Early childhood learning trajectories user guide

For educators, teachers and service leaders

This guide will help you use the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO)'s Early Childhood Learning Trajectories in your practice. The learning trajectories are designed for teachers and educators working in early childhood education and care (ECEC) services for children in the years before school. They can support ongoing professional learning for individuals and entire ECEC services and teams.

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The Early Childhood Learning Trajectories describe how children learn and develop in these key domains: Executive functions, Social and emotional learning, Mathematical thinking, Language and communication and Physical development.

While each learning trajectory describes children's progress in a single domain, they are designed to be used in interconnected ways. A single experience within an early childhood program may support progress in multiple domains at the same time. Progress in one domain may depend on progress in another.

You can use the learning trajectories in a variety of ways to strengthen your curriculum and inform your pedagogical decision-making, in line with the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF, V2.0) or other approved learning frameworks used in your service. The learning trajectories also support the National Quality Standard (NQS), especially Standard 1.3: Assessment and planning. They can help your service lift quality and implement your Quality Improvement Plan.

This user guide will go through: EYLF Principles, EYLF Practices, EYLF Planning Cycle and EYLF Learning Outcomes.

EYLF Principles

The EYLF V2.0 sets out 8 Principles to guide ECEC practice, based on contemporary theories, perspectives and research evidence. The learning trajectories are designed to support these Principles, especially those listed in this section.

Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships

The learning trajectories are designed to be used flexibly, and seamlessly integrated into existing practice. They are a resource for building your professional knowledge – not a test or a form – and do not involve extra documentation. This means you can spend more time on what matters most: nurturing responsive relationships with children and families.

Partnerships

The learning trajectories can support you to discuss children's learning, development and wellbeing with families, colleagues and educators and teachers. They are useful for facilitating partnerships between educators and teachers working with different age groups, as they show the continuity of learning, development and wellbeing throughout the years before school. They also provide useful language and ideas for describing each child's strengths at the transition to school, and enriching narratives about children's progress.

Respect for diversity

The learning trajectories recognise that children learn and develop in unique ways. They encourage you to see each individual child's strengths and opportunities, recognising that children may be at different stages across domains. Children's progress may accelerate, slow down or even reverse at different times or in different contexts. The learning trajectories are open-ended, encouraging you to consider how children may demonstrate progress in each domain in ways that reflect their community, identity and culture.

Critical reflection and ongoing professional learning

The learning trajectories can help you gradually build your understanding of how children learn and develop. They are designed to be explored, used, reflected upon and revisited over time. This includes supporting educational leaders to facilitate critical reflection with their teams.

Collaborative leadership and teamwork

The learning trajectories provide you with the language to support professional conversations with your team about children's learning, development and wellbeing.

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What you can do next

The following are tips for using the learning trajectories to embed these Principles in your practice:

- Think about how you can use the learning trajectories in positive ways that enhance relationships with children and families. This includes recognising that children's progress is not always linear and avoiding misusing the learning trajectories as 'checklists' or milestones that need to be met.

- Use words and ideas from the learning trajectories in your interactions with families, colleagues and other professionals, to strengthen partnerships and build shared understandings of children's progress in each domain.

- As you explore the learning trajectories, reflect on what progress in each domain might look like for each child. Consider how you can use the learning trajectories to recognise and celebrate each child's strengths and progress in ways that are culturally safe and responsive.

- If you are an educational leader, consider how you can use the learning trajectories in individual and group professional learning. The ideas in this guide may help you design collaborative learning experiences for your team.

- Motivate each other to use the learning trajectories effectively in everyday practice. Draw on the learning trajectories to assist in sharing your insights about children's learning, development and wellbeing, and encourage others to talk about and share their perspectives.

Reflection activity 1

Explore how your service's statement of philosophy and policies talk about learning, development and wellbeing, and how they are assessed, evaluated and supported.

How do the learning trajectories align with your service's statement of philosophy and service policies?

EYLF Practices

The EYLF V2.0 sets out 7 Practices that teachers and educators draw on, to inform all aspects of their curriculum decision-making. The learning trajectories connect to all EYLF V2.0 Practices and specifically those listed in this section.

Play-based learning and intentionality

The learning trajectories enable you to identify where the child's learning and development might be. This provides you with information to support the intentionality of planning and responsive interactions with children throughout the day.

Assessment and evaluation for learning, development and wellbeing

The learning trajectories assist with assessment *of, for* and *as* learning, prompting you to describe and interpret children's learning development and wellbeing. They support your discussions with colleagues, families and other professionals, to deepen shared understandings about each child.

What you can do next

The following are tips to use the learning trajectories to improve your curriculum and practice:

- Choose one learning trajectory and one EYLF V2.0 Practice that resonates with you the most.

