

Early Years Exchange

Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework

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This edition of the Early Years Exchange focuses on children in the birth-to-three-years period, and includes:

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Subscribe to the [Early Years Alert](#) for updates on VEYLDF resources.

Focusing on children in the birth-to-three-years period

From 2014 to 2016 the VCAA has collaborated with Anne Stonehouse AM to develop resources that focus on the birth-to-three years period. Anne has made a lasting and significant contribution to supporting the implementation of the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF) through developing pedagogical approaches that early childhood educators can use to enhance their practice with very young children. This aligns with the VEYLDF's focus on the impact of learning and development for very young children on subsequent educational achievement.

This is important foundational knowledge for all early childhood professionals to understand and apply in their work with families and children from birth to eight years.

In late 2016 and early 2017, the VCAA published the video resource developed with Anne: *What, why and how? Pedagogy with very young children*. The resources include:

- *There's a lot going on! Pedagogy with very young children* consists of videos and a collection of notes that can be used by leaders to support their use. It provides an overview of elements of good quality practice in an education and care service with children aged from around 14 months to almost three years.
- *Prompts for reflection* is a collection of eight vignettes that focus on various aspects of an educator's pedagogy.

The national Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF; 2009, p. 46) and the VEYLDF (2016, p. 36) define pedagogy as:

... early childhood educators' professional practice, especially those aspects that involve building and nurturing relationships, curriculum decision making, teaching and learning.

This video shows a number of episodes where an educator and children are teaching and learning together. It also includes the ideas of the educator, Melanie Turkopp (Mel). The overall aim is to provide an overview of some of the important elements of pedagogy or practice that is high quality.

The intent is not to prescribe specific practices, but rather to show examples of practice as prompts for critical reflection and discussion.

Rationale for video

The overarching theme of the video is that pedagogy with very young children is complex and requires deep thinking. Pedagogy with children under three years old is less understood and practised than that with children over three years old and there are many challenges. One of the main challenges is figuring out what very young children are trying to do and communicate, and finding out what their intentions are can be like solving a mystery. Evidence of very young

children's learning is less obvious than that of older children, in part because the younger the child, the less adept they are at communicating with language. Educators and other professionals who work with this age group need to have consistent determination to try to understand children's intentions. Adults need to figure out what children are communicating, both verbally and in their behaviour. What are they telling us about what they have learned or are learning, their personal way or style of being and what they are interested in?

Traditional stereotypes of very young children can also lead to underestimating their learning because we either don't notice it or we misinterpret it.

A further challenge to offering a curriculum that is high quality is that the difference between very good and mediocre pedagogy is often subtle. Pedagogy has as much to do with educators' rationales – that is, what and how they do it – as it does with what they do.



Purpose

The main purposes of the video are to:

- clarify what good quality pedagogy or practice with very young children means and what it involves
- highlight the various important roles educators play in promoting and extending very young children's learning and development
- increase awareness of the complexity, variety and significance of the many roles educators play
- demonstrate that effective pedagogy with very young children is based on profound respect, deep and broad knowledge and thoughtful willingness to critique and innovate.

Themes

The main theme of the video is that quality pedagogy:

- demonstrates profound respect for each child as capable, with the right to contribute to their daily life
- emerges from deep and thorough knowledge of each child
- has clear purposes.



Pedagogy that enacts respect, knowledge and clarity of purpose arises from critical reflection, being creative, experimenting, taking reasonable risks and learning along with children.

Background information

Filming took place over two days, three months apart. On the first day of filming Mel worked in a group with other educators. On the second day, she changed rooms and worked with a small group of children on her own,

with another educator available for when she had to leave the room. The terms pedagogy, teaching and practice are used in the video, and in the notes that follow, to describe educators' work. The principles also apply to children younger and older than the children appearing in the video, who are aged from 1½ to three years. The messages in the video are also relevant to professionals other than educators who work with children in this age group.

This [video resource](#) is available on the VCAA website.

Critical reflection

In this critical reflection, Anne Stonehouse AM reflects on why it's important for early childhood professionals to focus on children during the birth-to-three-years period and challenges us to reconsider some of the language we use in relation to their development.

Children from birth to three years delight, amaze, confuse, frustrate, puzzle and impress people who live and work with them. They are in some ways like children older than three years and in many ways unlike them. Using children older than three years as the standard or default position almost always leads to images of very young children that highlight what they can't yet do, what they lack, what they need to learn – in other words, a deficit image.

Images and labels matter. The term 'infant', which derives from a Latin word meaning 'unable to speak', illustrates this deficit approach. In addition, depending on how you define speaking, that label is incorrect. From birth children communicate powerfully and participate in conversations. The problem is that we don't always acknowledge what they are communicating, and we sometimes misinterpret it. The term 'toddler' both demeans and misrepresents people who are lumbered with the label. New walkers don't 'toddle' for very long! Furthermore, how ridiculous is it to label a group of people by their ambulatory status!

Many people in the broader community and in our profession assert the importance of the first three years in laying the foundation for life. However, practice, policy and pedagogy don't always enact that assertion.

Momentum is building in the early childhood education and care profession to pay more attention to children from birth to three years, their characteristics and strengths and the challenges they face – in other words, embracing an image that isn't derived from comparisons with older children. Increasingly educators and other early childhood professionals realise that excellent pedagogy, curriculum, and, more generally, desirable experiences and learning opportunities, begin with knowing children aged from birth to three years deeply as they are now, and knowing each child well in the context of family and community.

