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Attachment-based care: What does this look like in pedagogical practice?

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Presentation overview

- The Early Years Education Program
- Attachment & Education
- Pedagogical practices
- Outcomes of attachment-based ECEC
- Resources and acknowledgements




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The Early Years Education Program


- Targeted to vulnerable children and families
- Operated by Children's Protection Society in low socio-economic, high-need area of Melbourne (23% DV on 2 or more domains of AEDC, 2014)
- Children are under 3 when they enter the program
- Children receive 25 hrs a wk of HQ ECEC for 50 wks / yr for 3 years
- Educator to child ratios are high (1:3 under 3s; 1:6 over 3s)
- Children have all been assessed as having 2 or more risk factors e.g., parental mental health difficulties; parental substance abuse; family violence; teenage parents; (Victorian Dept. of Human Services Best Interest Case Practice Model, 2007)



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The program model: six components (Jordan et al., 2014)




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Attachment-based care: relational pedagogy

Relational pedagogy underpins *all* interactions between educators and children and between educators and parents

Relational pedagogy acknowledges the importance of educators being intentional about their work with children *and families* and recognising the centrality of relationships for learning (Papatheodorou & Moyles 2009)



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Attachment-based care: Primary educator

- Each child and family are allocated to a primary educator who is the go-to person for that child and family and who also acts as a primary attachment figure for the child in the centre.
- Each primary educator builds an attachment to their primary children and also where appropriate helps build the attachment between each child and their parents(s).
- Educators develop and maintain trusting relationships with the child's parents to reduce risk factors and build protective factors

Educators are skilled:

- Attachment theory: consultations with Infant Mental Health professionals
- Circle of Security Intervention (Powell, et al., 2014):
Provide a safe haven and a secure base for children; delight in their explorations and welcome them back.

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Attachment-based care: Building relationships with children

Educators are *skilled* in relationship building with children and so they were observed to be physically and emotionally warm, kind, caring, friendly, respectful, attuned, available, predictable, consistent, clear, supportive and calm.

Educators described many different practices and skills that they employed in order to build trusting relationships with the children. The practices included:

- "Being present when the children arrive and leave"
- "Giving children time – taking things very slowly"
- "Giving children personal space" & "knowing when to step back"
- "Getting down to the children's level"
- "Using eye contact and smiling"
- "Using language that affirms love and care"
- "Acknowledging children's feelings"

Education

- All educators have as a minimum: Diploma in Children's Services
- Early Years Learning Framework (DEEWR, 2009) *informs* practice
- Educators attend ongoing relevant training e.g., effects of trauma; sensory play;
- Educators have monthly consultations with an EC Consultant
- Educator : child *ratios* support the attachment-based work
- Educators have *time* for planning, programming & reflective practice
- Educators have *supervision* with a team leader

Pedagogical practice #1 Purposeful greeting

From their very first encounter with the centre, families are greeted purposefully and warmly firstly by the receptionist, then by their child's primary educator, and also by any other staff members who encounter them.

All staff make an effort to learn the names of children's extended family members including siblings, aunts and grandparents so they can greet them appropriately.

Educators show genuine interest and concern for every family member and child in the informal conversations they have each day at arrival and at departure times and before and after weekends.

These purposeful conversations help to strengthen the relationship between home and the centre

Pedagogical practice #2 Gradual orientation into the program

An orientation plan is developed between the educator and the parent(s). It ensures that the child's transition into the centre is in their best interests, is thoughtful and occurs gradually over a period of weeks and months. Informed by extensive family history and IMH input

For children <12 mths it may take up to 12 wks;

For children >12 mths it may take up to 8 wks.

Educators and parents review the plan together at the end of each week with IMH support.

There is **no rush** to move a child and family through the process.

The slow transition supports children *and* parents to gradually build trust with educators and settle into the new setting.



