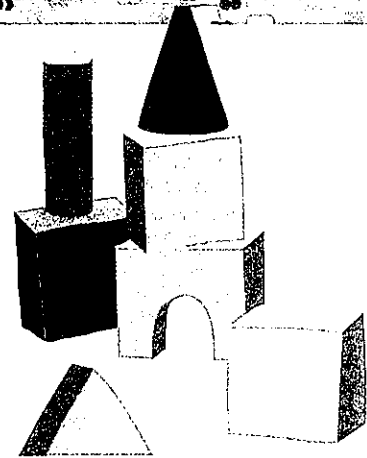


# Relationships and interactions in children's learning

## CHAPTER LEARNING FOCUS

This chapter will investigate:

- the importance of relationships and interactions for children's learning
- effective pedagogy
- teaching strategies that support children's learning, notably scaffolding and sustained shared thinking
- promoting interactions through grouping
- promoting positive interactions.



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## Introduction

Relationships between children, and between adults and children, provide contexts that support and encourage children's development and learning. The first section of this chapter focuses on strategies that can be used by educators to promote positive relationships, on the basis that positive relationships are at the heart of effective pedagogies. Building on this, the second section of this chapter explores teaching strategies that support children's learning and contribute to positive learning environments. The chapter supports educators to build and maintain positive relationships with children – Quality Area 5 in the *National Quality Standard* – and to develop and maintain 'collaborative partnerships with families and communities' – Quality Area 6 in the *National Quality Standard* (Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority [ACECQA], 2013). It also supports educators to meet Professional Standard 3: plan for and implement effective teaching and learning, and Professional Standard 4: create and maintain supportive and safe learning environments in the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* (AITSL, 2010).

Arthur, L., Beecher, B., Death, E., Dockett, S. & Farmer, S. (2018). *Programming and Planning in Early Childhood Settings*. (7<sup>th</sup> Ed.). Victoria: Cengage Learning Australia

## Positive relationships

'Establishing successful relationships with adults and other children provides a foundation of capacities that children will use for a lifetime' (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2009, p. 1). The same emphasis on positive relationships is seen in *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (EYLF)* (DEEWR, 2009, pp. 20–1), where the first learning outcome highlights relationships with people, places and things in promoting children's development of a strong sense of identity. Elements of this learning outcome are that:

- children feel safe, secure and supported
- children develop their emerging autonomy, interdependence, resilience and sense of agency
- children develop knowledgeable and confident self-identities
- children learn to interact in relation to others with care, empathy and respect.

Strong, positive relationships are the basis of effective teaching in the early years. In listing the principles underpinning effective early childhood pedagogy, the *EYLF* emphasises the role of secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships in promoting the wellbeing, learning and development of young children.

One of the general capabilities that underpins the Australian Curriculum, implemented in all schools across Australia, is **personal and social capability**. This capability focuses on children and young people learning to 'understand themselves and others, and manage their relationships, lives, work and learning more effectively' (ACARA, 2013, p. 2). These personal/emotional and social/relationship capabilities include empathy for others, positive relationships and managing challenging situations.

The *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment Training and Youth Affairs, 2008), which underpins both the *EYLF* and Australian Curriculum, also has a focus on social interactions and relationships as critical for lifelong learning and citizenship: 'The more students learn about their own emotions, values, strengths and capacities, the more they are able to manage their own emotions and behaviours, and to understand others and establish and maintain positive relationships' (ACARA, 2013, p. 2).

The National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2009, p. 1) has concluded that 'healthy development depends on the quality and reliability of a young child's relationships with the important people in his or her life'. Early relationships provide a context for development and learning, and are key elements of the lives of young children. The significance of caring relationships is well established in attachment literature (Thompson, 2013). Caring relationships are those where adults care *about* children, as well as care *for* them. Through these relationships, children build a sense of their own identity and their ability to influence the world around them.

There are many variations in early relationships – for example, children's relationships with a parent and an educator will be different – and also in the cultural context of relationships. Through relationships, children become a part of their social and cultural contexts. Children's development and learning is promoted when children experience relationships underpinned by:

- a reliable support that establishes children's feelings of confident security in the adult
- b responsiveness that strengthens children's sense of agency and self-efficacy
- c protection from harms that children fear and the threats of which they may be unaware
- d affection, which promotes young children's development of self-esteem
- e opportunities to experience and resolve human conflict cooperatively
- f support for the growth of new skills and capabilities that are within children's reach
- g reciprocal interaction by which children learn the mutual give-and-take of positive sociability
- h the experience of being respected by others and respecting them as human beings.

J Shonkoff & D Phillips, *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*, pp. 264–5, © 2000 National Academy Press.

### Personal and social capability

'encompasses students' personal/emotional and social/relational dispositions, intelligences, sensibilities and learning' (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Agency [ACARA], 2013, p. 2).

In a well-reported adage, Bronfenbrenner (1992) summed up the importance of positive relationships for children in his statement that 'every child needs someone who is crazy about [them]'.

Australian research has emphasised the importance of relationships for children's wellbeing and the provision of high-quality early childhood education. The South Australian Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS) (2008, p. 9) has promoted a focus on 'three R's' (Reflect, Respect, Relate) through the development of materials and approaches that call for 'reflective practice ... respectful connections and relationships between educators, families and children'. Reflective practice is also a core feature of the *EYLF*, which encourages educators to move beyond things that have been taken for granted and to question their own perspectives, roles and understandings as they engage with children, families and communities.

'Respect' is another term that appears regularly in discussions of the principles underpinning quality early childhood programs. The *EYLF* highlights respect for diversity as one of its core principles. This incorporates not only respect for the individual differences among children, but also for the diversity among families and communities. In addition, Quality Area 5 in the *National Quality Standard* (ACECQA, 2013) also emphasises the important of 'respectful and equitable relationships' being developed with each child (QA 5.1) and the 'dignity and rights' of each child (QA 5.2.3). Diversity is discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

The elements of respect noted by DECS (2008, p. 11) are:

- respect for families and communities – their diversity, their richness and the aspirations they hold for their children
- respect for children – their capacities and interests, their right to worthwhile learning experiences and their innate eagerness to learn and to socialise
- respect for educators – their professional standing, their complex roles as teachers, carers and learners and their contribution to new understandings.

Relationships are recognised as the core of learning and development. When based on reflection and respect, relationships are dynamic – changing over time in response to different contexts and circumstances. For example, relationships change as children grow, develop and learn: we relate differently to a child when they are a baby and when they become a preschooler or school student. Circumstances change too – as a primary carer of a child, educators form particular relationships. When children start school, these relationships change – but hopefully are not lost.

## The importance of relationships and interactions for learning

One of the major trends in understanding children's development and learning has been the recognition that children learn a great deal from talking and interacting with others. The work of Vygotsky (1978) and more recent researchers (see, for example, Bodrova & Leong, 2007; Rogoff, 1990, 2003) has emphasised the social nature of learning among young children.

Vygotsky's theory falls under the broad headings of sociocultural or cultural-historical theory because it argues that 'participation in social life guides and energises the child's mastery of new, culturally adaptive skills' (Berk, 2001, p. 30). Interactions between children and more knowledgeable members of their society, who can include peers as well as adults, underpin the acquisition of the ways of thinking and being that are crucial to engaging in that society. Such interactions can generate a zone of proximal development (ZPD), the zone in which Vygotsky concluded that learning occurs. As outlined in Chapter 3, the ZPD is defined as the distance between what a child can actually do on his/her own and the child's potential development, indicated by what the child can achieve in collaboration with others (Vygotsky, 1978). Berk (2001, p. 41) describes this as 'the dynamic region in which new capacities form as children tackle culturally meaningful tasks with a mentor's assistance'.

Just as relationships with children change over time, so do relationships with parents and families. What strategies do you use to build relationships with families and to maintain and sustain these over time?

As children participate in culturally meaningful experiences with more knowledgeable others – be they adults or children – there are opportunities to internalise the language and understandings used. For Vygotsky, understanding children's development required an understanding of social context and interactions. Higher forms of thinking appear first in social interactions, between the child and others, before being internalised by the child (Bodrova & Leong, 2015).

For children to internalise something they have encountered in social interactions, there must be a sense of shared understanding and focus in these interactions. For example, if two people are talking about different things, or even have a focus on different aspects of the same situation, a genuine sharing of ideas is unlikely to occur. For shared understanding – intersubjectivity – to occur, there needs to be a real attempt by each participant to understand the perspective of the other participants.

If learning is considered to be a social endeavour, then communication is essential. Vygotsky's work regarded language as a critical element in learning, as language 'enables thought, and produces meaning in interaction with others' (Reid, 2002, p. 18). From a very early age, infants engage in communicative practices that encourage social interactions. With very young children, much of the responsibility for sustaining interactions comes from adults. This continues in various ways as children develop, practise and refine their range of communicative competencies and as their understandings of social and cultural practices expand. As children become proficient language users, the scope for interactions, and for achieving intersubjectivity, broadens.

### Children's relationships with adults

One of the key determinants of quality in early childhood settings is the nature of the relationship between children and adults (Britto, Yoshikawa & Boller, 2011; Hamre, 2014). A secure and close relationship between children and educators is characterised by sensitivity, whereby educators get to know each child, establish intersubjectivity and, through this, become adept at perceiving and responding to the child's signals. Acknowledging and responding appropriately to children's signals helps children to develop trust and confidence that the adult will be available and supportive. Positive relationships help children feel safe and cared for. Both parents and educators highlight the importance of emotional responsiveness from adults as central to positive relationships (Degotardi, Sweller & Peason, 2013).

Sensitivity and responsiveness are particularly important in relationships with infants. In high-quality settings, routine interactions such as those at mealtime, changing and sleeping can be times of sensitive engagement with children (Degotardi, 2015). Such interactions are most likely to be achieved when there are high adult-child ratios and where adults and children have sufficient time to develop close relationships. It is also important to note that individual differences among children and adults influence relationships, meaning that some children will prefer to be with some educators rather than others. Regardless of this, it remains important that educators work to establish positive relationships with all children.

The quality of the relationships and interactions between educators and children has an impact both on what children learn while in early childhood settings and on their future interactions with educators in different settings, including school. Where relationships between educators and children are positive, children tend to interact more positively with their peers and regard the school/early childhood setting positively, hence making more of the educational opportunities they meet (IOM & NRC, 2015).

While relationships between individual educators and children are important, so too is the overall atmosphere of the setting. The climate of a setting is created by all involved – children and adults. They can range on a continuum from 'positive, pro-social environments characterised by close adult-child relationships, intricate pretend play scenarios and little disruptive behaviour to angry, hostile environments characterised by conflictual child-teacher relationships, angry disruptive children and little constructive peer play or collaborative learning' (Bowman, Donovan & Burns, 2001, p. 50).

Educators need to be aware of the role they play in generating positive climates in early childhood settings and classrooms. When children feel valued and respected, they are likely



**FIGURE 9.1** Educators' positive relationships with children support children's learning.

Source: KU Phoenix Preschool

to seek out challenges, knowing they will receive appropriate feedback and continued encouragement. Educators who engage with children in reciprocal relationships are caring, responsive and emotionally warm (see Figure 9.1). Positive educational climates are characterised by cooperative peer interactions, children's exercise of autonomy, limited peer conflict and engagement in learning. Positive educator–child relationships promote feelings of security and self-efficacy, and these, in turn, support children's confidence in taking risks (Rimm-Kaufman & Wanless, 2012). Children are supported to develop social competence when educators create environments that are appropriately challenging, where emotions and social interactions are discussed and where there are clear and appropriate expectations (Rolfe, 2004).

## Adult relationships in early childhood settings and schools

The interactions between families and educators have a major impact on the climate of the early childhood setting or school. Where adults are supportive and have trusting and respectful relationships, positive social and emotional climates are likely. Effective early childhood education is built on positive, respectful and caring relationships among the adults who care for children. For family engagement to be effective, educators need to take responsibility for making meaningful and ongoing connections with families. The importance of family engagement and relationships with families is discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

### PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Just as relationships provide the context for children's learning and development, they also provide the context for educators to reflect on, critique and build on their professional practice. The importance of professional relationships that promote reflection is highlighted through the *NQS*, with self-assessment and reflective practice forming the core of quality improvement processes. Further, one of the five principles underpinning the *EYLF* is 'Ongoing learning and reflective practice' and the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* (AITSL, 2010) include 'Standard 5: Engage in professional learning', which has the following focus areas:

- Identify and plan professional learning needs.
- Engage in professional learning and improve practice.
- Engage with colleagues and improve practice.
- Apply professional learning and improve student learning.

The focus on identifying and engaging in professional learning, interacting with colleagues around professional practice and applying what has been learned through this are equally important in early childhood and school contexts.

