective pedagogy and practice?

By supporting continuity of learning and transition to school we have the opportunity to positively influence a child’s early learning and development, and the trajectory of their future academic success. Evidence informs us that the foundations for students’ learning capabilities are developed through activities that are engaging and provoke their attention, interest and enjoyment.

Early years teachers scaffold these foundations by adopting pedagogical practices that balance students’ academic, physical, social, cognitive, emotional and creative skills while considering the culture and histories, background, age, abilities, interests and characteristics of individual learners. Hence, the department developed the Supporting successful transitions: School decision-making tool to empower principals to collaborate with key local partners, including Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services, to build continuity of learning and develop locally tailored transition to school strategies.

The decision-making matrix, included in the tool, emphasises that when collaborative decision-making regarding transition strategies is taking place, certain behaviours will be evident. Behaviours relevant to effective pedagogy and practice are structured around two key focus areas, early childhood pedagogy and continuity of learning.

Throughout this case study, three of our Early Childhood Education and Care Regional Directors, whose regions were part of the Age Appropriate Pedagogies Pilot in 2015, reflect on different aspects of effective pedagogy and practice that they have observed across their respective regions.

Decision-making matrix – Effective pedagogy and practice

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<th>Effective pedagogy and practice</th>
<th>Collaborative behaviours</th>
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| Early childhood pedagogy        | • Programs incorporate a range of age-appropriate pedagogies, which include investigations, real-life experiences, focused teaching and learning.  
• Curriculum planning is resourced, delivered and assessed using multiple pedagogies.  
• School recognises how learning is organised in ECEC services and has adopted some similar approaches. |
| Continuity of learning          | • Alignment between learning frameworks and school curriculum inform decisions.  
• Learning is viewed as a continuum for each child.  
• Schools and ECEC services have a shared understanding of curriculum and pedagogy and how it applies across settings. |
Far North Queensland Region

Focus: Implementing age-appropriate pedagogies in a multi-age classroom

Lower Tully State School is located 13 kilometres southeast of Tully and has a current enrolment of 65 students. In 2015, the P – 1 teacher participated in the Age Appropriate Pedagogies Pilot, developing an action research project focused on numeracy in a multi-age classroom of 16 students, including six Prep children.

Actions

The teacher recognised through reflection on current practices, that a high percentage of the classroom practices were teacher-initiated and planned. This reflection also led her to examine how she viewed children in her class; rediscovering that children could be viewed as learners along a continuum rather than individual year levels. Having a strong understanding of the Australian Curriculum, the teacher was able to guide teaching and learning in planned and teacher-initiated learning, as well as those spontaneous teachable child-initiated moments.

A big book character, Addtron, came to life in the classroom acting as a vehicle to engage students from multiple year levels and promote active, learner-focused and creative learning experiences. Addtron (a printer), was central to a mathematics ‘lab’ learning space in the classroom. The ‘lab’ became one of the mathematical rotations for the multi-age class, providing children agency in their learning.

In the small school context, all staff members were interested in the pilot. There were many conversations between staff and families about pedagogy and practice as a result of introducing the mathematics ‘lab’ learning space and a range and balance of age-appropriate pedagogies.

Julie Musumeci, Acting Principal
Lower Tully State School

‘I appreciate the importance of effective pedagogy and practice to the holistic development of the child; there needs to be a range and balance of approaches and characteristics, reflective practice and combination of teacher- and child-initiated learning experiences, while maintaining high expectations for our children.’

Learnings informing next steps

Currently this teacher is sharing her learnings; starting with conversations about the evidence that informed the Age Appropriate Pedagogies Pilot with her colleagues. Additionally, she encourages strong engagement with the Australian Curriculum and shares her experience approaching implementation of the curriculum informed by her learnings from engaging in the Pilot.
Central Queensland Region

Nonna Vella
Acting Early Childhood Education and Care Director
Central Queensland Region.