It's about time!



Spotlight: Maternal and child health

Maternal and child health (MCH) practitioners talk about their work in this year of celebrating 100 years of MCH services across Victoria. Both **Ann McNair** and **Karen Freeman** shared their experiences at the State-wide Maternal and Child Health Conference in April. The prime focus of their work is the wellbeing of mothers and children, but as part of that they play a crucial role in supporting families to establish connections with networks that will support them from when their child is born until they start school.

Ann McNair: Establishing networks through local communities

Wellbeing from birth

Along with many MCH professionals we are using the *Play, Learn and Grow* resources in our work with families. Many of our Hume City families are included in the photographs in the document so we are very proud of it.

Using the Ecological Model, with the child at the centre of their world, we adopted a focus on the wellbeing of the most vulnerable families, using a strengths-based approach and respecting the role of parents as their child's first and most important teacher. Our Family Early Learning Program used learning as a way of engaging families and this work has been continued by our Enhanced MCH practitioners and Parent Support Workers.

By supporting parents to increase secure attachment with their child through teaching and being responsive to their child, our program focuses on building the protective factors that each parent brings to their child's life.

Parents are encouraged to use the *Play, Learn, Grow* resources for ideas about how they can help their child learn. Health is a critical enabler of children's wellbeing and MCH professionals work to build a collaborative framework with families and other professionals around the child, to support the child's wellbeing and development.

The Victorian Early Years Learning Development Framework (VEYLDF) is a foundation document for MCH and helps us understand the best ways to assist parents and families to ensure their child's wellbeing by setting their child on a positive life-long learning journey.

Local community networks

Hume City, along with a number of other councils, has significant numbers of Syrian humanitarian refugees who are settling in our community. The wellbeing of these families has been significantly impacted by their experiences.

Through our collaborative relationships with the Adult Migrant English Service (AMES) and Spectrum, appointments were made for families to attend our MCH centres. Even though AMES and Spectrum would have arranged accommodation, financial supports and English language classes, the overwhelming competing factors in the lives of these families meant that most were not arriving for their appointments. Through a suggestion by a very talented staff member, Sharyn Jones, our Administration Team Leader, we decided to take our service to the family.

The new arrangement is to provide a home visit to the family with an interpreter. We take along information about registering children in kindergarten, primary school, immunisations, playgroups, local school hubs that have bicultural workers, Arabic and Assyrian Storytime at the local library, Youth Services and even Home and

Community Care (HACC) services. We give each of the younger children a book written in their home language. Using the interpreter, we ascertain the services that each family wants and after obtaining the family's permission we act as the pivotal point of collaboration for the family and services to ensure the overall wellbeing of the family.

Forms such as the immunisation registration and/or kindergarten enrolment are completed with the assistance of the interpreter at this home visit. We contact our MCH Central Booking Service and make a follow-up appointment for any children requiring a Key Ages and Stages (KAS) visit, explaining where the Centre is and the role of MCH.

We have recognised that by helping and facilitating the family to connect with the local community we are supporting them to have a focus on their child and building their family's wellbeing.

By building a sense of belonging and engagement with community we are using many of the principles of the VEYLDF with a focus on the child and family's wellbeing.

Resources for MCH practitioners: Working in Partnerships with Families

This [CCCH Community Paediatric Review](#) (Vol. 23, No. 1, February 2015) has useful information about the benefits of partnerships with families. It also focuses on the opportunity for families to support their child's emergent literacy.

Karen Freeman: Working in networks to support transition and wellbeing

Through my work in kindergartens within several municipalities, I became aware of the challenges for children commencing four-year-old kindergarten, particularly for those children who may have developmental delays and additional needs.

Educators within early years services also identified challenges, often having minimal information about individual children's development and little understanding of their differing needs when commencing the kindergarten year.

My participation in the VCAA's Assessment for Learning program last year provided me with an opportunity to look at how MCH practitioners could work more collaboratively with early years educators to better support children with this transition.

Two kindergartens within more vulnerable and socially disadvantaged areas were offered an MCH practitioner presence at their four-year-old kindergarten program's orientation or interview days.

This provided an opportunity for MCH practitioners to identify children with possible developmental delays who may require additional supports and further evaluation. It also promoted the MCH service to families who had either not engaged with it or not attended with their child for the 3½-year-old KAS Assessment.

During these days, if parents and educators had no concerns about a child, a 3½-year-old KAS assessment within the kindergarten environment was arranged for a later date. Consent forms were signed by parents to enable this.

Families who were already engaged with an MCH practitioner were supported, and encouraged to attend the 3½-year-old KAS visit if they had not already attended.

Where concerns regarding a child's health or development were identified by parents or educators, a spontaneous assessment inclusive of a Brigance Developmental Screen was attended with parental consent. This provided more information about the child's needs and strengths for both parents and educators. Appropriate referrals for further assessment and support were attended after discussion with parents.

Support for families was also provided in other ways as required.

This included assessing younger siblings, supporting with documentation for carers allowance, referral to housing services, social supports, and providing priority letters where appropriate, when kindergarten places were still not confirmed.

An MCH presence on these days provided both an opportunity for earlier identification of children with developmental delays, and to work with educators and families to ensure available supports were in place to contribute to a more successful transition to kindergarten.