However, it is not only participation in formal, identified professional development that is important for educators. Reflective practice is an ongoing process as educators consider the bases of their actions within daily practice and reflect on what has already happened. Importantly, reflective practice seeks to problematise practice (Jarvis, 1992). Through reflective practice, educators are well placed to 'examine their own values, beliefs and assumptions, understand the consequences of these, and

consider alternative perspectives, frameworks and approaches – all with a view to improving practice' (Dockett & Perry, 2014, p. 71). Indeed, educators who engage in reflective practice have been shown to be more insightful, aware and sensitive in their interactions with children than those who do not engage in reflective practice (Virmani & Ontai, 2010).

Reflective practice may be undertaken individually, but it can be particularly effective when it occurs within a collaborative context, such as a professional community or network (Alvestad & Rothle, 2007). However, participation is not sufficient to effect change: to achieve this, critique is required (Dockett & Perry, 2014). For professional relationships to support critique and change, a climate of trust and respect is required. The external support of a mentor can help to build the climate and structure that provides time, space and opportunity for reflective practice, as well as the safe psychological environments required to offer both trust and challenge (Timperley, 2008).

## Children's relationships with peers

Children's relationships and interactions with other children are often complex. From an early age, children display a range of skills and understandings as they communicate with other children, help others, play, establish friendships and work to maintain them, and seek to resolve conflicts (IOM & NRC, 2015). As noted in Chapter 3, children's developing theories of mind provide the basis for the beginning of understandings about people and their actions. From infancy, children develop understandings that people act intentionally, seek to attain specific goals and respond to stimuli in various ways; in other words, young children are building a sophisticated understanding of their own and others' mental words, and this enables them to realise that people act on the basis of their beliefs (Wellman, 2014).

It is now recognised that interactions and relationships among children are complex and that some deep and lasting friendships are forged during the early years of life (Dunn, 2004; Hay, 2005) (see Figure 9.2). While children are often capable of forming friendships and interacting with others in many different ways, educators cannot assume that this is necessarily an easy process, without challenges and pitfalls.

Adults, who have much greater social experience than young children, often need to provide some guidance, suggestions and possibly interventions in order to help children engage in social interactions such as play and conflict resolution. Some children tend to be shy or reticent in their interactions with peers, while others tend to be very outgoing and sometimes unaware of some of the subtleties of interactions. Others respond differently in different contexts.

As well as providing guidance in social interactions, the ways in which adults organise learning environments can influence children's interactions with peers. For example, when children attend early childhood settings on a part-time basis, it can take some time for them to establish relationships (de Groot Kim, 2010). How educators group children and the provisions made for play (including time and space) can have an impact on how well these relationships develop and whether or not they are maintained. Children have the potential to develop strong peer relationships when educators provide opportunities for regular, ongoing peer interactions.

Educators have an important role to play in promoting positive and sustained interactions among children. Knowing the children well and engaging them in positive interactions and relationships are important elements in this expectation. This means being aware of, and being able to use, a range of teaching strategies to support children's learning.

## Effective pedagogy

Several recent studies have explored the nature of effective pedagogy in early childhood education. The *Effective Provision of Pre-school Education* (EPPE) project (Sylva et al., 2010) has had a substantial



FIGURE 9.2 Friends matter.

For a long time, it was assumed that babies and toddlers were unable to form genuine friendships. We now know this is not the case. From your observations of babies and toddlers, what evidence do you note to indicate the importance of friendships? Can you recall a friendship of your own that developed in the very early childhood years?

influence on what constitutes effective pedagogy. From this study, effective early childhood pedagogy is defined as promoting:

- a balance of child-initiated and teacher-initiated activities
- regard for play as a potentially instructive activity
- complementary focus on social and cognitive outcomes
- the necessity for educators to have a good understanding of curriculum areas and content
- a strong focus on educators planning and initiating group work
- feedback to learners provided by educators
- a repertoire of pedagogical practices that educators draw on as appropriate
- social and behaviour policies focused on conflict resolution.

In other words, effective pedagogy requires educators to know, understand and use a wide repertoire of practices to promote teaching and learning. It also requires educators to plan, support and interact with children in multiple ways within learning environments as they demonstrate sensitivity to the nature of learning tasks, the content of what is to be taught and children's own learning and development – including their ZPD – as well as their own expertise (Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva, 2004).

There is a great deal of balance required in order to promote effective early childhood pedagogy. As well as a balance between teacher-led and child-initiated interactions, there needs to be a balance between what educators do and the provisions they make for learning and development. For example, it is not enough for educators to set up the environment and then not interact with children, nor is it sufficient for educators to focus only on interactions, without consideration for resources and planning. In other words, educators need to focus on setting up a learning environment as well as active involvement with children as they engage within that environment. Teaching strategies are the focus of this chapter, while planning and setting up learning environments are explored in Chapter 10.

## Teaching strategies that support children's learning

Differences between educational settings have often been reported in terms of philosophical and pedagogical bases. For example, some comparisons of schools and early childhood settings have used the descriptors *play-based* or *constructivist* learning versus *teacher-directed learning* or a *transmission approach* to describe the respective settings. Such a clear dichotomy is often misleading. Educators will promote learning in different ways at different times. As outlined in Chapter 7, educators will draw on curriculum approaches and pedagogies according to their contexts, the type of experience being implemented and their expectations and understandings of children's learning. As a consequence, educators will select different teaching strategies at different times to support their approaches to curriculum. Hatch (2010) calls for educators to develop a wide repertoire of teaching strategies as part of their overall pedagogy, reflecting the diversity of children, families and educational contexts.

In past decades, the dominant discourse in early childhood education has been developmentally appropriate practice (DAP), a position clearly documented in the USA by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (Bredekamp, 1987), revised in 1997 (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997) and elaborated in 2006 and 2009 (Copple & Bredekamp, 2006, 2009). This approach is based on Piaget's (1962) theories of development in which children's actions in child-initiated play are perceived as the primary source of learning. Piaget's work has resulted in the image of the child as a solitary thinker, working to make sense of the world. DAP emphasises a 'child-centred' approach to learning. This has been interpreted by some educators to mean that their role is to observe and wait for children to take the initiative in learning or to display signs of *developmental readiness* and to provide children with experiences that match their current level of development. Copple and Bredekamp (2006) have described

the two basic aims of DAP as to 'meet children where they are' and 'help each child reach challenging and achievable goals' (p. 3). They emphasise that achieving these aims does not happen by chance: educators need to be proactive and intentional in their actions.

Current cultural-historical theories recognise that children actively construct their own knowledge while at the same time advocating the importance of social and cultural forces. Dominant developmentalist discourse has been challenged by the co-constructivist approach of Vygotsky (1978), and the notion of scaffolding put forward by Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976). The social interactionist theory of Vygotsky (1978) argues that the greatest learning occurs within the ZPD, where children are operating at the upper edge of their competencies. This places the focus on potential rather than current understandings and on the role of the educator in mediating learning.

Rather than be restricted by traditional roles, or their perceptions of these, all educators need to develop a repertoire of teaching strategies that enable them to switch between roles of observer, mediator and leader of children's learning in different contexts and with different children. No one set of pedagogical practices is suitable for all children or all learning contexts; rather, different pedagogies will be appropriate for different children in different contexts. Further, different strategies will be appropriate for the same child at different times and in different contexts. Ongoing critical reflection and analysis of taken-for-granted early childhood pedagogies is needed. For example, the work of educators in Reggio Emilia suggests that there is a role for educators in complicating children's play (Edwards, Gandini & Forman, 2012). Rogers (2011) and Wood (2009, 2014), among others, have also encouraged educators to reconceptualise pedagogies of play and the role and place of play within early childhood curricula and pedagogy. The basis for reconceptualising play is outlined in Chapter 3.

Effective educators draw on a repertoire of pedagogical practices (Sylva et al., 2010). This means that educators are thoughtful and intentional in the pedagogies that they choose. Epstein (2007) uses the term 'intentional teaching' to highlight educators as active and purposeful in selecting pedagogies that are the most appropriate when planning learning environments, responding to spontaneous learning opportunities and interacting with children during routines and transitions. According to Epstein (2007, p. 1):

intentional teaching means teachers act with specific outcomes or goals in mind for children's development and learning. Teachers must know when to use a given strategy to accommodate the different ways that individual children learn and the specific content they are learning.

Recent research (IOM & NRC, 2015) advocates a balance of child-guided and adult-guided experiences. Adult guidance does not mean that educators only implement experiences that are adult-initiated and directed; rather, the intent is that they join in children's play and take active roles in guiding children's learning. This guidance is particularly important when new resources are introduced, when children may need their attention drawn to resources that are available or to capitalise on a serendipitous moment. Guidance is also important when children need support in creating 'systems of knowledge' such as understandings of literacy concepts, when they do not engage with something they need for future learning and when they seek help (Epstein, 2007, p. 46).

Furthermore, intentional teaching requires a strong understanding of curriculum content so that educators are able to 'weave content information' (Schiller, 2009, p. 57) into play experiences and model vocabulary that supports children's understandings of concepts. In planning learning environments, 'the daily structure also prompts teachers to think about content broadly so they can include the full range of cognitive domains (introducing different subjects across activities) and social components (altering group size and composition; creating communities of shared interests and experiences) over the course of the day' (Epstein, 2007, p. 13).

The EYLF (DEEWR, 2009, p. 15) includes intentional teaching as one pedagogical practice and suggests that intentional teachers are 'deliberate, purposeful and thoughtful in their decisions and actions'. This refers to the ways in which they plan learning environments and their interactions with children. The framework encourages educators to draw on a repertoire of strategies to 'extend children's learning and thinking' (p. 15). In addition, Quality Area 1 of the *National Quality Standard* requires educators to 'use intentional teaching to scaffold and extend each child's learning' (QA 1.2.2). Professional Standard 3 in the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* also requires educators to

draw on a range of teaching strategies to plan and implement effective teaching and learning. Table 9.1 illustrates a range of strategies that educators might use. These range from low levels of interaction, such as acknowledging children's learning, to mediating strategies, such as scaffolding, and then to more proactive and explicit strategies such as demonstrating and directing (Bredenkamp & Rosegrant, 1992; Mac Naughton & Williams, 2009). At the low interaction end of the continuum, educators provide resources, comment on children's learning and model language and actions, but children 'make connections on their own or through interactions with peers' in what Epstein (2007) calls 'child-guided learning'. In 'adult-guided' learning (Epstein, 2007) educators take a more active role in children's play and experiences to mediate learning and, when appropriate, engage in explicit teaching through demonstration and by providing directions.

**TABLE 9.1** Continuum of teaching strategies

Low interaction	Mediating	Explicit
Acknowledging	Supporting	Demonstrating
Modelling	Co-constructing/sustained shared thinking	Directing
Facilitating	Scaffolding	
	Reflecting	
	Critiquing	

## Low interaction strategies

### ACKNOWLEDGING

**Acknowledgement** occurs when educators take notice of and comment on children's behaviours and practices. Acknowledgement is a way of offering non-judgemental feedback to children (Porter, 2016). Kostelnik et al. (2015) suggest that meaningful feedback takes account of children's efforts and feelings, indicates the progress children have made and comments on specific elements of children's creations. The educator may comment on the way that a child used colour and line in a painting, for example. Educators can also acknowledge children's behaviours; for example, by giving positive feedback on the way that a group of children worked collaboratively to construct a spaceship. Intentional teaching requires educators to think carefully about the comments they make and the impact their comments have on children's learning. Acknowledging recognises children's actions or interaction, but offers no way to extend them. However, Bovey and Strain (2005) note that acknowledgement can be used effectively to promote positive social interactions when combined with the strategy of prompting, or providing cues to guide children's actions. Porter (2016) also supports the use of acknowledgement as a prompt to help children evaluate their own actions.

### MODELLING

In **modelling**, children learn by watching others. Educators can model dispositions such as play and curiosity, learning processes such as problem solving and practices such as reading, as well as non-gendered behaviours and cooperation with others. Educators are powerful models for children so it is important to think about the messages that children are getting from educators' actions as well as their words. Intentional teaching requires thinking about the intended and unintended messages educators are providing to children through their words and actions.

Educators may be models by playing parallel to children while using similar materials (Dockett & Flear, 1999). This may mean, for example, sitting next to children in the sandpit and making comments that model spatial and positional language or using specific arts vocabulary to describe elements and aspects such as colour, line, beat and rhythm when children are engaged in creative arts experiences (Arthur, McArdle & Papic, 2010). Adults' modelling of literacy behaviours is linked to children's

**Acknowledgement**  
Acknowledgement involves providing non-judgemental feedback.

**Modelling**  
In modelling, children learn by observing others.

interest in, and willingness to engage with, reading and writing (Raşan et al., 2009). In the same way, adults' modelling of the actions, tools and language of mathematics is influential in children's approaches to, and engagement in, numeracy experiences (Montague-Smith & Price, 2012).

When educators join in children's play and carefully observe what is happening, they are able to offer models that are responsive to children's interests and play directions and to support learning. Dockett and Fler (1999) note that modelling can provide important cues to children who are seeking to enter play but are unsure of how to do this. Children who are unfamiliar with a particular environment may need some assistance in 'reading' the situation. Modelling is a means of providing such cues.