Gradual orientation

"In this program ... the orientation takes longer than in mainstream child care which is like one week, go! But in this program we take it very slowly, really ensure that it's based on the child's need and the parent's need, so they have that responsibility to look after a child - that is the nature of being a mother and having a baby.

So we follow it through and we assist them and we support them the best we can to build the attachment. The orientation [process] actually supports the parent to build their attachment in here. So we let the parents engage in the play, either indoors or outdoors and let the parents assist them during quiet time, music time or sleep times and it goes from there, they gradually build attachment with their babies and then it's for real.

We have a few parents that actually didn't have any attachment whatsoever when they put their child in this program. And then slowly from that orientation process I can see the spark or the love in their eyes, that my son is beautiful, yeah you can see the difference."

(Educator)

Pedagogical practice #3 Education and care planning

Educators and parents meet to develop an Education and Care Plan


Children's plans are reviewed every 3 mths to ensure relevancy of the goals

Meetings are held at the centre and begin by reviewing the child's progress, as well as discussing the child's skills, achievements, interests, and any significant changes that may have occurred or are occurring in the children's and families' lives, e.g. court appearances; family reunification; changes in housing

Parents are encouraged to identify *their* goals for their children

Educators share the child's portfolio






Education and care plans (cont.)


When new goals are identified → clearly linked to the EYLF learning outcomes, with activities and actions that will be taken to achieve the planned goals

Educators share accurate and unbiased information with parents in ways that enable them to understand their children's progress and needs as well as share their own ideas for new goals and strategies that might help to achieve them

Meaningful partnerships are developed when parents' views are listened to, when their knowledge is treated respectfully and inclusively in the goal setting process, and when they are seen as their child's most important educator as well as capable contributors in their children's lives




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Education and care planning ...

"A lot of the families that come in here who are overstressed and overburdened, sometimes have very low confidence, and the more we become expert, the less confident they become. Engaging parents helps if you make them the expert and just ask to walk alongside them and asking what their desires are for their child. You always achieve goals with parents when it's a goal they want to achieve rather than one that you want to achieve"

(Educator)




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Outcomes of attachment-based care

- Parents *and* children develop a sense of belonging
- Parents *and* children feel:
 - Welcome
 - Safe
 - Secure
 - Respected
 - Trusted
 - Listened to
- Parents sustain their engagement with the EC setting

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Parental belonging


"I don't have family, so I consider this centre here as my second home, and my family"

"They really care, not just about the kids, but about me"

"I have positive feelings and respect and I never feel judged"

"I feel safe with them that I can go and talk to them about anything that's going on, and they make me feel better"

"I've never had someone that cares so much about me, like I've never had it in my life"



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Resources

Working with vulnerable families - a partnership approach (Fiona Arney & Dorothy Scott, 2013)

Educators Belonging, Being and Becoming – Educators' guide to the EYLF for Australia (DEEWR, 2010)

Learning together in the early years - exploring relational pedagogy (Theodora Papatheodorou & Janet Moyles, 2009)

The circle of security intervention: Enhancing attachment in early parent-child relationships (Bert Powell, Glen Cooper, Kent Hoffman, & Bob Marvin, 2014)


Calmer classrooms - A guide to working with traumatised children (Vic State Govt. 2007)

From isolation to connection - A guide to understanding and working with traumatised children and young people (Vic State Govt. 2009)

Involving parents in their children's learning (Margy Whalley & the Pen Green Centre Team, 2007)




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Reference

Jordan, B., Tseng, Y., Coombs, N., Kennedy, A., & Borland, J. (2014). Improving lifetime trajectories for vulnerable young children and families living with significant stress and social disadvantage: The early years education program randomised controlled trial. *BMC Public Health*, 14(965). doi: 10.1186/1471-2458-14-965



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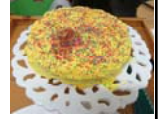
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“If that kind of support had been available to my mother so long ago, would I be here? Would my son be here?”

Thank you

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