Educators were also provided with information to enable them to more effectively prepare and plan for additional learning resources and funding required for these children prior to their commencement to kindergarten.

Watch the video [Delivering a century of expert advice: 100 years of MCH](#) for more about this year's celebrations.

Celebrating a pioneer of maternal and child health

The Royal Australasian College of Surgeons has published two ebooks about Australian women surgeons who served in World War I. Vera Scantlebury, a Melbourne surgeon, travelled to London at the age of 28 to work in challenging circumstances for the British War Office. On her return to Australia, she was a central part of the government focus on infant welfare in the 1920s.

Read about Vera's experiences and life in *Women Surgeons of World War I* on the [RACS website](#). ABC Radio National also features [Vera's story](#) as part of the centenary of WWI since 2014.

*Dr Vera Scantlebury and her brother
Dr George Clifford Scantlebury, c.1918.*

*Papers and Memorabilia of Vera Scantlebury Brown,
University of Melbourne Archives, 2013.0058.00001*



Spotlight: Organisational and practice change at Kensington Community Children's Co-operative

Kensington Community Children's Co-operative (KCCC) celebrated the launch of its new playground in July 2017 after a three-year enhancement. This revitalised space is only one aspect of the changes this service has embarked upon to strengthen learning relationships with children.

This article was written in collaboration with staff at KCCC



Sigi Hyett, General Manager



Melissa Bell, Pedagogical Leader



Mai Vo, Room Leader



Shazia Rizwan, Room Leader



Eldre Cashman, Room Leader

From 2014 to 2017, KCCC conducted a service review on three levels:

- Organisational review: looking at structures, processes, rosters, staffing, budgets
- Practitioner review: examining values and beliefs about children of different ages and their capabilities
- Practice review: considering how values and beliefs affect practice (impact of pedagogy).

The KCCC leadership team conducted a critical review of rosters, staffing, conditions, and responsibilities of all educators and support staff working in the service. Enrolment processes and the local demand for services were part of the organisational review. The organisational review then became the foundation for initiating practice review across the service. For KCCC this involved a long-term commitment to a period of critical reflection, in partnership with families and with the support and leadership of researchers and a consultant.

A key focus of this review was the National Quality Standards, Quality Area 5: Relationships with children – with a particular emphasis and regard for the learning of children under three years.

Very young children's learning is subtle. This means that supporting and extending their learning requires adults to pay close attention in order to figure out what children are trying to do and communicate and what they're demonstrating they've learned or are interested in learning.

(Anne Stonehouse, 2017 What, why and how? Pedagogy with very young children p. 5)



The key review changes developed from the whole-service commitment to continuous action research. This model of continuous improvement was designed for an integrated service working within a community, and led to the following outcomes:

- multi-age rooms
- a refurbished playground area, accessible by all rooms, and integral to the program.
- a renewed practice focus that keeps the child central to all decisions.

Multi-age rooms

Multi-age rooms allow for more equitable systems for families enrolling children under three years. Room groupings are available for children from 12 months to three years, which means there is reduced waiting time based on children under three, for example, those who are 18-months-old or two years, reaching a specific age within this period. This approach also broadened educator knowledge about the capabilities and interests of young children under three years.

There is now a specific emphasis on identifying the key educator for each child – who they settle with and prefer, or have formed a relationship with. These relationships are supported through the staff rostering system. KCCC also maintains the whole-service lunch time, which is as important for relationships between children and all the teams – reflecting KCCC's prioritising of relationships.

A staged approach to this organisational review enabled time for staff to adjust to the proposed changes, and engage in professional development, which provided opportunity to discuss both the educational changes and organisational changes in regular meetings. Critical thinking about values and assumptions underlying pedagogy, and different perspectives and possibilities, was encouraged.

Time was set aside for all educators to have opportunities to visit other services that were already successfully delivering multi-age groupings. This provided educators with the opportunities to see and talk about evidence-based programs in action outside their own service.

Refurbished playground area

Moving to a multi-age approach included opening up the outdoor space to all children, removing barriers between rooms. The sections of fences dividing rooms came down in stages to support a planned approach to move from the traditional age groupings to the multi-age grouping.

A refurbished playground area was created, accessible by all rooms, and integral to the learning program. The refurbished outdoor area was a central feature of the integrated model to improve everyday learning.



The children are able to move freely between indoor and outdoor spaces throughout the service. The outdoor space has been designed for children of all ages to explore and investigate. For example, in a favourite area, risk-benefit assessment ensures that the climbing tree has an adequate safe fall zone, free of hazards and sufficient tan bark. Children are supported to explore and make judgments on how high they can climb. Educators across the service are confident in actively promoting independence and exploration.

The new playground is a central feature of the integrated model to improve everyday learning and to:

- strengthen responsive relationships between adults and children
- identify opportunities for small group collaborative learning
- provide greater support for building friendships between children.

This required a sustained focus in whole service planning with a researcher, to review partnerships with children, families, kinship members and other professionals. Taking this approach supported the staff to focus on the learning with very young children under three years and broaden their awareness of children's capabilities. It avoids expectations about capabilities according to age and takes into account individual children.