## FACILITATING

Mac Naughton and Williams (2009, p. 81) describe **facilitating** as a 'process of making children's learning easier'. As such, it includes actions such as 'scheduling, selecting materials, organising space and interacting verbally and non-verbally' (Mac Naughton & Williams, 2009). Intentional teaching includes planning learning environments and interacting with children in ways that facilitate learning. Educators can facilitate learning by providing experiences that are appropriately challenging and by giving sufficient space, time and resources to promote children's engagement (see Figure 9.3). Higher-level processes such as problem solving and critical thinking can be facilitated with the provision of open-ended resources and a climate that encourages divergent thinking (Mac Naughton & Williams, 2009). The educator may become what Jones and Reynolds (2011) term 'a stage manager', providing experiences and resources that will extend children's interests, making props, organising the set and making script suggestions. The educator may add some writing materials to the dramatic play area where a group of children are using chairs to make a bus and pretending to give out tickets, for example. The addition of literacy materials encourages the children to make bus signs and bus tickets, thus facilitating the inclusion of literacy practices in the children's play. Reynolds and Jones (1997) note that when educators add something new to facilitate what children are interested in doing, they are using their power to support the children's purposes, not detracting from these.

Mac Naughton and Williams (2009, p. 81) argue that facilitation on its own is not enough to promote learning. When educators set up environments and are reluctant to interact with children, it is difficult to build relationships and to extend learning. Low-intervention strategies such as facilitation are also 'implicated in sexist and racist relationships between peers' as they do not challenge such relationships or prompt alternatives.

## Mediating strategies

Moving towards the middle of the continuum, there are several strategies that mediate children's learning. These include strategies such as supporting, co-constructing, sustained shared thinking and scaffolding. Mediation requires educators to observe and interpret children's actions and interactions on the spot in order to be able to respond in a way that is sensitive to children's perspectives and that assists children's learning (Dockett & Fler, 1999). Educator mediation is vital as a means of sustaining and complicating children's play (Edwards et al., 2012).

## SUPPORTING

Educators can **support** children's learning by being available to give assistance when needed and providing physical or verbal support and encouragement. This may mean supporting a child as they

### Facilitation

This occurs when adults make it easier for children to learn.



**FIGURE 9.3** Educators can facilitate children's learning through the provision of resources and organisation of the environment.

### Support

Educators support children's learning in multiple ways.

attempt to write or assisting a child to join in play with others. For example, 'supportive adult participation' in literacy-enriched play results in gains in children's 'knowledge of environmental print and print concepts' (Morrow & Schickedanz, 2006, p. 278). Educators can support children's learning by providing clear, specific feedback and feed-forward that focuses on learning, relationships and/or dispositions. Feedback such as 'Abby, all your collage materials stayed on this time because you used the strong glue and the stapler' provide more useful support for learning than 'That's great' or 'Good girl'. Feed-forward could focus on strategies that Abby could use next time such as suggestions that she spread the glue to the corners of the collage materials to help them to stick. To make effective use of supporting strategies, educators need to be careful observers, sensitive to children's ideas and intentions.

Educators can also use feedback to support children's sense of belonging and wellbeing and the development of relationships. At times, educators may need to intervene to support children to resolve conflicts or to promote equity (Dockett & Fler, 1999; Mac Naughton & Williams, 2009).

## CO-CONSTRUCTING

Co-construction occurs when the educator and a child or children are jointly involved in an activity such as building a tower with blocks, writing or retelling a narrative or working together to solve a problem (see



FIGURE 9.4 Adults can engage in co-construction with children through play.

Source: Summer Hill Children's and Community Centre

### Sustained shared thinking

Educators and children are mutually involved in cognitive constructions.

construction as 'each party engages with the understanding of the other and learning is achieved through a process of reflexive co-construction' (Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva, 2004, p. 720). Sustained shared thinking involves educators and children (or children together) working in an intellectual way to work through an issue, solve a problem or clarify understandings. It is not a one-sided intervention, with the adult prompting all the interaction and providing all the guidance. Rather it is a mutual interaction where both parties contribute to the interaction and the thinking involved. Sustained shared thinking can only happen when there are responsive, trusting relationships between adults and children.

Outcomes of the EPPE project (Siraj-Blatchford, 2005) detail a range of strategies to support children's sustained shared thinking:

- tuning in – listening and observing carefully, noting verbal and non-verbal language as children engage in experiences
- showing genuine interest – focusing attention on the child and their actions, responding appropriately
- respecting children's own decisions and choices – following children's leads
- inviting children to elaborate – seeking extra information and detail

Figure 9.4). The most powerful form of co-construction involves the co-construction of meaning as children and adults together build knowledge about their world. In this sense, knowledge refers to the understandings and interpretations educators attribute to specific events and actions, rather than an accumulation of facts (Mac Naughton & Williams, 2009).

Intentional teaching highlights the importance of educators encouraging children to engage in experiences that they may not choose on their own, or that they may not be confident about engaging with on their own. When educators join in experiences and engage in co-construction, children often develop confidence in themselves as learners as well as developing new understandings.

## SUSTAINED SHARED THINKING

The EPPE project refers to co-construction as **sustained shared thinking**. This is a process whereby educators and children are mutually involved in cognitive co-

- recapping – indicating that you have listened and understood what has been said
- offering your own expertise – adding detail that extends the interaction
- clarifying ideas – reporting your own understanding and seeking additional detail
- suggesting – offering your own input
- reminding – referring back to previous comments or intentions
- using encouragement to further thinking – acknowledging the thinking that has occurred, pointing out any contradictions, thinking out loud about what might be meant or might happen
- offering an alternative viewpoint – provoking thinking in a different direction
- speculating – asking children to think about what might happen and why
- reciprocating – contributing to the interaction by referring to your own experiences or views
- asking open questions – considering many 'right' answers
- modelling thinking – describing your own thought processes (metacognition).

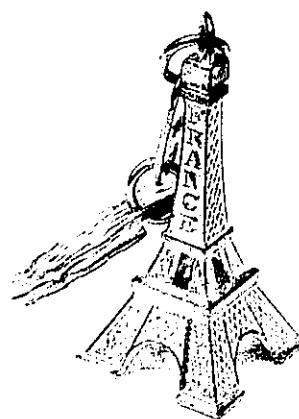
Some, rather than all, of these strategies are evident when children and adults are engaged in sustained shared thinking, as noted in Example 9.1 from Botany Downs Kindergarten in Auckland, New Zealand. The processes that were involved in promoting sustained shared thinking were recorded in a Learning Story. In this example, a child's interest in towers was sparked by the gift of a key ring with a small model of the Eiffel Tower. Educators *tuned in* to this and *showed genuine interest* as they noted Madison's ongoing fascination with the topic and supported this by *contributing resources*, inviting Madison to *elaborate* and *clarify* her ideas, while also suggesting opportunities to *extend the thinking by offering input and alternative viewpoints*. Resources enabled Madison to construct her own Eiffel Tower and provided a context for *provoking thinking* and *clarifying ideas*. Extension also occurred when Madison was *reminded* of the poster comparing the height of towers around the world, and she was encouraged to make comparisons with the tower in her local environment. The addition of input from the director's overseas trip not only confirmed that she had *noticed and was interested* in Madison's topic, but also involved *reciprocal* sharing of information. This sustained interaction over a considerable period of time provides a useful example of the ways in which educators and children can engage in deep learning experiences.

## The Eiffel Tower

It all started with a key ring – an Eiffel Tower key ring, a gift from Madison's aunty from her European adventures.

For a week afterwards, Madison and her sister Georgia played games where their Eiffel towers 'talked' to each other and went on adventures. It was a few days later that Madison arrived at kindergarten asking if a picture of the Eiffel Tower could be printed out for her. Madison's mum googled and printed a picture for her, only to be told that she needed an Eiffel Tower with four feet, just like the key ring.

A different picture was found and printed for Madison. Half an hour later Madison walked through the office door holding her Eiffel Tower, complete with four feet. It was made of paddle-pop sticks, glued together with a glue gun, and had four legs, each with a small cap attached that allowed the tower to stand up.



Eiffel Tower key ring.

Glovanconcept/istockphoto



The process of construction was documented, later becoming a Learning Story.

After looking at her Eiffel Tower and the printed photograph, Madison realised that she had forgotten to make a flag for the top. So she added one. Karen [staff member] showed Madison the pictures of the Eiffel Tower on her office wall and got out her own portfolio to show Madison the photographs of when she visited the Eiffel Tower.

Stefanie thought that Madison's Eiffel Tower was just the best: 'I want to make one like that'. With Madison's assistance, drawing on her own experience, a second Eiffel Tower was completed.

When asked what she knew about the Eiffel Tower, Madison replied, 'It's in France. It looks like the Sky Tower, except that it has different types of legs. It's thin and kind of a blackish colour. It's bigger than the Sky Tower. I like it because it is big and you can go up to the top and see the whole world'.

To explore the towers of the world more closely, we found our poster picturing the sequence of heights of the towers of the world. The Eiffel Tower and the Sky Tower are certainly not the biggest in the world. When we looked more closely, we realised that we needed to update our towers chart. There are so many more towers in the world now.

It just so happened that Bronwyn [Director] was travelling to Paris on her way to a conference. She visited the Eiffel Tower and sent a postcard to Madison. She also found some additional resources about the Eiffel Tower, including a model that needed to be constructed. When the model was pieced together, some of the children chose to carry it around.

The Eiffel Tower encouraged stunning drawings and served as a provocation for many children. For example, Jacob was one of the many children who used their knowledge to replicate the tower with the building blocks. Overall, there was a growing interest in building towers.

Madison continued her fascination with the Eiffel Tower. We [staff] asked ourselves how we would be able to deepen her understanding. As we explored the intricacy of the 18038 pieces of steel that make up the Eiffel Tower,



Madison's Eiffel Tower model.



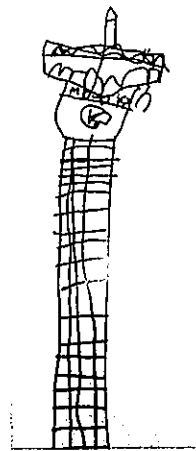
Eiffel Tower compared to other tall buildings.



Eiffel Tower puzzle.

we came across a digital puzzle that allowed Madison to build the tower on the computer. Madison not only had to build the tower, but she also had to come to grips with the challenges of a laptop mouse. Her initial response was one of panic; however, true to her disposition to persist, she continued with just a little support. Within minutes Madison had this new skill under control and chose to complete the puzzle over and over again.

We need to recognise children's interests and intentions and to respond in ways that support and deepen their learning. It would be interesting to find out where you can see the Sky Tower from near kindergarten. Perhaps we could take a trip to the Sky Tower?



The Sky Tower.

Source: Botany Downs Kindergarten, New Zealand.

Interactions that promote sustained shared thinking are most likely to occur within a context of responsive and trusting relationships. Where educators enjoy their interactions with children, know the children well, trust children's competencies and interests and engage in reflective practice, the scene is set for some fascinating sustained shared thinking.

## SCAFFOLDING

Scaffolding is the 'process of providing temporary guidance and support to children moving from one level of competence to another' (Mac Naughton & Williams, 2009, p. 370), or situations in which 'the adult provides just enough but not too much support, matching the amount of support to the skill level the child displays, providing more support if the child falters and decreasing support just enough to challenge the child to move ahead' (Bowman et al., 2001, p. 220). Through interactions that are targeted at a child's ZPD, adults can promote challenge and complexity in children's interactions and understandings and support them as they move towards independent practice.

Rogoff (1990) uses the term 'guided participation' to highlight the way in which interactions assist children to build a bridge from current to new understandings. In literacy learning and teaching, this mediation strategy is reflected in the practices of modelled, guided and independent reading and writing.

Scaffolding is not the same as sustained shared thinking, although there may at times be similarities in the way educators approach these. In sustained shared thinking, each partner contributes to the thinking and the extension of the understandings developed. This may mean that the educator can enter an interaction without knowing where it will lead, but draws on their knowledge of curriculum content and learning processes to guide the learning towards the broad learning outcomes that are appropriate for each child. In scaffolding, the adult, or more experienced person, tends to know how to complete the task at hand, and can guide the other participant through the processes needed to achieve mastery. There is often a clear goal and the educator may well have planned clearly defined steps along the way, withdrawing support as the child moves towards mastery of the task.