Actions

The network meeting began with the sharing of the National Quality Framework (NQF) which introduces the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF), and recognises that children learn from birth. The NQF supports Goal 2 of the Melbourne Declaration on Education Goals for Young Australians, that: ‘All young Australians become - Successful learners, Confident and creative individuals, Active and informed citizens’.

The group progressed to explore the Educators’ Guide to the Early Years Learning Framework, Queensland Kindergarten Learning Guideline, Foundations for Success, Educators’ Guide to the Framework for School Age Care and the Foundation Level of the Australian Curriculum. During the course of the meeting it became evident to the group that the Australian Curriculum recognises the EYLF, which establishes the foundations for effective learning in school and throughout life, aiming to build on those foundations as learners move through schooling.

Learnings informing next steps

During the course of the meeting, strong partnerships and relationships were formed and reciprocal visits to Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services and schools were organised. Early years school staff organised visits to the ECEC services on several occasions and at various times of the day. This enabled the staff to build relationships with families as they brought their children into the ECEC setting and also provided an opportunity to engage in high quality conversations with educators and directors about curriculum and pedagogy.

Additionally, early years school staff began discussions at their school setting about how they could further align their pedagogical practices to ensure continuity and successful transitions for the students transitioning into prep from the local ECEC services.

The Fitzgerald Early Years Neighbourhood Network has certainly been a launch pad for deep discussions regarding continuity of pedagogy and curriculum. The school have indicated their interest in being involved in the department’s work around age-appropriate pedagogies in 2016.

Focus: Collaborative review of one school’s pedagogical framework

Fitzgerald State School is located in Mount Pleasant, Mackay and has a current enrolment of 705 students. On 3 September 2015, the Fitzgerald Early Years Neighbourhood Network met at one of the local kindergarten services where the school leadership team, early years school staff, educators and directors shared the curriculum frameworks and pedagogical practices that they plan and implement.

Peter Robinson, Deputy Principal
Fitzgerald State School

‘The network meeting proved to be a valued opportunity to develop a greater understanding of both the curriculum frameworks and the pedagogical practices implemented by the ECEC centres and the school.’
Focus: Children, teachers, curriculum

In my interactions with metropolitan schools involved in the 2015 Age Appropriate Pedagogies Pilot, I have observed three reoccurring themes. I believe it is important to consider these themes as we move forward to embed effective pedagogy and practice:

- Children’s enjoyment: ‘Children were engaged and happy’
- Teacher’s satisfaction: ‘Teachers were animated and enthusiastic’
- The Australian Curriculum: ‘Know thy curriculum - the importance of understanding the curriculum’

Actions

Throughout the Age Appropriate Pedagogies Pilot, children’s engagement in learning was palpable; children were seeing themselves as learners. Although there was no set formula for the application of age-appropriate pedagogies, teachers were guided by the research-based characteristics of age-appropriate pedagogies, in creating learning experiences that responded to the individual child, context and purpose of learning. Through teacher’s exploration of these characteristics, I saw children’s increased motivation, engagement and achievement.

In parallel, I also observed an increase in teacher’s motivation, engagement and agency. The pilot provided teachers with support to engage with age-appropriate pedagogies. Prep teachers who were part of the pilot were also empowered by their school leadership teams; working in a collaborative manner and engaging in professional conversations through a shared language with other school staff.

A deep knowledge of curriculum was also shown to be essential in engaging with age-appropriate pedagogies. The pilot focused on the ‘how’, but familiarity with the foundation level of the Australian Curriculum was essential for teachers and school leaders to ensure consistency and rigour.

Learnings informing next steps

While only a relatively small number of schools in Metropolitan have participated in the pilot, it is important that all schools and teachers know about and can utilise a range and balance of age-appropriate pedagogies within their teaching practice. The Supporting successful transitions: School decision-making tool supports and empowers principals to this end. Effective pedagogy and practice are foundational and applicable long before and well beyond the Prep year.

More information

Data in this case study has been sourced from Regional Operational Plans.