The leadership team reported that the indoor-outdoor approach across the program strengthened responsive relationships between educators and children. Opportunities were identified for small-group multi-age collaborative learning. This extended to small group excursions in the community that are a regular feature of the weekly program. These initiatives provided greater opportunities for building friendships between children.



Extended time for uninterrupted learning

In discussion with an early childhood consultant, all staff were encouraged to see and understand the capacity of individual children and to consider the Practice Principles. Ideas about specific practices and learning opportunities were discussed.

The staff as a whole worked towards slowing down the pace within the service, by reviewing how many interruptions occur to children's learning throughout the morning, day and week. This meant they were able to think more about observations, listen more carefully to the children, and tune into their signals and cues, pausing to reflect on children's temperaments, learning styles, and preferences. This is particularly important for children and families at orientation and when settling into the service. It also meant there were more opportunities to discuss and learn with families, exchanging information about children's learning, and listening carefully.

Educators across the program reported that they felt less stressed in getting things done and more able to engage in conversations with children, which connected to their professional learning.

Linking STEM learning

The educators are working with a consultant to engage in learning about STEM concepts and practices – reducing the missed opportunities for early learning. This is an ongoing professional learning commitment so that educators learn together and transform their pedagogy.

This includes understanding and practising conversations with children that are based on reasoning and discovery. For example, in the sandpit, using the experience of baking 'cakes' to talk about mathematical language, volume and weight, and scientific concepts – how matter changes from solid to liquid (melting) and liquid to solid (baking process).

Educators purposeful conversations scaffold children's learning of mathematical and scientific concepts.

From birth, early experiences and relationships influence children's long-term outcomes and life chances. This includes the development of executive functioning and the capacity to experience, regulate and express emotion, to form close, secure and satisfying relationships and to explore, discover and learn about themselves and the world around them

(Institute of Medicine, 2015; AIHW, 2015 as published in the VEYLDF, p. 2)

Interview: Cultural organisations in partnership with families

The VEYLDF has a strong focus on learning and development in the birth-to-three-years period because of their importance in shaping children's outcomes. From birth, early experiences and relationships influence children's long-term outcomes and life chances.

The redevelopment of the Pauline Gandel Children's Gallery, launched in December 2016, focused on creating a space where children, from babies to five-year-olds, can play, explore and learn. The Children's Gallery is an outstanding example of how cultural institutions can provide rich experiences to children and families. Museums Victoria's Scienceworks is also undergoing a redevelopment to focus on this age group.

Pauline Gandel Children's Gallery at Melbourne Museum

Alex Price, Outreach Programs Manager, Museums Victoria, explains how the new gallery was developed.

What research has informed this focus on very young children? At the beginning of the Pauline Gandel Children's Gallery project, the two Education and Community Programs staff on the project team conducted research into child development and children's museum experiences throughout the world. Sources of information were broad, and included the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework, Early Years Learning Framework, UNICEF Facts for Life (4th Edition), Maternal and Child Health Nurses Ages and Stages, Raising Children Website, Centre for Community Child Health; Royal Children's Hospital resources, Developing Child resources from Harvard University, and publications by and about theorists and educational approaches including Piaget, Vygotsky, Bruner, Erikson, Montessori, Steiner and Reggio Emilia. A large spreadsheet was created in which data from the various sources was represented according to the ages of the children, and allow particular gallery experiences to be charted against the developmental ages and stages and needs. A comprehensive literature review was also written summarising research findings.

Key messages from the research were that the first three years of life are significant because of the immense neurological growth in babies' brains. This growth happens when a baby explores the world around them with their senses. And babies and children learn best when they have responsive and caring parents and caregivers and are in stimulating environments where they can learn through play.



Photo: Joel Checkley/Museums Victoria

Community consultation in the project was crucial; it is estimated that over 100 adults and 500 children were involved throughout the timeframe. These people shared perspectives on their vision for the redeveloped gallery, as well as detailing how they used the museum and other cultural institutions with their families. Visitor data was also useful in the early planning of the redeveloped gallery. We identified that the age group that visits Melbourne Museum the most is three-year-olds. We also found that a significant number of five-to-eight-year-olds were not using the previous Children's Gallery – they were visiting other parts of the museum. Therefore, the decision was made to change the target audience of the Children's Gallery from three-to-eight-year-olds to babies-to-5-year-olds.

Who was involved in the redevelopment? There was a core project team led by Kathy Fox, Exhibition Producer, and Georgie Meyer, then

Manager Education and Community Programs at Melbourne Museum. There were three in-house designers, a science communication curator, education and community programs officer and, as the project progressed, project assistants, multimedia specialists, conservators, collection managers, fabricators and carpenters. A number of exhibition elements were also outsourced to external artists, animators, a landscape architect and builders, and sound and lighting designers.

As mentioned previously, there was an extensive consultation process, which began early in the project. Initially, Museum Members, early childhood educators, health and additional needs professionals, design students and professionals, and museum staff were invited to attend brainstorming sessions. The Gowrie Victoria Docklands children and staff were involved in workshops where children were asked to design their dream museum. They also participated in



Photo: Joel Checkley/Museums Victoria

two whole-day workshops in their centre, which were facilitated by Polyglot Theatre Company and provided the project team with an opportunity to observe each age responding intuitively to open-ended experiences. Later on in the project, specific exhibition elements were created and tested with children, then refined. For example, a strong desire for nature came out in the 'dream museum' workshop. This was tested through light and sound experiences during the Polyglot sessions, and then late in a temporary testing space at Melbourne Museum, and eventually became 'Camouflage Disco' in the gallery. The Gowrie children visited and played in the space, as well as diverse groups from the CBD, inner and outer metropolitan and rural educational services, Museum Member and staff families.