Scaffolding can occur at different levels (Dansie, 2001; Engin, 2014). Scaffolding at the macro level requires examination of the social and cultural contexts in which learning occurs. Elements of macro-scaffolding include the climate of the learning environment, the language that is used within that environment, the norms within that environment and the accepted and expected ways of being and doing within that context. Micro-scaffolding occurs within the context of macro-scaffolding. It can include elements such as the conversations between educators and children or between children,

a demonstration provided for children or the specific resources directed towards a learning experience – such as when an educator draws children’s attention to a particular piece of equipment that could advance their thinking or project. Dansie (2001) describes micro-scaffolding as contingent, so that the nature and extent of scaffolding varies for different children and in different situations. While this individual scaffolding is what most educators think of as scaffolding, Dansie argues that without the broader macro-scaffolding, micro-scaffolding may well be limited. For example, if the learning environment is not reflective of children’s interests or strengths, if it is irrelevant to their experiences or it is just inappropriate in expectations, lots of individual support will not overcome this.

Effective scaffolding provides varied assistance, depending on the children’s actual grasp of the task. With novel tasks for young children, scaffolding may commence with a physical demonstration, usually accompanied by a verbal explanation. For example, nine-month-old James is sitting on the floor. His father gives him a mirror. James turns the mirror over several times and notices the shifting light. His father holds the mirror in front of James and exclaims, ‘Wow! I can see a baby!’

As children get older and more articulate, the verbal element of scaffolding tends to increase. The adult may ask questions, provide prompts, model strategies, encourage risk taking, confirm children’s thinking and give feedback (Mac Naughton & Williams, 2009).

Berk (2001) describes the goals of effective scaffolding as:

- joint problem solving aimed at keeping the child in the ZPD
- self-regulation
- warmth, responsiveness and engagement.

Consider these goals within the following examples in this section. In Example 9.2, five-year-old Will is completing a complex puzzle with his dad. The puzzle is a 200-piece picture of Ireland. It is a gift from a special friend and Will is keen to complete it. The puzzle has been completed before, so Will has a sense of what it looks like. Some puzzle pieces are placed on the table and others remain in the box. In Example 9.3, Angus is encouraged to try his developing skill of crawling and reaching, with support from his mother. In Example 9.4, Ellie’s participation in social play is scaffolded by her preschool teacher, Amy. In each example, the elements described by Berk (2001) are evident.

## EXAMPLE 9.2

### The puzzle

‘Where do we start?’ asks Dad.

‘Over here in the corner. There’s some of these pieces, and I found two already’, replies Will.

‘What about corner pieces. Have you seen any of them?’

‘Well, yes, I suppose so. But I’m looking for these bits; you can find the corner pieces.’

They continue sifting through the pieces. Dad finds and places some corner pieces in appropriate places. He then asks, ‘Can you help me find a bit with yellow on one corner and some black on the other side?’

‘Mmm’, says Will. ‘OK. I’m looking.’

‘Thanks, remember it’s yellow and black.’

‘Yes, yellow and black ... yellow and black, yellow and black. Here’s one!’

‘Can you see if it fits? Maybe you’ll need to turn it around a few times. Hey, wow, you’ve got a piece. Now we need another piece here. What do you think it might have on it?’

‘I don’t know’, replies Will.

‘Is there anywhere you could find out?’

‘Well, let me look at the picture [on the box]. I think that should be Dublin there, so maybe it’s something with a D or something on it?’

'That would make sense', replies Dad. 'Can you see anything like that?'

After looking for a few minutes Will cries, 'Ohhh! No! I just can't find anything like that'.

'Well,' says Dad, 'how about we sort these pieces out, so all the blue ones are over here, the ones with writing can go over there ...'

'Look, here's one. I think this one fits', calls Will.

'How did you work that one out? That was a good one to look for', says Dad.

'I just looked for some black letters and some green on the side and there it was', says Will, grinning.

### Angus is crawling

Angus, at eight months of age, was almost crawling. As he lay on his tummy on the floor, his mother placed a favourite toy nearby. Angus looked at it and swung his hand and arm towards it. He could not reach it. He looked to his mother, who had not noticed his action. Once again, he reached towards the toy. This time, his mother saw him and said, 'Wow Angus, you can almost reach that!' She moved it a little closer to him. Angus smiled as he looked again at the toy and his mother. He arched his back, and proceeded to raise himself almost to his knees. His mother clapped and cheered as he did so. Now on his knees and with his arms in a crawling position, Angus balanced himself in such a way that he could move one arm and one leg forward – his first crawl. He reached the toy, and as he grasped it, lost his balance and fell back onto his tummy. With a big grin on his face, he brought the toy to his mouth and looked at his mother.

EXAMPLE 9.3

### Is this a restaurant?

Ellie is four years old and attends preschool one day each week. She tends to engage in onlooker play, but seems keen to join in with the other children. Amy, the teacher, has noticed this and aims to help Ellie become more involved in social play. This morning, Ellie has been watching a group of girls set up a restaurant in the family corner. Amy moves to the area and knocks.

'Can I come in? Is this a restaurant?'

'Yes, you can come in and eat', replies Mandy.

'My friend has just arrived. Can she come too?' asks Amy. She motions to Ellie to join her. Together they sit at a table. Amy opens her arms as if looking at the menu.

'What would you like to eat, Ellie? Do you think the pasta, or the fish and chips?'

After a few minutes, Ellie says, 'The pasta'.

'OK, can we have two pastas, please?' Amy asks Mandy.

Mandy replies, 'OK two pastas coming right up'. Mandy pretends to write on a notepad and then tells Janine the order.

EXAMPLE 9.4

Mandy moves back to the table and asks Ellie, 'Would you like anything to drink?'

Ellie looks up and says, 'Yes please. Can I have a nice cold drink of water?'

'Coming right up', says Mandy.

In a few minutes, Mandy and Janine serve their customers. Amy and Ellie pretend to eat.

Amy looks at Ellie and says, 'I've got to go, there's an emergency at home. You stay for dessert'.

Ellie replies, 'OK'.

Mandy and Ellie then discuss what Ellie would like for dessert. They continue some conversation when dessert arrives and then when the bill arrives.



FIGURE 9.5 Friends can provide scaffolding.

### Joint problem solving aimed at keeping the child in the zone of proximal development

Effective scaffolding requires a focus on a specific task or situation. Together, those involved work jointly to reach a solution or conclusion. The adult (or more experienced peer) needs to make judgements about the progress of the task. If the child is becoming frustrated, changing the nature of the task, breaking it into manageable bits or re-examining what is required may be advisable to maintain the task within the child's ZPD. At different times, the assistance provided by the adult might be quite specific or quite general. A critical element of effective scaffolding is that it is adapted to the situation (see Figure 9.5). The amount and nature of assistance required by each child varies. What is appropriate for the same child varies as the context, the task and the expectations change.

### Self-regulation

Berk (2001) describes the promotion of self-regulation – the capacity to use thought to guide behaviour – as one of the goals of effective scaffolding. As noted in Chapter 3, self-regulation influences all areas of development and learning. Scaffolding can encourage children to think before they act, facilitating planning to meet particular goals and encouraging children to be in control of their own learning. Self-regulation develops through scaffolding as children have access to a range of strategies to work towards a given goal, and control is ceded to the children as they become more proficient in the task. Helping children to realise a range of possible strategies and passing control of the task to children encourages thinking about the task and planning – essential characteristics of self-regulation.

### Warmth, responsiveness and engagement

As discussed earlier in this chapter, warm, supportive relationships between adults and children are important in promoting learning. Effective scaffolding is also based on such relationships. Adults who are responsive and warm in their interactions with children tend to offer explanations for their expectations. They offer encouragement as well as challenge and engage in discussions related to expectations. Children know what is expected and feel certain that they can rely on support and encouragement. The same elements in scaffolding that promote warmth, responsiveness and engagement have been linked to authoritative parenting (Berk, 2001).

Scaffolding occurs in many contexts and in many interactions. It has an inherently instructional purpose and tends to be directed towards a specified goal. It is not essential that scaffolding be

planned – some of the most interesting and exciting instances of scaffolding can be spontaneous. However, there is often a strong element of planned learning and teaching related to scaffolding. Using the descriptions of macro- and micro-scaffolding, much macro-scaffolding can be planned. It is based on knowing the children in a particular group and planning experiences that reflect their understandings and interests as well as providing challenges. Micro-scaffolding may be planned in a general sense (for example, making sure that there is plenty of time to talk with children about a task or experience), but the specific nature of micro-scaffolding will depend on the individual child and her/his interactions. In other words, it is difficult to plan exactly what you might say when you interact with the child.

Recall that children can also provide scaffolding for their peers in many contexts. Example 9.5 describes scaffolding between two school-aged children who were working on a joint project.

### Making a PowerPoint presentation

Annabel and Jade have a joint school project to complete. They have the option of completing a paper copy of their work or making a PowerPoint presentation. Annabel has never made a PowerPoint presentation before. Jade has access to her parents' computer and has made several PowerPoint presentations. They work together on a project about Pinocchio.

Jade opens up the program and sets up a new page. She describes what she is doing: 'I'll just get a new page, and here it is. What sort of background do you think would be good? Do you think a colour, or maybe just a pattern?'

'Let's have red', suggests Annabel.

Jade fills the background red, but then changes it to green. The girls laugh. After changing the background to blue, yellow and orange, Annabel says, 'Can I have a turn?'

Jade hands her the mouse and Annabel chooses various shades of blue and green before they settle for a red background.

'OK, what's the first question?' asks Jade.

Annabel looks at the questions they need to answer and reads it out.

Jade types in the question and asks, 'What do you think we should say?'

Annabel suggests a response and Jade types it into the computer. Jade talks out loud as she does this, describing the font size and where the text is to be placed. At one point, Annabel suggests that a different font should be used, and the girls explore a range of possibilities.

The girls complete the first two questions. Then Annabel says, 'My turn to type', as she takes control of the keyboard and the mouse. She types in the question and waits for Jade to suggest an answer.

The girls continue to work on the project until they have completed a 10-page presentation.

#### EXAMPLE 9.5

### REFLECTING

Reflecting on learning is another mediating strategy (Wood, 2013). Educators engage in reflective practice when they think about how they teach, analyse events from different perspectives and identify and try out changes in practices. Reflection is one of the key components of professional practice outlined in the *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009). By reflecting on their practices, educators can analyse the effectiveness of strategies in supporting children's learning and make informed decisions about any changes to be made.

Educators who engage in regular reflection with children model these active learning practices. Educators can encourage children to reflect by recording interactions and conversations and by taking photographs and then discussing these artefacts with children. Jones and Reynolds (2011) provide examples of educators representing children's play pictorially and in writing, and sharing these with children to encourage reflections on learning. Dockett and Perry (2007) have encouraged children to reflect on their first year at school, utilising drawings and photographs as well as comments about their experiences. Wood (2013) reminds us that effective educators not only engage in reflection on their own practice, but also encourage others – including children – to reflect on their actions. This is a powerful way of focusing children's thoughts so they are able to reflect on their learning.

## CRITIQUING

Educator mediation can support children to engage in critical thinking or critiquing of issues of gender, ethnicity, language, ability and class and to challenge 'stereotypical knowledge and understanding' (Siraj-Blatchford, 2009, p. 153). For example, educators can scaffold children's critique of the ways that texts such as children's books and movies are constructed to represent particular world views, reproduce disadvantage, marginalise minority groups and encourage consumerism. Young children have demonstrated that with educators' guidance they are able to engage in critical thinking about texts (Barratt-Pugh et al., 2006; Beecher, 2010). A critical perspective encourages children to go beneath the surface of texts to examine meanings and actively interrogate and challenge the ways people are presented and to critique the ways that texts position us to accept dominant world views. Critical literacy encourages readers to challenge and deconstruct the taken-for-granted assumptions of texts (Comber, 2015; Vasquez, 2014).

Harwood (2008, p. 7) also suggests that 'the narratives that evolve from children's imaginative play may provide interesting social dilemmas for educators and groups of children to deconstruct and analyse using questions such as, "Why do only girls play in the doll corner?" or "What makes an action hero a hero?"'. Educators can encourage children to engage in critical thinking and to examine issues such as the interconnections between power, discourse and identities. This is the essence of critical literacy – interrogating the assumptions that are embedded in the text and the assumptions we all bring to engaging with the text. Wood's (2005) reflection on his approach to using critical literacy reminds us that young children can, and do, deal with complex issues, such as social justice, in their everyday interactions – including literacy interactions. It also provides an example of how the critically reflective practice of educators can recognise and build on this, encouraging all to raise questions about assumptions. An essential part of supporting children's critical thinking is the way in which educators themselves engage in such thinking.

## Explicit teaching strategies

The two strategies described in this section as explicit teaching strategies are demonstrating and directing. They each involve adults taking an active and leading role in children's learning experiences. It is important to note that intentional teaching does not mean the same as explicit teaching. Intentional teaching requires educators to draw on the full range of teaching strategies.

## DEMONSTRATING

Demonstrating is at the more proactive end of the teaching continuum. There are times when educators need to provide clear demonstrations to children. Demonstrations can be very effective when introducing a new technique or skill or when children have forgotten how to do something (Mac Naughton & Williams, 2009). For example, this may involve showing children how to use a particular piece of equipment or the demonstration of a particular technique that is useful when working with clay or when drawing (Arthur et al., 2010; Kolbe, 2005). Demonstration is a useful alternative strategy to 'learning by doing'; however, it is often most effective when accompanied by explanations and opportunities for practice.