- Notice the connections across the learning trajectory and the EYLF V2.0 Practice. Here are some ideas to prompt your thinking:

  – Take 'Holistic, integrated and interconnected approaches' as an example. Notice the components of children's learning, development and wellbeing that connect across all the learning trajectories, showing that all domains of learning are interconnected, are equally important and need your attention.

  – Consider the implications for 'Responsiveness to children' and how the learning trajectories can help you challenge each child's thinking, respond to their ideas, and engage in their learning.

  – Think about the 'Learning environments' in your service and how the learning trajectory you chose can guide you in the selection and provision of materials, and can inform the way environments are organised and used.

  – Look for 'Cultural responsiveness' and how it is embedded in the learning trajectory, inviting you to honour differences, respond to children's individual needs, and challenge your own assumptions and those of others.

  – Read through 'Continuity of learning and transitions'. Think about the way the learning trajectory can help you provide continuity for each child during the transitions they encounter between home, the ECEC service and other settings.

Reflection activity 2

What are the 3 key ideas that you are going to unpack further and why? How are these key ideas going to be beneficial in your everyday practice, and in supporting children's learning, development and wellbeing?

EYLF Planning Cycle

The learning trajectories support all stages of the planning cycle, in the EYLF V2.0 as outlined in this section.

'The EYLF planning cycle' by the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, used used under a CC BY 4.0 licence.

Observe listen/collect information	The learning trajectories provide an opportunity for you to know what to look for in relation to different aspects of children's learning, development and wellbeing.
Assess analyse/interpret	The learning trajectories help you to understand children's individual strengths and capabilities, and to understand what happens next along the continuum.
Plan design	The learning trajectories assist you to thoughtfully analyse the information you have gathered. They help you plan for, and extend, children's learning, development and wellbeing.
Implement enact	The learning trajectories offer suggestions for intentional teaching strategies in each domain.
Evaluate critically reflect	The learning trajectories assist you in identifying unanticipated outcomes, and whether the implementation supported or extended children's learning, development and wellbeing.

What you can do next

The following are tips to use the learning trajectories to improve your curriculum and practice:

- Choose one learning trajectory to begin using in your everyday practice. Once you feel confident, choose another one, and gradually build towards using the whole set.

- Keep in mind words and ideas from the learning trajectories while you observe and collect information about children's learning, development and wellbeing. Remember that individual children have different ways to demonstrate their progress in each domain.

- Use the learning trajectories to interpret the observations and information you collect across the curriculum. Notice domains where you have the strongest evidence of children's progress, and any gaps you could explore.

- Once you are confident using multiple learning trajectories, try using several of them to analyse a single observation. If you have a video of children's play, watch it a few times, looking for different domains each time. This will help you understand how the domains are interconnected.

- Use the learning trajectories to identify opportunities to enhance your curriculum. This might include planning experiences that focus on specific aspects of learning, or staying alert for opportunities to extend learning during your spontaneous interactions with children.

- Use the learning trajectories to reflect on how well the curriculum is working for each child, taking into account each child's unique strengths and progress.

Reflection activity 3

The diagram on page 5 shows how the learning trajectories can help with the decisions you make, at each stage of the planning cycle. How can you use the learning trajectories in each stage of planning? What might this look like in your context?

Image credit: iStock.com/Alina Demidenko

EYLF Learning Outcomes

The EYLF V2.0 sets out 5 integrated Learning Outcomes for children. The learning trajectories describe specific 'building blocks' of learning, development and wellbeing that contribute to achieving these outcomes.

You can use the learning trajectories to deepen your understanding of how children learn and develop, by following these steps:

Understanding specific domains of learning

The learning trajectories break each domain into parts (called 'subdomains', 'strands' and 'indicators') to show the many 'building blocks' that make up children's learning.

Knowing how children learn and develop over time

The learning trajectories show how each stage of learning builds on what has gone before, and also provides the foundation for later stages of learning.

Unpacking the EYLF V2.0 Learning Outcomes

The 'building blocks' described in the learning trajectories can contribute to the EYLF V2.0 Learning Outcomes in many ways. Reflecting on connections between the domains and Learning Outcomes can deepen your understanding of the EYLF V2.0.

What you can do next

The following are tips to use the learning trajectories to understand how children learn and develop:

- Choose one learning trajectory to start with. This could be a domain you already know well or perhaps one that is less familiar to you.

- Read through the learning trajectory, noticing the different subdomains and strands, and the differences between the indicators within each strand.

- Notice the specific vocabulary used for this domain, including words you already use, and any words or ideas that might be new to you.

- Reflect on how children's progress in this domain contributes to the EYLF V2.0 Learning Outcomes, using the reflection activities on page 8 as a prompt for your own ideas.

- Where possible, discuss what you have learned about this domain with your colleagues, to exchange knowledge and build shared understanding.

- If you want to know more, read the Early Childhood Learning Trajectories: The Evidence Base, which includes references for further reading.