A Health and Additional Needs working group was also established, and met several times throughout the project, reviewing designs and advising on modifications based on their client's needs. This was made up of representatives from Amaze, Vision Australia, Department of Education, Taralye, Early Education for Hearing Impaired Children, Noah's Ark, Yarra Preschool Field Officer, Brotherhood of St Lawrence, and Melbourne City Mission.

All children, families and adults involved in the consultation process were invited to the launch of the gallery.

How have you engaged parents in the possibilities for learning with very young children? Throughout the consultation process parents were interviewed and surveyed about various aspects of the gallery's design and operation. An information session was held with the Gowrie Victoria Docklands parents, some of whom hadn't visited the museum before. They were given the opportunity to let the project team know what they would like to be included in the designs for the redeveloped gallery and offered diverse perspectives.

In early stage consultation sessions, Museum Members were particularly passionate and insightful when sharing their experiences of visiting museums with their children and desires for the new gallery. Some members visit the gallery every week so were enthusiastic about being included in planning for the redeveloped gallery.

When we invited children to come into the testing sessions, we had formal and informal conversations with parents about elements such as the prevalence and length of text panels. We also observed how parents scaffolded their children's learning through play.

The project team worked together to consider how exhibits could encourage adult-child interaction, supporting the notion that parents and caregivers are children's first teachers. An example of this is the peek-a-boo windows at a child's height. There was great consideration throughout the gallery

design to ensure the needs of parents and grandparents were accommodated. There is ample seating, and the floor has a significant thickness of underlay, which makes it comfortable for everybody to sit on.

Following up from initial feedback about parents' favourite things to do in the previous Children's Gallery, we constructed a cafe near the entrance – coffee and snacks are important to parents! We also included some familiar experiences such as a book shelf and puppets. These inclusions support the notion that everyone will feel comfortable with finding something 'to do' in the gallery and promotes easy moments of adult-child engagement.

Once the gallery opened, we ran an internship program with La Trobe University Maternal and Child Health students. Over a two-week period in May, these students were placed in the gallery and were encouraged to engage with visitors about how they could play with their children.



Photo: Joel Checkley/Museums Victoria

What are some of the unexpected examples of children's learning?

Early on in the exhibit testing we realised that providing lights and soundscapes would evoke many different reactions by children. This has been reinforced now that the Camouflage Disco is open. Rather than just dancing in the disco as an adult might, children will roll or slither around on the floor, jump up and down, dance with other children or spend time by just watching themselves in front of the mirrors. Children of all ages have been observed spending significant periods of time, often more than 30 minutes, in this area.

Young children under three years can be very adventurous – we have had children younger than 18-months-old climb high up into the net climbing structure. This reinforces the idea that the ages and stages are very much a guide only!

Children never use things the way you expect them to. Loose parts such as puppets end up outside, and paintbrushes provided to dig up fossils in the dinosaur dig were fed to our Tiddalik the Thirsty Frog sculpture! There are also some large flat cushions in the group gathering space, which were intended to be used by children to sit on. As the cushions are in an exhibition space, and surrounded by interactives, it was assumed that the children would not pay much attention to them. However, children often arrange them on the floor and jump on them as if they are stepping stones. Or they will stack them and then delight in knocking them over.

What has been the response to the new developments at the museum?

Our visitation has increased significantly since the gallery opened in December 2016; in some months this year we have doubled the last year's numbers.



Photo: Joel Checkley/Museums Victoria

We have had many positive reviews in mainstream media, parenting blogs and through customer feedback. The Pauline Gandel Children's Gallery has also won several design and museum industry awards. Some comments from visitors:

- 'There is something for every age to stay here all day' (exit survey)
- 'Hours of fun for a diverse range of kids' (exit survey)
- 'The (climbing) structure has been created with separate spaces for children of all levels and abilities to make sure everyone can have fun climbing.' (Busycitykids.com.au)
- 'Kids had a ball at the children's museum, lots of sensory things for my ASD child to explore and play.' (Facebook review)
- 'I just wanted to thank you for the most amazing, creative and educational area you have created for our children in the new children's area. As if the museum wasn't fantastic enough, you give us space for our children to run, climb, touch, learn – it is marvellous.' (Voice of the Customer Feedback)

- 'I renewed our membership today as I am so excited for the kids, and what a great space in winter when it is cold – with little boys who need to move, what more do you need?' (Voice of the Customer Feedback)
- 'Thank you, thank you, thank you.' (Museum member)

The Museum Members program has also seen a marked increase in family memberships, with many visitors converting their admission fee to a membership on their first visit to the gallery. This is in addition to the Museum Generation campaign which has just passed the 3000th membership mark. This campaign provides every baby born, fostered, and adopted in Victoria in 2017 with a free six-month family Museum Membership. We hope that this increase will lead to more people introducing their children to the Pauline Gandel Children's Gallery and then exploring the many other fascinating discoveries in the broader museum.