There are times when adults may need to become involved to support children's play (Trawick-Smith & Dziurgot, 2010). Educators may need to take deliberate steps to structure children's play, while at the same time remaining sensitive to the direction of play. Roskos and Neuman (1993) see educators in this role as a coach who provides demonstrations and explicit directions. For example, playing with blocks could lead to a demonstration of balance and symmetry, as well as providing encouragement for children to build as high as they can.

In the area of literacy, critical theorists argue that children need clear demonstrations or explicit teaching. 'Explicit teaching' is a term that has been used to describe the 'uncovering, or laying bare, [of] tacit assumptions that operate in classrooms – assumptions about what the teacher wants and expects, about what the students are supposed to be doing and expecting of themselves, and about what concepts and skills are necessary in order to complete a task successfully' (Reid, 2002, p. 17). The focus on explicit teaching recognises the importance of helping children identify what they are expected to do and why, rather than assuming that all children can work out the connections for themselves.

It is important to recognise that some children come to early childhood settings or schools without having experienced the ways of thinking, behaving or talking that predominate in the setting or school. Schools and early childhood settings can seem very strange to children who do not have much experience in these contexts. In these situations, it can be very important for educators to talk about what they are doing and why, what is expected of children and educators and how to participate appropriately (Reid, 2002).

This is particularly the case for children from minority groups. For example, Delpit (1995, p. 31) reports that many children of colour in the USA experience a culture of power in the classroom that excludes them: 'If such explicitness is not provided to students, what it feels like to people who are old enough to judge is that there are secrets being kept, that time is being wasted, that the teacher is abdicating his or her duty to teach'. In Australia, similar issues exist for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island children, children from low socioeconomic communities and children from language backgrounds other than English.

Demonstrations need to be carefully matched to individual or small group understandings, to be authentic and 'doable' in order for children to engage with them (Geekie, Cambourne & Fitzsimmons, 1999). Demonstrations are most effective when they occur within a meaningful experience, such as the guided reading of a text or small group construction of a text, rather than in an isolated lesson, and when followed by opportunities for children to try these ideas for themselves.

Wood (2013) suggests that appropriate demonstrations provide children with access to concepts and processes that can be utilised in play. Relevant demonstrations for younger children may involve showing a child how to write a particular letter or how English is read from top to bottom and left to right. For older children, educators may provide explicit demonstrations of writing conventions such as punctuation. Mac Naughton and Williams (2009) note the importance of demonstrating within a teacher's repertoire, but also caution that an over-reliance on this strategy can result in a diminishing of children's willingness to innovate and explore things for themselves.

## DIRECTING

Directing is another explicit teaching strategy. It is most appropriate when children are introduced to something for the first time. It is also necessary when there are safety issues and the educator is required to intervene and remind children of procedures or rules. When educators are directing children's learning or play, the control of the experience is with the educator rather than the children. This may only be for a short period of time and then control of the situation is handed back to the children.

Sometimes when educators have very specific objectives planned for experiences, or lessons are focused on meeting particular outcomes, the result is that educators interrupt children's play and interactions to teach particular vocabulary or concepts (Jones & Reynolds, 2011). If teacher talk dominates, Mac Naughton and Williams (2009) caution that children can become passive learners. They suggest that children should be encouraged to question, reflect and explore so that educators are able to engage in conversations that extend learning.

## Selecting appropriate strategies

Intentional teaching is defined in the *EYLF* as 'educators being deliberate, purposeful and thoughtful in their decisions and actions' (DEEWR, 2009, p. 45).

Effective teaching strategies consider children's home and community experiences and interaction styles as well as the child's learning in the setting (Arthur & Beecher, 2014) so that they are responsive to children and support continuity of learning as recommended in the pedagogical practices of the *EYLF*.

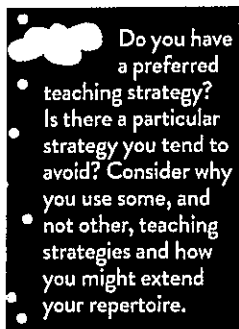
While the strategies outlined in the continuum above have been discussed separately, the reality is that educators' roles are dynamic and flexible, with most educators moving in and out of different roles within one learning experience or teaching session, and using many strategies simultaneously. For example, when scaffolding a child's understanding, an educator may provide a demonstration, offer support and then provide feedback by acknowledging the child's efforts. Of course, educators also need to remember that children can be engaging in complex play and learning without an adult being present at all! As the work of Vygotsky (1978) suggested, play itself scaffolds children's learning as it provides a supportive environment that encourages children to try out ideas and re-enact practices they have observed in the social worlds of their families and communities. Children can also support and scaffold each other's learning, provide each other with demonstrations and direct each other's learning.

## Conversations

There are many unplanned experiences in which children and adults engage that promote learning. Berk (2001) describes the power of conversations, highlighting their 'free-ranging' nature and the existence of conversations in everyday activities and events. The narratives of conversation assist children as they try to make sense of their personal experiences and as they seek to organise and interpret these experiences. Through narratives, children become aware of the perspectives and expectations of others, as well as developing their own awareness of self and deepening their understandings of the world around them.

Adult-child conversations provide many informal opportunities for children to develop understanding (Reid, 2002). Within early childhood settings and schools, as at home, there are many opportunities for conversations about routine tasks or events, as well as discussions about novel occurrences or interests. The time adults spend in conversation with children can be incredibly rich in learning opportunities as well as emotional warmth. Berk (2001, p. 74) notes the crucial role of adults interacting with children: 'Through dialogues with children, adults play a formative role in the development of children's self-concept, sensitivity to others, cognition, academic knowledge, morality, social skills, capacity to use language and gain control over thought and behaviour'.

Engaging in conversations with children is one of the most effective teaching strategies educators can use. Some adult-child interactions are controlled by the adult, often through direct questioning, resulting in a one-sided interaction that can feel like an interrogation, often following the initiation/response/evaluation pattern. These are clearly not conversations! A more positive alternative is the spontaneous conversation, generated from an interest, event or relationship, which is meaningful and enjoyable for all involved. These conversations often consist of statements that extend and confirm children's ideas and interests, and some open-ended questions to challenge and extend thinking. Such conversations can be initiated by children or adults. Often the most enlightening conversations develop from child initiations and interests. Conversations can help build positive relationships between children and adults as well as act to sustain them. Throughout the day educators will engage in many conversations – with individuals, small groups, large groups or a whole class group (see Figure 9.6).



## Promoting interactions through grouping

Just as educators will draw on a range of teaching strategies, they will also utilise a range of grouping strategies. The use of particular grouping strategies will depend on many things, including the context, the age and other characteristics of the children, the nature of experiences planned, children's interests and dispositions.

While many decisions about grouping reflect educators' beliefs, plans or preferences, as well as setting policies and practices, it is important to consider what those decisions feel like for the children who experience them. For example, Jones (2008, p. 34) describes three-year-old Jeanna who was just beginning to play beside Lori, a new friend, when 'the teacher calls the children inside for class meeting time ... Jeanna tries to sit beside Lori, but the teacher directs her to an assigned spot ... After the group time, she tries to join her new friend in the play kitchen, but now it's her turn to do an art project'.

Considering what it feels like to be grouped, and to be part of some groups and not others, may help educators reflect on some of the unintended consequences of the strategies they use.

### Group size

Large group conversations may well occur at the beginning or the end of the day, and could include story time, sharing time and whole group discussions. Small group and whole class conversations can be used to introduce topics, find out what children know or have experienced about a particular issue or set the scene for the day ahead. They can be interesting sessions where children plan their experiences or report their experiences of the day. The work of educators in Reggio Emilia suggests that educators can lead the learning of a group of children through strategies such as writing down what children say and then involving them in reflection on their words and stimulating further learning (Edwards et al., 2012).

Children participate in small group experiences in both prior-to-school and school settings (see Figure 9.7). While Reid (2002, p. 13) describes the use of small groups in school settings as 'central to all curriculum planning', she also notes that effective use of small groups requires more than setting up a cluster of desks or seating children together. The benefits of small group organisation in school classrooms include flexible classroom organisation, increased opportunities for students and teachers to build relationships and enhanced learning opportunities for students as they engage in situations drawing on different discourses and functions (Reid, 2002). However, these benefits are not attained without a strong teacher commitment to small group organisation, as well as an understanding that group structures and processes take some time to develop.

Arguments for small group size do not necessarily mean that the best grouping strategy is one educator with a small group of



**FIGURE 9.6** Adult-child conversations provide many opportunities for co-construction.

Source: Summer Hill Children's and Community Centre



**FIGURE 9.7** Small group experiences provide opportunities for conversations among children as well as between children and educators.

Source: KU Phoenix Preschool

children in a room or space on their own. There are benefits in two or more educators working together with a larger group of children, at least for part of the day. This could be a group of three educators with a mixed age group of infants and toddlers, or in a school setting it may mean two or three teachers team-teaching across a grade or across a number of grades or stages. It could also mean support teachers, aides and librarians working in classrooms alongside the class teacher rather than withdrawing children for specialist classes or remedial work.

## Grouping strategies

There are many different ways of grouping children in early childhood settings and schools. There is no 'best' method of grouping. It is useful to explore a range of possibilities rather than to continue with

current practices 'because that's how we always do it' or 'because regulations say we have to'. It is important to be aware of licensing guidelines and to follow required group sizes and staff-child ratios. This does not mean, however, that only one type of grouping is possible. It is possible to meet mandatory requirements for licensing and quality assurance standards by using a number of different grouping methods. It is to be expected that the pedagogical decisions made by educators will result in children interacting within diverse groups over different times of the day or year.

Groupings can be based on similarities across language or culture, age, ability and interest (see Figure 9.8). Groupings based on differences include mixed culture and language groups, mixed ability groups and mixed ages.

### AGE

Age has become the major criterion for grouping children in many educational communities. Rogoff (2003, p. 8) notes that 'with the rise of industrialisation and efforts to systematise human services such as education ... age became a measure of development and a criterion for sorting people'. This is reflected in the organisation of many early childhood settings and in schools. Indeed, Cornish (2010, p. 11) notes that 'owing to the entrenched lock-step system of same-age, same-grade classes, there is at least an implicit perception that learning is related to age'.

One of the advantages of same age groups is that the environment can be planned specifically to cater for that particular age group. This assumes, however, that all children of the same age will be similar – for example, that a group of four to five-year-olds will have similar developmental and learning attainments. It can be very convenient to classify children by age. However, the reality is that individual differences may well outweigh similarities.

There can be a wide range of differences even when all children are the same age. Children who are 18 months old, for example, will vary enormously in their use of language, their physical prowess and their relationships. Same-age grouping works to narrow the range of possibilities for children's behaviour and learning, and to encourage children to fit the expectations for their age group. As Greenman, Stonehouse and Schweikert (2008) note, the tendency of caregivers to minimise individual differences is strongest when the age range of children is narrow. There are arguments that a wider range of behaviours is likely to be accepted in a mixed age than in a single age classroom (Katz, Evangelou & Hartman, 1990) and that mixed age groups provide greater opportunities for children to learn from peers than age groups (Gerard, 2005). These support the view that **mixed age groups** facilitate attention to individuals.



**FIGURE 9.8** Mixed age groups provide scaffolding and encourage consideration of multiple perspectives.

Source: Western Sydney Institute of TAFE, Nepean Centre

**Mixed age groups**  
When children of different ages are grouped together.

Many early childhood settings utilise mixed age grouping. However, for mixed age grouping to be effective, attention needs to be paid to issues such as staff–child ratios, group size and the physical resources available for the group. For example, groups with large numbers of infants and toddlers may become overwhelming for both staff and children.

Some schools utilise multi-age classes. Multi-age groups are not the same as multigrade or composite classes. In multi-age classes the focus is on children working at their own level and at their own pace. In multigrade or composite classes, children are still divided and taught as separate grades. Multi-age classes are a philosophical choice whereas composite or multigrade classes are often a pragmatic reality – for example, in small rural schools with limited enrolments, or in larger schools where there is an imbalance in enrolments across some grades (Cornish, 2010).

### Advantages of mixed age grouping

Mixed age grouping is also known as family grouping, as it replicates the sorts of age spans that are typical in many families. In some cases of mixed age grouping, the same group may stay with the one educator, or team of staff, over a number of years. For example, a team of staff and a group of children may move through a child care centre from the 'babies' group' up to the four to five-year-old group. This also occurs in some school contexts, where educators move with a group of children as they progress from preschool to school. In Scotland, this process has been described as 'looping' (Fabian & Dunlop, 2007).

Potential advantages of multi-age grouping include opportunities for continuity of care, where children stay with the same educator over time and do not experience multiple transitions based on age, and opportunities for older and younger children to interact, prompting perspective taking and creating opportunities for complex interactions (Childcare Resource and Research Unit, 2014).

