

INTENTIONALITY

moving beyond outcomes

Since the introduction of the EYLF, the term ‘intentional teaching’ has entered the early childhood education and care lexicon. Educator and advocate, **Anthony Semann**, turns a critical lens on the process and explores what it means to be an intentional in our teaching.

The notion of intentional teaching has been in the limelight since its inclusion in the Early Years Learning Framework, with many educators puzzling over the meaning behind intentional teaching and its role in the education of young children. Rightly so, with the introduction of new terminology there should be reflection and consequent amendments as people experiment with such language and its implementation into practice.

More recently, questions in the professional learning programs Semann & Slattery has been delivering on behalf of Children’s Services Central include:

- ❖ What is the relationship between intentional teaching and the range of pedagogical approaches within a program e.g. emergent curriculum?
- ❖ Can intentional teaching operate in a program that has a commitment to play-based curriculum?

- ❖ Does intentional teaching mean being intentional about delivering outcomes as those outlined in the Early Years Learning Framework and the My Time Our Place?

The National Quality Standards specify that the program promote ‘children’s learning across five learning outcomes’ (DEEWR, pg 20). These outcomes in the EYLF are:

1. Children have a strong sense of identity.
2. Children are connected with and contribute to their world.
3. Children have a strong sense of wellbeing.
4. Children are confident and involved learners, and
5. Children are effective communicators.

And while these are interesting outcomes, they really are a set of outcomes that a small group of writers has determined as essential skills. Some would argue that these outcomes are difficult to achieve in adulthood, let alone childhood. A critical reading of these outcomes may raise more questions than answers. Such questions include:

- ❖ How were these outcomes determined for children?
- ❖ What are the challenges associated with identifying pre-determined outcomes?
- ❖ Does identifying outcomes for children in early childhood programs across Australia, regardless of location and human diversity, really honour the diversity of childhood and uphold the ethos of difference which has been the centre of early childhood practice?
- ❖ If outcomes for children are the focus of teaching and learning endeavours, where does the notion of being

WHAT IS INTENTIONAL TEACHING?

The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) defines intentional teaching as ‘educators being deliberate, purposeful and thoughtful in their decisions and actions’. It notes that: ‘Intentional teaching is the opposite of teaching by rote, or continuing with traditions simply because things have always been done this way’.

The EYLF says: ‘Educators who engage in intentional teaching recognise that learning occurs in social contexts and that interactions and conversations are vitally important for learning...They use strategies such as modeling and demonstrating, open questioning, speculating, explaining, engaging in shared thinking and problem solving to extend children’s thinking and learning. Educators move flexibly in and out of different roles and draw on different strategies as the context changes. They plan opportunities for intentional teaching and knowledge building. They document and monitor children’s learning.’ (*Being, Belonging and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework*, 2009, p.17)

The other interesting and often overlooked component of intentional teaching is the fact that intentional teaching can never be simply observed. Why? Because one can never observe what another person is thinking.

surprised by children fit into our work?

Such questions intend not to shift a focus away from the outcomes themselves, but rather query and question the focus the outcomes have played in the teaching endeavours within early childhood classrooms. To question brings a critical lens to our work and particularly assists us in unpacking what is meant by intentional teaching. As a number of participants in learning programs have asked, 'Does intentional teaching mean being intentional about delivering learning outcomes as outlined in the learning frameworks?' The short answer to what can be a very long thesis is 'No'. Intentional teaching is not about teaching to outcomes, but rather an assurance, in part, that our teaching is theoretically sound and based on what is in the best interest of children.

Within the EYLF, intentional teaching is used to describe teaching that is

'purposeful, thoughtful and deliberate'. That is, teaching takes place when educators are conscious of the intended purpose of their teaching and are aware of the consequences of such intentions. For example, one might suggest that transitioning 20 children into the bathroom to wash their hands prior to lunch is an intentional activity to maximise the time available at lunch. Undoubtedly, the educator who has implemented such a transition has been 'purposeful, thoughtful and deliberate' in their teaching. However, what is questionable in this example is the consequence of such a transition on children. Herein lies the creative tension between the intention of educators and its impact on children.