To celebrate the brand new Pauline Gandel Children's Gallery at Melbourne Museum and to welcome a new generation of children to its museums, Museums Victoria will be giving every baby born, fostered or adopted in Victoria in 2017 a free six-month Museums Victoria Membership. Memberships will be distributed at the eight-week visit to the maternal child health nurse beginning in 2017.

For more information please go to the [Melbourne Museum](#) website.

To get an overview of the Pauline Gandel Children's Gallery, watch the [video](#) *The Pauline Gandel Children's Gallery: A wondrous place for babies to 5 year olds*, hosted on YouTube.

Ground Up: Building Big Ideas, Together at Scienceworks

Murphy Peoples, Experience Manager, Scienceworks on the new exhibition opening in December 2017.

What research has informed this focus on very young children? Visitor statistics have told us that more and more visitors are coming to Scienceworks with preschool-aged children. Scienceworks is located in the western suburbs of Melbourne, one of Australia's biggest growth corridors. The community is highly diverse with surrounding local government areas (LGAs) having a high proportion of residents aged in the birth-to-four-years range. Australian Bureau of Statistics data shows that children in this age group in Greater Melbourne and the rest of Victoria make up about 3% of the population. The same data for our surrounding LGAs are 6% (Brimbank), 7% (Hobsons Bay) and 10% (Wyndham).

Our successful *Little Kids Day In* program has clearly shown there is a need for providing experiences for this age group. Until now, *Nitty Gritty Super City* has been an exhibition space most suited to a young audience (open since 1996, with its last refurbishment in 2006); however, it was designed for five-to-eight-year-olds. Visitor research tells us that two-to-six-year-olds are the most common users, but the exhibits weren't designed for their heights, strengths, developmental levels or reading levels. We wanted to build something specifically for under 5s for which the experiences were led by their developmental and physical needs. We also wanted to put this on the ground floor so prams wouldn't have to use the lift as often. We've taken what our visitors and staff have told us they love most about *Nitty Gritty* and developed the experience from this.

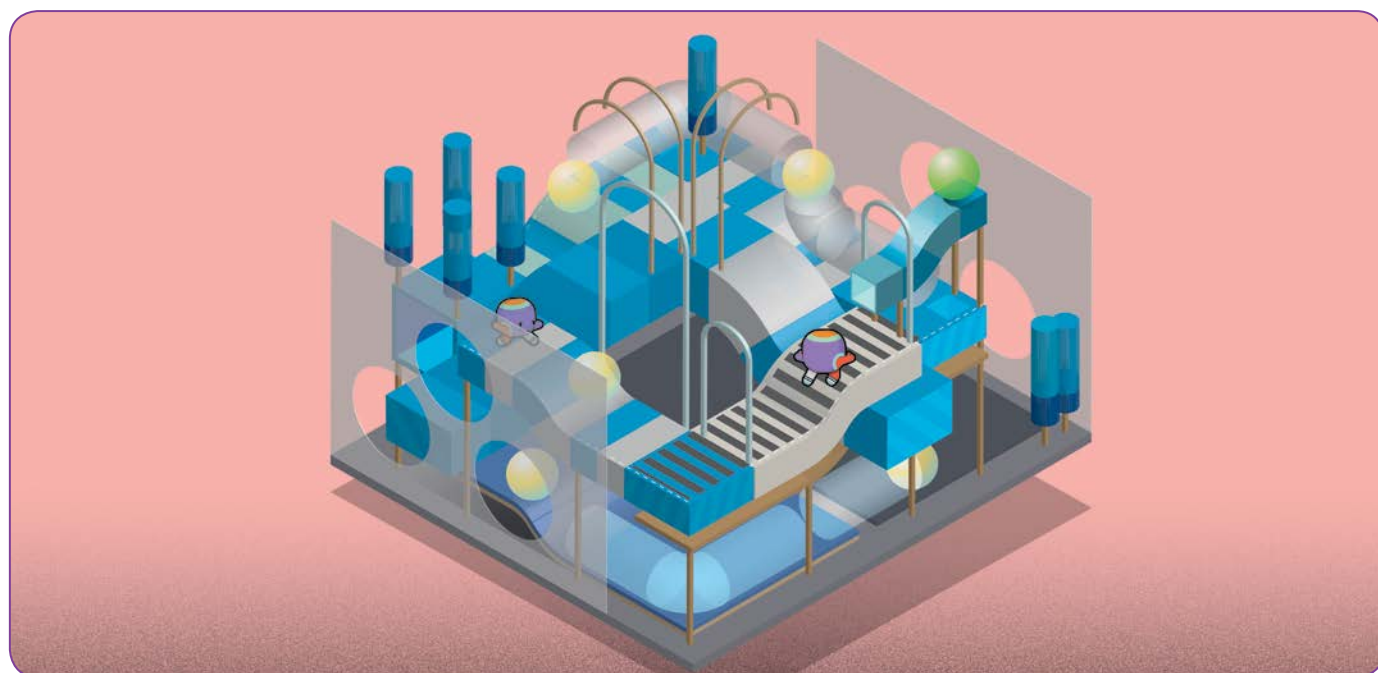
The Pauline Gandel Children's Gallery at Melbourne Museum, which opened in December 2016, has paved the way for early learning at Museums Victoria. Using a constructivist and learn-through-play approach, this has been continued in the development of *Ground Up: Building Big Ideas, Together* at Scienceworks.