Several studies and reviews suggest that children in multi-age settings in school contexts attain outcomes at least at the same levels of their peers in age-base settings (Saqlain, 2015) and may indeed develop social skills – including those related to self-regulation and leadership (Leier, 2008) – beyond those of these same peers. In multi-age classrooms gifted children can accelerate, and children who need additional assistance can be accommodated without standing out as different or needing to be withdrawn from the classroom. A range of ages in a group means that routines may be less stressful for staff as older children are able to assist the younger children. Older children are able to provide support and scaffolding for younger children; for example, by engaging in conversations, sharing a book or assisting with a construction.

In school settings, buddy programs have been used to build connections between older, more experienced members of the school community and those starting school (Dockett & Perry, 2013).

**Buddy programs** aim to help those starting school feel comfortable with the new environment and those within it, as well as providing opportunities for the older buddies to build and enact mentoring and leadership skills.

### Disadvantages of mixed age grouping

Concerns about mixed age grouping relate to younger children's safety and older children's learning. It may be difficult for staff to provide an environment that is safe for younger children but that at the same time provides suitable challenges for older children. Porter (2007) has expressed concerns that a mixed age environment may include resources that are not appropriate for younger children or that the curriculum may be 'dumbed down' for older children.

Porter (2007) also expresses concerns that mixed age groups create more work for staff to manage as they have to program and set up the environment for a wide range of interests and abilities. In addition, some staff members may not be confident working with a broad age range and may feel more able to interact with a particular age group.

In some small settings, mixed age grouping may mean that family members, who spend a great deal of time together at home, also spend time together in the setting. While this can have many benefits, it can also be difficult for children to establish their own individual identity.

**Buddy programs**  
Programs where older or more experienced members of a community support younger or newer members of that community. Buddy programs often operate in schools where older students are paired with those starting school, providing a friendly face and source of support in the new environment.

### Responses to concerns

Mixed age grouping does not mean that all children in an early childhood setting will spend the whole day together, or that a multi-age class will stay grouped as one class all day. Mixed age groups can be made up of a number of small groups.

It is important to remember that different forms of grouping can be used throughout the day. Children may be based in mixed age groups for part of the day and be grouped according to ages at routine times and for small group experiences, or for particular curriculum areas in a school setting. In a long day care setting, issues of safety can be addressed by providing small equipment that may pose a safety hazard for infants and toddlers while the younger children are eating and/or sleeping.

Educators can also consider the use of space so that small group learning centres are created within the mixed age environment. Resources for older children can sometimes be placed within an enclosed area that older children can access but which keeps younger children safe.

### ABILITY

Children can be grouped in same ability or mixed **ability groups**. These groups may be for the whole day, such as when children are placed in a school class based on general ability. Grouping can also be flexible so that children may be in a mixed ability class and be ability-grouped for classes such as mathematics and English.

**Ability groups**  
Grouping students according to achievement, skill or ability.

### Advantages of ability groups

There is a wide range of abilities in any group of children, making it difficult for educators to cater for each child's potential and for children to remain motivated. The advantages of ability groups are that the curriculum can be more closely matched to children's development and learning, children are able to interact with peers at a similar level of interest and understanding and are able to challenge each other (Whitton et al., 2016). A range of research reports that ability grouping supports early literacy development (McCoach et al., 2006; Nomi, 2009). However, ability grouping may well be beneficial for some children and not others. For example, Hong et al. (2012) report that homogeneous ability grouping had little effect for high-ability students, but some positive effects for other children when combined with instruction time. The reverse conclusion was drawn from earlier studies (Kulikand & Kulik, 1987), a finding possibly explained by Nomi's (2009) conclusion that the effects of ability grouping largely depend on school contexts.

Gross and Sleep (2000) argue that children who are gifted benefit from doing work at levels beyond their age rather than from enrichment at their own age level. While some educators are concerned that children who are placed in the top ability group may become conceited, Gross (1997) states that when children who are gifted are ability-grouped they realise that there are children who are more capable than they are.

### Disadvantages of ability groups

Grouping children by ability can result in children being labelled with such terms as 'bright' and 'gifted' or with such terms as 'slow learner' and 'learning disabled'. Consciously or not, many staff respond to the way that children are grouped by adapting their behaviour and expectations. Educators may expect more of children who are in a high-ability group and less of children in a lower-ability group. It is important when using ability groups to reassess children regularly (Whitton et al., 2016).

Ability grouping may reinforce competition between children and increase the focus on success and failure. Children who are placed in lower-ability groups may develop negative self-concepts and self-fulfilling prophecies, believing, for example, that 'I can't do maths' or 'I'm only on level one. I'm no good at reading'. Equally, children who are identified as gifted may have trouble living up to the high expectations placed on them and start to exhibit signs of anxiety or stress.

Decisions on how to group children may be based on a test of children's ability. These tests are often culturally biased, advantaging children from English-speaking, middle-class backgrounds. As a result, some children's strengths may not be identified. In addition, some children do not perform well in a test situation.

There are some general issues to consider regarding the assessment of young children (Dockett & Perry, 2007), including the following:

- Young children's abilities are emerging, not fixed. Assessment at any one point may present a distorted view of capabilities (Bowman et al., 2001).
- How and where should assessment be undertaken?
- What assessment procedures are to be used?
- What decisions (for example, school entry, progression, retention, access to early intervention services, and programs for gifted children) are based on the assessment?

### Responses to concerns

Ability grouping may occur for some, rather than all, parts of the day. Within these groups, 'different students can complete differentiated work that meets individual academic needs' (Whitton, 2003, p. 1). When educators plan a range of experiences with varying levels of complexity and various modes of engagement, it is possible to respond to children's differing abilities.

## LANGUAGE

Children can be grouped in same language groups or in mixed language groups. Often, children will naturally form groups with others who share the same language background. These groups can draw on shared experiences that foster talk and meaning-making as well as positive self-esteem and a feeling of security. Educators can also plan groups based on language. They may plan same language groups in order to support the maintenance and development of children's home languages and to build children's self-esteem. Mixed language groups may also be planned to support bilingual children's second-language learning through interactions with native speakers. Educators may also utilise grouping strategies that promote cross-cultural understandings and appreciation of linguistic diversity (see Figure 9.9).

Educators can encourage and support children's informal interactions with same language peers. It is important to allow time for extended interactions in the home language so that children have time to be engaged in learning and develop concepts in the home language (Jones Diaz, 2014). Educators can also plan for same language groups at routine times such as mealtimes, where a group of children and an adult who speaks the same language are seated together. Other educator-initiated same language groups may occur at small group time where a bilingual worker, community language teacher or family member may share a story or song with a group of children or interact with children in play in their home language. Same language groups will generally require children to be grouped across ages and stages, meaning that older children can scaffold younger children's language learning.

### Advantages of same language groups

Same language groupings provide children with opportunities to use their home language in the educational setting and give children the message that languages other than English are valued. Language is a means of maintaining group identity and solidarity and for passing on cultural heritage. Same language groups generate opportunities for children's home languages to be recognised and celebrated, and for children to use their home language in meaningful ways that support language maintenance.

The maintenance of the home language is essential, particularly for young children. Gibbons (2002) suggests that a second language such as English should not be introduced until the child is confident in the first language. Children who have a firm foundation in the first language

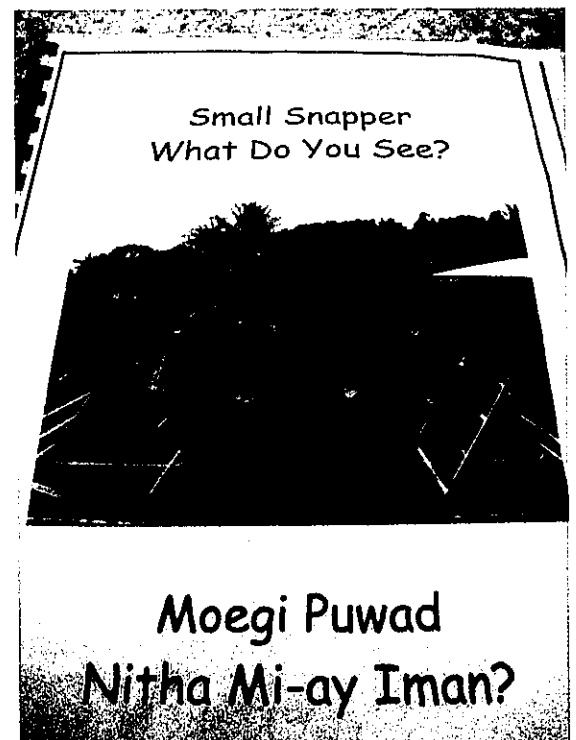


FIGURE 9.9 Print materials can promote the use of home languages.

are in a much stronger position to develop a second language than the child who is still in the process of learning the first language (Gibbons, 2002; Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke, 2000). When the home language is not supported, children may experience subtractive bilingualism where the home language is replaced by the second language (Otten, 2014). Subtractive bilingualism, particularly at an early age, can have a negative impact on a child's learning, social interactions and self-esteem, and can result in the child rejecting the language and culture of the home. When this occurs, children may end up fluent in neither their home language nor English and unable to communicate effectively at home or at school.

### Advantages of mixed language groups

Mixed language groups expose monolingual children to the diversity of languages in the broader community, while also providing second-language learners with opportunities to hear and use the new language. Mixed language groups promote respect for different ways of speaking and different types of print.

Children growing up in a monolingual environment need to be introduced to the reality of the linguistic diversity of their broader community (Genishi & Dyson, 2009). If there is no linguistic diversity in the early childhood setting, educators need to bring it in from the surrounding community in whatever ways are possible.

For bilingual children, small child-initiated mixed language groups provide opportunities to be involved in experiences where the second language is used to describe actions, negotiate with peers, develop hypotheses and solve problems (Arthur & D'Warte, 2016). Mixed language play experiences provide second-language learners with exposure to the new language in stress-free and meaningful environments that support and scaffold their second-language use in communications with others. Siraj-Blatchford and Clarke (2000) note that young children learning English as a second language need to be involved in interactive situations with other children and adults where dialogue is encouraged and their language attempts are supported.

### Concerns about same language groups

Educators may express concerns that there are many different language groups in their setting or classroom and that it is not possible to support them all. There may also be concerns regarding the lack of resources to support the further development of oral and written language in children's home languages. In addition, educators may be concerned that children are not exposed to children from other language groups and do not have opportunities to interact in English if they only participate in same language groups.

### Responses to concerns about same language groups

The multilingual resources in a setting and among families and the broader community can be used to support multilingualism and multiliteracy. Educators can borrow community language resources from local libraries, resource centres and family members. Many resources can also be created through the collection of newspapers, magazines, menus and food packaging in relevant community languages as well as the use of photographs of shop and street signs in languages other than English. Access to the Internet also provides opportunities to locate a wide range of online resources, and educators, families and children can create multilingual resources in relevant languages using digital resources such as book creation apps.

Where there are bilingual/multilingual staff in the setting, regardless of whether they are an educator, teaching assistant or cook, they can support children's home language development and liaise with family and community members. Bilingual staff who speak the same languages as the children can play alongside children and engage them in interactions in the home language. Where there are no staff who speak the appropriate languages, staff can often be accessed through support agencies.

Family members, community volunteers and older children can also be involved in educational settings to support children's home languages. Family and community members can participate in children's play and encourage interactions in the home language. They may also be able to share stories, songs and rhymes with children in their home language, although educators need to be sensitive to the fact that not everyone who speaks a language other than English is literate in that language. Older

children can also work with younger children to support home language learning. In a school setting, for example, children from the upper primary years can participate in experiences with children in the first years of school where they use the home language to communicate.

## INTERESTS

Children will often form their own groups based on shared interests (see Figure 9.10). In a preschool setting, for example, a group of children may be interested in digging in the sandpit and exploring how deep they can dig. Another group of children may be interested in taking on roles in dramatic play where the theme is related to their interest in animals and veterinary surgeons. Yet another group of children may be interested in using writing materials and exploring print. Children will move in and out of different interest groups throughout the day.

Children's interests can form the basis of the curriculum; for example, in an emergent curriculum approach. In other cases, the curriculum may be organised around mandatory curriculum or teacher-selected themes where children are permitted to make choices based on their interests.



**FIGURE 9.10** Interest-based groups encourage learning and engagement.

Source: KU Phoenix Preschool

### Advantages of interest-based grouping

Where children are able to form their own interest-based groups, they are often motivated to engage in in-depth learning as they investigate questions and solve problems they have generated (Helm & Katz, 2016).

Children's family and community experiences often create shared interests that encourage talk, collaborative play and investigation. This may be an interest in the latest popular children's television program or digital toy, or an interest that emerges from family or community experiences such as visiting the beach or playing soccer. Shared experiences at the setting, such as building construction occurring next door, the discovery of a bird's nest or a visit to Chinatown, may also spark children's interests. In other cases, the experiences of one child, such as taking a sick animal to the vet, may spark the sharing of experiences and interests among a group of children. These shared experiences provide many opportunities for collaborative learning.