Reflection activity 4

The table on the page 9 shows examples of how each domain in the learning trajectories contributes to the holistic outcomes of the EYLF V2.0. The phrases in quotation marks come from the relevant learning trajectory. Can you think of other examples?

Try these tips:

- **Choose a phrase** from one of the indicators (boxes) that describes what you might see children doing.

- **Reflect** on how this phrase relates to the EYLF V2.0 Learning Outcomes. Many phrases may relate to more than one outcome.

- **Repeat** this for a whole row (learning trajectory domain) or column (EYLF V2.0 Learning Outcomes). Try to find an example for each box.

- **Share** your ideas with a colleague and discuss whether they see the connections in the same way. They may have new ideas too.

Remember that reflection is about stretching your thinking, not finding the 'right' answer. It is a process of ongoing learning.

Reflection activity 5

Use the reflection table to collect examples within the context of your setting:

- Revisit and reflect on this individually and with colleagues, to deepen your knowledge and understanding of the learning trajectories and EYLF V2.0 Learning Outcomes.

- Use it with new team members to support them in making the link between learning trajectories and the EYLF V2.0 Learning Outcomes.

Image credit: iStock.com/FatCamera

Learning trajectory domains	EYLF V2.0 Learning Outcomes				
	Children have a strong sense of identity	Children are connected to and contribute to their world	Children have a strong sense of wellbeing	Children are confident and involved learners	Children are effective communicators
Executive functions	When children 'resist distractions more easily', they can focus on doing what matters to them.	When children 'stop or pause some behaviours', it contributes to a calm environment in the room.	When children 'recall and follow simple instructions', they can manage wellbeing tasks.	When children 'enjoy exploring new information and ideas', their appetite for learning increases.	When children 'show interest in alternative perspectives', they engage in richer conversations.
Social and emotional learning	When children can 'describe their own strengths', it contributes to a strong sense of self.	When children 'recognise that others have different needs', they can notice ways to help others.	When children 'anticipate and plan ahead for difficult situations', they can respond with confidence.	When children 'use more complex social strategies', they can participate more in collaborative learning.	When children 'deliberately choose ways to express themselves', they develop their own communication style.
Mathematical thinking	When children 'frame and investigate questions and wonderings using mathematical ideas', they deepen their own understanding.	When children 'participate in regular routines', they can predict what they need to do to contribute to them.	When children 'use their bodies to explore', they can orient themselves with confidence and seek spaces they like.	When children 'investigate the world more purposefully, collecting information about topics of interest', they become self-directed learners.	When children 'use drawings to represent quantity', they can better communicate their mathematical thinking.
Language and communication	When children 'use single words with increasing clarity' in their home language, they build their own unique vocabulary.	When children 'show awareness of the purpose of writing', they can learn how writing makes a difference in the world.	When children 'engage with others to create meaning', they build a sense of belonging.	When children 'pretend to read, retelling familiar stories,' they share their understandings of the process of storytelling.	When children 'babble, vocalise and make first approximations of words', they may be using this as their means of verbalising their thoughts.
Physical development	When children 'communicate needs for movement or rest', they are recognising their own preferences or desires.	When children 'use their senses to understand the world', they can explore, investigate and participate in play.	When children 'begin to coordinate movement in their arms, legs and body', they can move around confidently and safely.	When children 'use more complex small objects', they can learn about the purpose and function of those objects.	When children 'respond to sights, sounds, smells, textures and tastes', they can describe or show how that makes them feel.

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Social and emotional learning					
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Physical development					

About this resource

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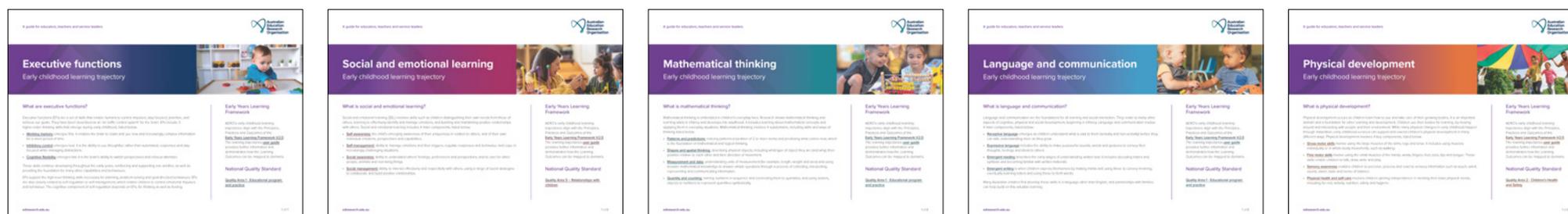
Further reading

For more information on our learning trajectories research

- Early Childhood Learning Trajectories: The Evidence Base

More information

The AERO website features further guidance, including practice guides, case studies for early childhood practice. Visit edresearch.edu.au for more information.

For more information visit **edresearch.edu.au**