The other interesting and often overlooked component of intentional teaching is the fact that intentional teaching can never be simply observed. Why? Because one person can never

observe what another person is thinking. This raises another dilemma regarding intentional teaching and the assessment process. If intentional teaching cannot be observed, including during an assessment visit, then the onus is on the assessor and the educator to create a space to discuss the thinking behind the educator's practice rather than working within a predetermined definition of 'good' or 'bad' practice.

For example, I often hear people critiquing group times as an outdated approach to teaching that has a negative effect on young children. However, this critique fails to examine closely the intention behind the educators' decision to include a structured group time in their curriculum. Surely what is more important is the content and intention of such a group time rather than the mere fact that children are participating in a whole group experience. This is where intentional teaching really takes shape.

The educator has a responsibility to explain the decision behind his/her practices, and, in doing so, might explain the intention of such a group time is to build a sense of community and identity (Learning Outcome 1: Children have a



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strong sense of identity). This is especially important in the age of indoor-outdoor programs, and progressive morning teas and lunches, which has meant children rarely come together in whole groups anymore. This coming together as a group can be argued to contribute to social capital and a sense of togetherness for children and adults alike.

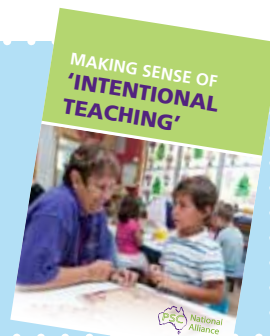
In some programs, children may seem to be achieving better outcomes when compared with children in a different program. However, this may have nothing to do with the capabilities of children, but rather the skills of the educators in teaching effectively.

So what does this mean for educators and their intentionality? Educators should take time to critically reflect on their teaching strategies, the goals they set for young children and the impact their decisions have on the lives and opportunities granted to children in their program. Our responsibilities are therefore two-fold: firstly, responsibility to provide children with the best education possible, and secondly, responsibility to stand by the decisions we make regarding our curriculum and teaching strategies.

FURTHER READING...

So, what does intentional teaching mean exactly?

For more information, download the Children's Services Central *Making Sense of Intentional Teaching* booklet from www.cscentral.org.au/Resources/intentional-teaching-web.pdf



In times of change, many of us revert to what we know and what might seem to be safe. In recent times, this has played out with educators proclaiming their teaching, observations of children and curriculum content being linked to the learning outcomes within the frameworks.

Rather, what is needed during such times of change is to ask some critical and reflective questions that challenge the assumptions we might have about intentional teaching and learning outcomes and our role as educators of young children.

For example, have we achieved the outcomes in the Early Years Learning Framework and the My Time our Place and, if not, should the effectiveness

of our educational endeavours be mapped out against these outcomes? As with intentional teaching, we must continually ask questions relating to the intentions of our practice and embrace a pedagogy of change in order to engage in ongoing improvement. ★

Anthony Semann is Director Semann & Slattery. He has worked as an educator, innovator and advocate with a broad range of government and private organisations. Anthony has a degree in education, a Masters qualification in sociology and is currently completing a PhD investigating the relationship between courage and leadership.

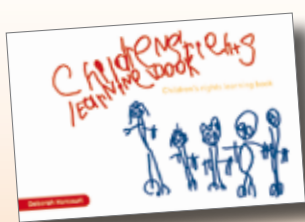


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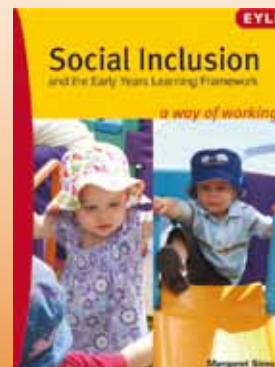
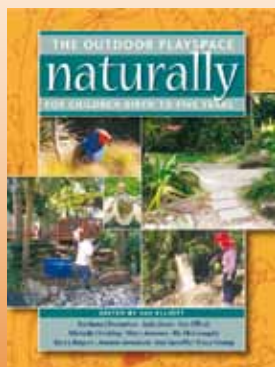
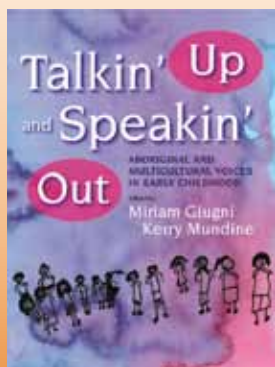
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