In an emergent curriculum approach, educators are responsive to children's interests and aim to extend their understandings. Educators can provide spontaneous support for children's interests by showing an interest themselves, asking questions and providing resources. At other times the interests of a group of children can provide the catalyst for an in-depth investigation or project that requires long-term planning as well as spontaneous interactions and resourcing. The addition of relevant resources can encourage further exploration and the representation of ideas using a range of media. Projects are rich with opportunities for children to use curriculum areas such as mathematics, science and literacy in meaningful contexts and for children to develop dispositions to be curious, solve problems and be actively engaged in learning (Helm & Katz, 2016).

### Disadvantages of interest-based grouping

Educators may be concerned with children not receiving a broad education if they only follow their interests. For example, some children may not choose to engage in any creative arts experiences, or may never visit the book area or writing centre. If children are allowed to always follow their interests, they may only ever engage in gender stereotypical play. Other concerns include the diversity of children's interests and educators' inability to follow the interests of all children. Some educators are concerned that children may be interested in areas such as popular media culture that they believe are commercially driven and ideologically unsound.

### Responses to concerns

Not all children's interests need to, or can, be followed and extended in educational settings. However, where the program is open and responsive to children's interests there are possibilities for all children to make choices and to engage in meaningful learning. Responding to children's interests does not take away the responsibilities of educators to plan and provide for a wide range of educational opportunities. While children's interests can provide the stimulus for curriculum, the engagement of educators will often determine whether and how these interests generate learning experiences. For example, interactions with educators can support children to build on, extend, challenge or complicate interests and understandings.

Educators' interests and experiences – provided children respond to these positively – can also be the catalyst for children's investigations. Jones, Evans and Renken (2001) suggest that by including their own interests in the curriculum, educators model knowledge and enthusiasm. Educators' values as well as the values of the children's families and broader community also influence decisions as to what is included in the curriculum (Jones & Nimmo, 1994). Jones et al. (2001, p. 8) argue that 'in-depth curriculum emerges in the intersections between teachers' interests, kids' interests and school-community values'.

Interest-based projects can integrate many domains of learning and introduce children to experiences they may not otherwise pursue (Helm & Katz, 2016). For example, children who may not choose to engage with reading and writing in traditional areas will often use books and computer resources to investigate an area of interest. They will also tend to integrate reading and writing into their play as the project provides a purpose for using print to represent their meanings (Helm & Katz, 2016). This may involve writing signs to accompany a block structure, creating menus in restaurant play and reading signs and posters (Arthur & Beecher, 2014).

Some interests may be based on traditional gendered roles, such as girls' interest in fairies or boys' interest in superheroes. However, educators' involvement in and extension of children's interests can help to break down gender barriers. Educators can work with children to critique gendered roles and to examine power relationships (Mac Naughton, 2000). Other interests, such as dinosaurs or The Wiggles, may cross gender divides and encourage boys and girls to collaborate.

While many educators have expressed concerns about the ideological and commercial influences of popular media culture on children's lives, and feel uneasy about including children's popular media interests in educational settings, popular media culture provides links to children's home and community experiences.

Rather than dismissing popular culture as commercially driven and ideologically unsound, engaging with popular culture can provide opportunities to respect children's home experiences and open up possibilities for critical analysis (Marsh & Millard, 2000). Working with children's popular culture requires educators to regard the texts that are valued by children themselves – whatever their form – as assets that can be used to make connections and experiences with more formal literacy skills and expectations. Connecting with children's popular culture will often involve engaging in digital literacy practices – which themselves incorporate popular culture (Parry, 2014). Educators can work with children to challenge and transform the messages of popular media and to critique the commercial nature of many popular texts. It is important, however, that the critique of texts of popular culture arises from children's issues and questions and that it is extended to all texts. This requires educators to be familiar enough with children's popular culture to be able to incorporate it in meaningful ways within the curriculum (Dickie & Shuker, 2014).

### FRIENDSHIPS

Children will also form their own friendship groups. **Friendship groups** are formed based on social ties and often on shared experiences and interests. These groups can be the basis of small spontaneous groupings or groupings in more formal contexts; for example, when children are able to choose to work with friends in a classroom context. Friendships matter to children. Friendships also take effort and energy to maintain. Educators need to provide opportunities for children to make and be with friends, and sometimes to impart guidance about the responsibilities that can go with friendships.

**Friendship groups**  
Groups formed on the basis of social connections or shared interests.

### Advantages of friendship groupings

Friendship groups encourage social interactions, language use and collaborative learning. Children are much more likely to engage in arguments – in conversations, rather than in a conflictual sense – with friends and to have a vested interest in solving arguments (Dockett & Perry, 2001). Play between friends does seem to generate more disputes; however, because of the friendship, there is great motivation to resolve these disputes in ways that maintain the relationship (Dunn, 2004).

Friendship groups provide stability and security. When children enter unfamiliar environments, such as when they start school, the presence of friends and the chance to be with friends are important (Dockett & Perry, 2007). Children make judgements about their 'belongingness' in school based on whether or not they have friends. Where children start school not knowing any of the other children, they report expecting to make friends and the chance to be with those friends for much of the school day.

### Disadvantages of friendship groupings

Some children may find it difficult to form friendships and may be rejected by their peers. Rejection may be because of a child's difficult behaviour or because of perceived or actual differences. Children may be rejected because of race, culture, language or religious beliefs, because of physical attributes such as height or weight or because they do not fit expectations of gender roles. Peer acceptance – or rejection – in the early childhood years is linked to later peer interactions and acceptance (Hay, 2005). In other words, children who have friends when they are young are likely to have friends when they are older.

Educators also may be concerned that children will not remain on task if they are sitting next to their friends.

### Responses to concerns

Children generally feel devastated when others utter the call: 'You're not my friend and I'm not playing with you today'. To use friendship groups effectively, educators need to spend time talking with young children about the nature of friendships. They will also need to model some of the strategies that can be used to make and support friendships. These are important skills and it is not surprising that young children may need some assistance at various times. Educators have a responsibility to assist children who are experiencing difficulties with peers. Educators can assist children to gain entry to a group and encourage friendships among children. It is also the educator's responsibility to address discrimination and unfair behaviours such as bullying, racism and victimisation. Strategies to support early competence with peers have an important place in the early childhood curriculum.

Children talking to each other and seemingly drifting off-task may be perceived by some educators as a disadvantage of friendship grouping, but it is also one of the great advantages of friendship groups. Given the importance of talk in cultural-historical approaches to learning, children need to talk with their peers. Of course, educators would be quite happy if the talk generated among friends related only to the task at hand; this is rarely the case, whether we are considering groups of children or adults. One of the challenges for educators is to encourage talk about learning experiences. Berk (2001) reminds us that children (and adults) resort to talking to themselves (and others) about a task when it is just that little bit too difficult to do automatically – in other words, when the task is located in the ZPD. She suggests that a classroom full of conversation related to the learning experiences provided is a classroom where you expect a lot of learning to take place.

## GENDER

Often children will spontaneously form **same-sex groups** based on shared interests and social worlds (Hanish & Fabes, 2014). When children form their own groups based on gender, they often engage in stereotypical experiences such as boys playing with trucks in the sandpit and girls playing with dolls in the home corner. In play contexts, in particular, children 'create and re-create their understandings of what they believe to be normal behaviour for boys and girls, women and men' (Mac Naughton, 2000, p. 119).

At times, educators may form children's groups based on gender. Educators may group children with others of the same gender at routine times, such as forming lines to move from one area of the

**Same-sex groups**  
Groups formed on the basis of sex or gender.

setting to another or when asking children to complete tasks such as emptying bins or packing away. Often these groupings reinforce traditional gendered roles. Educators may also decide to group by sex for particular school curriculum areas such as mathematics or English. At other times, educators may encourage mixed-sex groups to play and work together or encourage engagement in non-stereotypical roles and experiences.

### Advantages of same-sex groups

One response to children's gendered play is to encourage all children to engage in a wide range of curriculum experiences. Children may be encouraged into non-traditional areas through strategies such as role modelling (for example, having a male teacher or parent in the home corner or a female member of staff in the block area) and through strategies such as 'girls' day' in the block area. These strategies may provide some encouragement and support for children to explore non-traditional play experiences.

Single-sex classes have been advocated by some educators as a means of addressing the poor performance of some boys in literacy and furthering boys' interest in areas such as English (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Training, 2002). Martino, Mills and Lingard (2005) argue that the strategy of single-sex groups, on its own, does not necessarily produce changes in educational outcomes for boys. Rather, changes in pedagogy, in combination with the contexts in which single-sex groups occur, are associated with differentiated outcomes. One of the advantages of single-sex classes is that educators are able to select content and teaching strategies that are likely to engage boys or girls. However, this can also occur in co-educational classes.

### Disadvantages of same-sex groups

Children tend to play with peers who are similar to them. One of the consequences is that gendered roles can become entrenched – with research suggesting that children who play mainly with same-sex peers exhibit more sex-stereotypical behaviour than those who play regularly with mixed-sex groups (Mehta & Strough, 2009). Same-sex groups do not recognise challenges for children who are unsure about their gender identities.

Same-sex groupings, such as 'girls' day' in the block area or 'boys' day' in the family area, aim to provide opportunities for girls as well as boys to engage in a wide range of experiences. However, such approaches do little to explore or challenge assumptions about gendered play or to encourage children to think about the traditional discourse of masculinity or femininity (Mac Naughton, 2000).

In schools, the organisation of separate classes for boys and girls assumes that all boys learn in the same way and are interested in the same topics and that girls do the same. This ignores the diversity among groups of boys and girls and the intersections of race, class and socioeconomic status with gender (Alloway & Gilbert, 2002). Same-sex classes can also work to reinforce dominant masculinities. Rather than separate classes and programs of study, curriculum and assessment that relates to children's real-world experiences and integrates out-of-school knowledge has the potential to support all children to engage in meaningful learning and to enhance the motivation, engagement and socio-academic achievement of all children (Munns et al., 2006).

### Responses to issues of gender

The learning environments we create have a substantial impact on how children experience gender. Children learn much about their gendered identities from educators and peers (Bigler, Hayes & Hamilton, 2013). Educators need to understand how gendered roles are constructed and how power relations impact on children's play and their social futures. Educators can work with children to help them analyse their own play and gendered relations and to deconstruct dominant discourses. Educators can plan experiences and resources that challenge the demarcation line that often exists between boys and girls. The encouragement of new dramatic play scripts that are inclusive of all children, the negotiation of roles and discussion of what is fair and unfair helps to re-create new possibilities. Educators can use instances of children crossing traditional gender boundaries as opportunities to open up discussions about the limitations of traditional gendered roles and the exploration of alternative practices.

Cultural-historical and postmodern theories argue that there is a complex interplay as gender interacts with children's linguistic, social and cultural backgrounds. Identities, including what it means to be a boy or a girl, are socially constructed. As boys take up masculine ways of being, they may see reading and writing as 'unmasculine', and as girls take up feminine ways of being, they may see mechanics and construction as unfeminine. Effective teaching practices challenge boys and girls to broaden the way they see themselves as learners, the ways they relate to others and the strategies they use for learning (Beecher, 2010). Educators need to work with children and families to challenge children's preconceptions, link the curriculum to all children's family and community experiences and take a critical perspective in analysing gender roles in popular media and educational texts.

### Making decisions about grouping

Effective pedagogy calls for a range of grouping strategies. A number of different strategies may be used within the one setting throughout the day.

When making decisions about grouping, staff, families and children should be involved. The following steps provide a guide to settings when investigating methods of grouping that may be appropriate to the setting:

- *Exploring alternatives* – brainstorming possible grouping strategies will assist the team to explore all alternatives.
- *Examining advantages and disadvantages* – each type of grouping can be explored from the perspectives of families, staff and children. This process enables the group to examine the myths and realities associated with different types of groupings and to discuss any concerns people might have. Ways of responding to concerns about different grouping strategies can be explored through resources such as readings and videos, as well as through networking with other settings.
- *Investigating different grouping strategies for different parts of the program* – it may be useful at this stage to investigate the use of different types of grouping for different times, such as mealtimes or adult-initiated small group times.
- *Exploring human resources* – utilising staff, support staff such as bilingual workers, family, community members and older children can be explored. Flexible staffing arrangements and the use of volunteers and systems such as buddying or peer mentoring can provide opportunities to implement new grouping strategies.
- *Examining constraints* – any constraints that may affect the implementation of different types of groupings should be addressed. This may include constraints regarding building or classroom design, curriculum resources or staff knowledge and confidence with new grouping strategies.
- *Developing a plan of action* – once the possibilities and constraints have been explored, decisions can be made about the implementation of grouping strategies. The development of a plan of action can assist with the process of implementing changes.
- *Evaluating effectiveness of grouping strategies* – it is important to engage in ongoing reflection on the effectiveness of grouping strategies being utilised and progress towards implementation of the plan of action.