In 2016 the Victorian Government launched the VicSTEM strategy. In pursuit of Victoria being the Education State, the Victorian Government has identified the importance of supporting development of STEM skills in our state. STEM is cross-curricular, aiming to bring together the four areas of science, technology, engineering and maths to promote critical and creative thinkers who can develop technological (not necessarily digital) solutions to problems.

The strategy highlights the importance of positive early experiences with STEM and that we need to connect educators, children and families with specialist support. Young children are innate problem solvers as they learn about the world, so engagement and promotion of STEM in the early years is a natural fit. As an added bonus, engaging young children also means we can involve their carers.

Research tells us that girls disengage from STEM fields at a young age. To proactively engage girls in STEM through exhibition design we have looked at a range of resources (such as the UK project *Towards Women In Science & Technology* and *Exhibit Design for Girls' Engagement* by the Exploratorium). This has led to the development of Museums Victoria's own checklist for engaging girls and young women in our exhibition development processes (which includes things like having female role models, use of gender-neutral colours, being hands-on and collaborative).

Who has been involved in the development of the exhibition? Creating something that is accessible and suitable for a varied range of audiences was important in the design process. Feedback has been gathered at many points in the process – during the concept, design and construction phases. This meant real change could be made based on feedback. Many staff were involved in the development in various working groups, and several external community groups were also consulted.



Community consultation and prototyping along the way over the last 12 months has been with:

- early years professionals from the surrounding LGAs of Hobsons Bay, Wyndham and Brimbank
- Amaze (this exhibition will have its own social scripts as part of our autism-friendly museum project)
- VicDeaf
- Vision Australia
- young children and their carers visiting Scienceworks.

Our proactive approach at Scienceworks to engage girls and young women in STEM has led to consultation with:

- Lauriston Girls' School STEM Integrator
- kindergarten teachers with a passion for engaging girls in science
- Engineers Without Borders
- Monash University Faculty of Science staff.

What are the timelines? *Ground Up: Building Big Ideas, Together* has just begun construction (you can sneak a peek from the walkway above!) and will open to the public on 4 December 2017, which will also be a *Little Kids Day In* event with lots of activities for children under five years.

Kindergarten and Foundation groups will be able to book the space, with accompanying staff-led experiences, from Term 1, 2018. Bookings open at the beginning of December 2017.

How will the exhibition engage young children? Our audience research informed the decision to have a construction-play-themed exhibition with STEM underpinnings. Within STEM, children are encouraged to creatively solve problems, often with some sort of built or technological outcome. Children plan, create, test, reiterate and retest their designs. This is about discovering how things work or how problems can be solved through use of skills, rather than rote learning.

There is no one way to do something. Experiences are designed (and have been tested) to be intuitive, which gives us an exciting opportunity to be instruction-free – there are no text panels telling our visitors how something must be used or what the 'right' answer is.

The experiences have been designed with the needs of children and their carers as the first premise and this is cross-checked at all stages throughout the exhibition development.

We assessed the developmental needs and physical abilities of children at different ages and stages, using the Victorian Maternal Child Health Service Key Ages and Stages, cross-checked with the VEYLDF and EYLF, Foundation curriculum, and the needs of carers of different-aged children.

Based on these we developed a set of seven visitor outcomes for *Ground Up: Building Big Ideas, Together*.

1. Our early learners will feel inspired to experiment with construction-based technology.
2. Our youngest visitors will feel confident and empowered to attempt unfamiliar challenges.
3. Our early learners will develop their problem-solving skills, specifically skills which form the basis for science, technology, engineering and maths learning.
4. They will have heaps of fun in this exhibition.
5. Through collaborative play, our youngest visitors will expand their cooperation and communication skills.
6. Carers will develop their confidence and skills as first teachers.
7. After visiting, our early learners will be more inquisitive about their everyday constructed environments and will continue play-based experimentation at home.

Once we had the outcomes we brainstormed what experiences would help us reach them, incorporating the needs of our target audience. All throughout the space carers are encouraged to join in the play (they may find it hard to stop themselves!) and scaffold their child's learning. We have three zones:

- The Baby Landscape features a soft, comfortable environment with a mix of passive and interactive experiences developed for babies and toddlers. This space is loosely enclosed with a rolling mound to create a safe space for those on the floor, while allowing adults to monitor other children in the space.
- The Tinkering Zone has activities that involve lots of testing, trying, designing, critical thinking and problem-solving. Each experience has multiple stations or ways to play in parallel for young children for whom sharing or taking turns is a challenge!
- The Collaboration Zone has more full-bodied, physical experiences where social skills, communication and turn-taking may be involved to solve problems. There is scope for open-ended play as well as goal-oriented play.

In *Ground Up: Building Big Ideas, Together* our character Dot appears throughout the space – she provides a sense of cheekiness, links the space together and is a female role model for young girls without having eyelashes, lipstick or a bow in her hair. Dot's name is inspired by Australian earth scientist (geology and palaeontology) Dr Dorothy Hill, who was the first female fellow of the Australian Academy of Science and a pivotal role model for encouraging women into tertiary science education in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Visit the [Scienceworks](#) website for more information about *Ground Up: Building Big Ideas, Together*.

Resources

Revised Victorian Early Years Learning Development Framework

The VEYLDF was revised in 2015–2016 in consultation with stakeholders across the early years.