### Communicating with families about grouping

It is essential that educators respect family values and expectations and include families in decision-making about grouping. At the same time, educators can provide families with information that outlines how the setting/school approaches children's learning and the role of grouping strategies. Ways of exploring issues with families may include:

- staff–parent interviews where individual children's experiences and learning at home and at the setting can be discussed
- meetings where the setting/school philosophy and program are discussed with families
- images of children interacting in a variety of groups such as mixed age and interest groups, with annotations to highlight children's learning

- programs displayed for parents so that they can read about what their child has been doing each day – throughout the whole day, not just at educator-initiated group time
- observations that highlight children's social interactions and prosocial behaviours available for families to read
- notes to families in communication books or diaries about what their child has been doing each day, with families encouraged to contribute comments
- articles in the newsletter and in the foyer about the benefits of particular types of grouping such as multi-age classes or same language groups
- workshops presented by staff on areas such as interest-based programming
- open door policy so that families can see first-hand how grouping strategies are working in the setting.

## Promoting positive interactions

Relationships and interactions provide a context for learning. However, educators have all experienced situations when interactions are not positive and relationships seem to be based on angst rather than support. How can they encourage children to engage in positive interactions? It is not suggested in this chapter that children should not engage in conflict or disagreement. Rather, it is suggested that there are positive ways of handling these situations. Disagreement and argument, supported by explanation and justification, can be a powerful learning context. This can only happen if children are encouraged to listen to and respect the views of others, expect to justify their position and recognise that people construct different understandings based on different perspectives and experiences. As outlined in Chapter 3, children are building understandings about themselves and others, and the basis of their actions, from an early age. However, it is unreasonable to expect them to have mastered many of the skills required for positive, complex interactions. The professional responsibilities of educators include not only creating a warm and welcoming emotional climate in settings, but also promoting positive interactions among all within that environment.

When educators provide an environment that promotes positive behaviours, they support each child to 'manage their own behaviour, respond appropriately to the behaviour of others and communicate effectively to resolve conflicts' (*National Quality Standard, Quality Area 5.2.2*).

Positive interactions are essential to developing a sense of identity and belonging. As explored in the *EYLF* (DEEWR, 2009, p. 20),

Children learn about themselves and construct their own identity within the context of their families and communities. This includes their relationships with other people, places and things and the actions and responses of others. [Identity] is shaped by experience. When children have positive experiences they develop an understanding of themselves as significant and respected, and feel a sense of belonging.

Educators have a major role to play in creating the positive and supportive climate that underpins such expectations. They have a responsibility to help children develop and demonstrate their social competence; in other words, to help children develop the skills required to interact successfully with other children and adults. For example, educators may need to support children in initiating and sustaining relationships with peers, interacting cooperatively and functioning as part of a group. Some children will need assistance in learning how to approach a group, how to articulate their feelings, preferences and reasons, and how to join in play. Educators can assist children to interpret what is going on in other children's play, see the situation from others' perspectives, choose an appropriate response and carry it out (Meece & Soderman, 2010). Educators can also assist children to develop **prosocial behaviours**. Prosocial behaviours include cooperation, caring behaviours and responding with concern to others' distress.

Educators foster children's social competence and promote prosocial behaviours when they:

- build secure relationships – when educators are sensitive and responsive to children, and respectful of children and their families, they engage in actions such as listening, conversing and attending to children. Educators' positive interactions with individuals help children feel valued (Driscoll & Pianta, 2010).

**Prosocial behaviours**  
Actions to help others,  
without the expectation  
of reward.

- model socially acceptable behaviours – children are likely to imitate the behaviours of respected models. When educators engage in interactions based on kindness and empathy, children are likely to do the same (Eisenberg, Fabes & Spinrad, 2006).
- establish prosocial expectations – children's behaviours will reflect educators' explicit expectations; that is, when they are clear about what is – or is not – acceptable behaviour. Strategies to help children to see the effects of their behaviour on others include role taking and perspective taking (Eisenberg et al., 2006).
- create a caring community of learners – children are encouraged to interact with peers and scaffolding is provided to support conflict resolution and interpersonal negotiation (Hyson & Taylor, 2011).
- support families – family interactions provide the basis for secure attachments and ongoing prosocial interactions (Hyson & Taylor, 2011).

Positive interactions are promoted in an environment where all participants feel valued. Just as the physical environment is instrumental in generating opportunities for interactions, so too is the emotional environment. A positive emotional environment (Kostelnik et al., 2015) helps children feel valued and respected and, through this, promotes children's self-regulation.

## Guidance instead of discipline

One of the features of a positive emotional environment involves educators talking with children about expectations. Sometimes this is done through the use of rules. Remarkably, rules tend to be overwhelmingly about what *not* to do, rather than expected behaviours; for example: 'No running' instead of 'Walking area'. Rules written in the negative tend to position educators as rule enforcers (Gartrell, 2012), whose role is to point out the mistakes children make. One problem with this is that it does not help children work out what mistakes they have made. A more positive approach can be to frame 'rules' in the positive and to include children. Example 9.6 contains one educator's reflection on her conversation with children about rules.

### Making the rules

Everything seemed really chaotic today. I had set out some new construction equipment and everyone wanted to play with it at once. There were squabbles, some shouting, and upset children when some missed out and others felt that they did not have a sufficient turn using the materials. I had put the new equipment in an area that had a sign with the rules marked clearly – the sign had the numeral 4, and a picture of four chairs around a table. Yet few children referred to the sign and of those who did, most were upset that others were not 'following the rules'.

I was relieved to get to group time when we could all catch our breath and discuss what had happened. Several children complained that 'it wasn't fair' that they did not get a turn, or that others did not follow the rules. Our discussion lasted for over 20 minutes and it became very clear to me that my idea of having established rules was not the same as the children's. Charlie reminded me that the rules on the sign 'weren't our rules', they were mine.

'So, what do we do now?' I asked the children. There were several suggestions, ranging from 'put the new equipment away and then no one can play with it' to 'just let us play with it when we are ready'. To gauge how the group felt, I asked them to vote. The majority voted for no rules. Perhaps sensing that I was a little uncomfortable with this, Erin offered 'maybe we can try it like that for a while'.

The next day I placed the new equipment out again, in the same place, but without the sign. While there were still some complaints, in the main I heard children reflecting on our

conversation from yesterday, with comments such as, 'we can decide', 'remember to take turns, so we get to keep the new equipment' and 'you can have a play now'.

What do I take from this experience? I am reminded to not think of myself as the only source of authority in the room and to consider how, when provided with the opportunity and trust, children can work with guidance rather than discipline. I do expect that there will be times when I need to step in, but am now reminded that children have the potential to learn to manage their own actions.

Positive environments tend to reflect a guidance approach, rather than a discipline approach, to promoting prosocial behaviours (Porter, 2016). Discipline is adult-centred, focuses on obedience, tends to punish misbehaviour and reward 'good' behaviour, and relies on rules. A discipline approach relies on adults to monitor and manage children's behaviour, and assumes that we all are motivated to act in certain ways because of the consequences we expect. In contrast, a guidance approach does not rely on punishments or rewards, but guides children to certain ways by focusing on internal motivation and control. Porter (2016) emphasises this change in power relationship as one of the key elements of a guidance approach: rather than adults controlling children, the aim is for adults to work *with* children to help them develop self-regulation, as well as respect for themselves and others.

In a guidance approach, adults model language and strategies, provide private feedback rather than public humiliation and engage children in general group discussions about positive social behaviours. Educators using a guidance approach are intent observers, considering how the environment sets the scene for some types of interactions. Helping children develop the capacity to cope with day-to-day stress and challenges, as well as the disposition for perseverance when faced with unfamiliar situations, promotes self-regulation and generates opportunities for ongoing success (DEEWR, 2009).

## Creating positive learning environments

The physical environment educators create has implications for children's interactions and behaviours. Learning environments that promote prosocial behaviours and collaborative learning have the following features:

- *Sufficient, open-ended and accessible resources.* Positive learning environments include resources that encourage active learning, involvement, negotiation and collaboration. Resources that are well organised, aesthetically displayed and easily accessible to children help them to be in control of their own learning and to become deeply engaged in experiences of interest. Educators who are sensitive to children's emerging social skills provide sufficient resources to alleviate disputes, while at the same time assisting children to negotiate with their peers.
- *Meaningful experiences that include appropriate levels of challenge.* Positive learning environments include experiences, learning centres and projects that facilitate in-depth investigations and promote collaborative learning. Experiences that provide appropriate levels of challenge and adult guidance promote success and build feelings of competence.
- *Large blocks of time that encourage children to engage in deep learning.* A flexible timetable with large chunks of overlapping time (Greenman et al., 2008) allows sufficient time for children to engage in deep learning and limits the frustrations associated with constantly needing to pack away and move on to a new activity. A flexible timetable with as few transitions, delays and interruptions as possible encourages a relaxed atmosphere. Effective educators acknowledge and respect children's feelings and their engagement in experiences. When young children are provided with sufficient time, they are also able to complete tasks such as getting dressed independently and they develop autonomy and positive self-esteem. Even in school settings, a creative organisation of the school day can provide large chunks of time to facilitate play sessions (Dockett & Fleer, 1999).

- *Sufficient space for children to explore and to form small groups.* Well-planned spaces can promote the sorts of behaviours educators want to encourage – whether these are quiet reflection, collaboration or creativity. Environments can be organised in ways that promote small group experiences and interactions, and that balance quiet and private spaces with more active spaces, enabling children to be together or alone. A positive social environment provides sufficient space to avoid congestion and competing demands. Careful planning of spaces and resources that take account of traffic flow and the amount of space needed for an experience can eliminate many frustrations and potential conflicts.
- *An aesthetically pleasing environment.* Environments for young children should be places of beauty (Greenman, 2005). Displays of children's work, photographs of children and their families and artefacts from children's families and communities can help create a sense of belonging and promote conversations among children.
- *A range of flexible groupings that support collaborative learning and the co-construction of knowledge.* Positive learning environments encourage small group collaborative interactions that, in turn, encourage perspective taking, negotiation, turn taking and cooperation in a realistic and meaningful context. A range of flexible grouping strategies throughout the day – including mixed age, friendship and interest groups – foster interactions and make it more likely that children are grouped at times with more socially competent children who can model prosocial behaviours and group relationships. Effective educators have realistic expectations of children and do not expect young children to sit and listen in large groups for long periods of time.
- *A community of care.* Responsive educators plan environments that respect children's competencies and emerging social skills and nurture a community of care.
- *Clear expectations.* Positive environments provide children with clear expectations about their behaviour and set clear and appropriate limits when necessary. Effective teachers have clear routines and procedures that support learning (Lyons, Ford & Arthur-Kelly, 2011). Educators who effectively guide children's behaviours provide consistent, predictable interactions and are sensitive to children's perspectives. Positive social environments also require educators to engage in open communication with children and families, to negotiate guidance policies and goals and to discuss appropriate behaviours with children. Although Professional Standard 4 of the *Australian Professional Standards for Teachers* uses the term 'managing challenging behaviours' rather than guiding behaviour, the intent is that educators provide clear guidelines and expectations in order to provide and maintain supportive and safe learning environments.
- *Meaningful feedback.* Effective educators give meaningful feedback and acknowledgement to children rather than empty praise. They model and scaffold prosocial behaviours such as alternative ways of solving problems and ways of dealing with frustrations. Educators have an important role in talking with children about their feelings, scaffolding children's problem-solving and conflict-resolution skills and assisting children to learn to appreciate diverse interaction styles and perspectives. The sharing of literature and group discussions can assist children to project into the feelings of others and to develop problem-solving skills in a less confronting environment than the playground.

## Conclusion and reflection

The basis for this chapter is that positive relationships are at the core of effective interactions with children and adults. Effective early childhood environments – be they prior-to-school settings, schools or outside school care settings – are those in which people feel valued, respected and accepted. Learning occurs within the contexts of positive relationships. Educators have a responsibility to be proactive in establishing and maintaining positive interactions with children, other professionals and families. The ways in which educators engage with children – the strategies they use – and the organisational policies and practices they implement – such as grouping strategies and approaches to guidance – are reflections of the relationships they have already established as well as the ones they wish to build.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- 1 During the day, take a moment to step out of the early childhood setting, classroom or school and then re-enter it as if it was the first time you had visited. Consider how the environment looks, the noise level and the way you feel upon entering. Is the environment warm and welcoming? Or overwhelming and chaotic? What can you do to make the environment more welcoming?
- 2 Using a guidance approach means that there is no place for rewards or punishments. What strategies, other than rewards and punishments, could be used to promote and guide positive interactions?
- 3 Consider the professional relationships that support you in your work. What is effective? How do you support other educators? What else could you do to extend your own professional learning or to extend the learning of others?

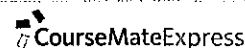
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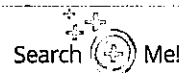
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