Launched in May 2016, it reflects new research and practice, policy decisions and aspirational outcomes for young children, including the priorities of the Education State. It is designed to guide practice for all professionals working in Victoria with children from birth to eight years. It provides a common language for a wide range of professionals and in doing so, promotes continuity of pedagogy and practice.

The VEYLDF has a specific focus on early experiences and learning from birth, and outlines the importance of the first three years of life in shaping learning and development, health and wellbeing. It retains its three distinct components: Practice Principles, Learning and Development Outcomes, and Supporting Children's Transitions.

The VEYLDF includes the following changes:



- the eight Practice Principles have been reordered to begin with reflective practice as a defined skill in critical evaluation for all early childhood professionals
- 'Family-centred practice' has been renamed 'Partnerships with families'
- the introduction to each Learning and Development Outcome has been strengthened to include contemporary evidence that will inform professionals' practice and advance outcomes for children and families
- the Learning and Development Outcomes have been linked to the first three levels of the Victorian Curriculum F–10.

[Illustrative Maps](#) (referred to as Attachment 1 in the [VEYLDF](#)) are designed for both early childhood education and care professionals and teachers in the early years of school to inform curriculum planning and pedagogy with young children.

Wellbeing Practice Guide

To support implementation of the VEYLDF, the VCAA commissioned the University of Melbourne to undertake a literature review that focused on assessment of wellbeing.

The *Wellbeing Practice Guide*, which includes scenarios and learning activities, was developed in 2016 to support engagement with key concepts of the VEYLDF.

Both resources are designed to inform a greater understanding of wellbeing and its place as both a prerequisite for and an outcome of learning. It links to the Department of Education and Training [Respectful Relationships](#) initiative (2016) and references the [Victorian Government Child Safe Standards](#).

The *Assessment of Wellbeing in Early Childhood Education and Care: Literature Review* and the *Wellbeing Practice Guide* are both available on the [VCAA website](#).



The E4Kids study: Assessing the effectiveness of Australian early childhood education and care programs

Effective Early Educational Experiences, known as E4Kids, is a longitudinal study into the impact and effectiveness of early childhood education and care in Australia, as well as outcomes for children who do not attend programs. Conducted by the Melbourne Graduate School of Education, E4Kids followed almost 2500 children in Victoria and Queensland over five years, measuring their progress as they participate in childcare, preschool and family day care programs. The study looked at the contribution made by different programs to children's learning and development over time, in home-based and centre-based environments.

The final report was published in April 2017. Leaders in early childhood education and care are encouraged to read the overview to inform their discussions about current practice with educators in their settings. The overview and findings are available on the [University of Melbourne website](#).

Early Childhood Reform Plan: Ready for kinder, ready for school, ready for life

A focus of the Victorian Government's Education State is getting young children off to a positive start in the early years. The Victorian Government is making a significant delivery of funding to deliver on its commitment to give every child the best start in life.

The VEYLDF is the foundation for the Early Childhood Reform Plan (2017) to invest in high-quality early childhood education and improve access and inclusion for all children and families.

Early Childhood Reform Plan Area Forums will be held across Victoria. Go to the [Department of Education and Training website](#) for more information.

Building Better Brains

The Brain Builders video, developed by the Alberta Family Wellness Initiative, presents the science of how children's brains develop, using an engaging and accessible video that highlights the importance of all children having the nurturing experiences they need to support positive development and growth. As the video explains, good physical and mental health from birth is critical for children, not just for their learning and development now, but also in the future.

[Watch the video](#) to explore how different experiences affect the architecture of the developing brain.

Action Plan

Using the *What, Why and How?* resource to focus on routines

The 'Lunch' vignette features a small group of children eating lunch, with their educator speaking about her reasons for offering eating experiences the way she does.

Routines have rich potential for enjoyment and learning. Eating experiences are probably the best example of this; others include arriving and leaving, dressing and undressing, toileting and nappy changing, resting and sleeping and other essential parts of the day.

The children ate lunch for approximately 40 minutes, and the vignette aims to show highlights. It is worth noting the length, as the pace of eating routines affects how pleasant and relaxed the children feel and the learning opportunities available in this amount of time.

Notice how Mel balances giving children freedom, choice and encouragement to do things for themselves with stepping in at times to help or even take control.

This vignette lends itself to analysis of the many different ways that educators teach children.

A group of four children with one educator makes a big difference to the atmosphere. There is a feeling of calm that is likely to be much more challenging to achieve with a larger group. There is silence at times and space for children to communicate. It is worth thinking about how to approximate this kind of atmosphere in larger groups. In addition to being a better experience for children, there is less stress on educators in a smaller group.

Mel's enjoyment is so evident in the video footage, but there is still the idea that it is demanding work. She may make it seem easy, but it isn't. The vignette offers a realistic example of the work of educators, not one that has been staged.

Questions for critical reflection

- What stands out for you about this lunch experience?
- What do you think the children learn from this experience?
- What does Mel hope that the children will learn?
- What are some examples of children showing initiative, making decisions – in general, strengthening their sense of agency?
- What image of children does this segment portray?
- What roles does Mel play in this episode? What more could she have done or what could she have done differently?
- What are examples of direct instruction?
Changing the environment?
- Mel talks about her goals and intentions for lunch. What are yours? Do the Learning and Development Outcomes in the EYLF and VEYLDF inform the way you offer lunch? If so, explain how.

