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Gloria Quinones  
*Monash University*

Avis Ridgway  
*Monash University*

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## Early Childhood Pre-Service Students' Transitioning into Discourses of Professional Practice

Gloria Quiñones  
Avis Ridgway  
Monash University

*Abstract: The focus of this study is to investigate early childhood students' discourses of play-based curriculum. In this paper we focus on how students made implicit and explicit links to the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF). Twenty-six early childhood students had volunteered their de-identified play and pedagogy assignments. We analysed their assignments and selected quotes that focused on their role as educators and related to the VEYLDF. We theorized the concept of conceptual reciprocity as students' understanding of their role in being sensitive and reciprocal with children and families. Our findings indicated that early childhood pre-service students shared a common language as they transitioned to professional practice. This concept links strongly to students and VEYLDF perspectives of pedagogical educators being effective and affectively relating to children. The study shows how pre-service students understand discourses that are in line with the VEYLDF and the National Quality (NQ) reform agenda where professionals must know how to communicate and interact with other cultures and show responsive engagement with children, families and wider society.*

### Introduction

We extend our earlier research (Ridgway and Quiñones, 2012) on early childhood students' conceptualisations of play-based curriculum by further examination of data, specifically looking at pre-service students' interpretations of the Australian - Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF) (DEECD formerly DEEWR, 2009) as they transition from being pre-service students to professional educators and potential early childhood leaders. Our initial research indicated that when pre-service students were set the task of developing a model of play and pedagogy it supported their analysis of what pedagogical play could mean in practice, and permitted them to imagine their roles as future teachers and leaders in the field.

Having an awareness of how young children's learning and development can occur through play based curriculum (such as the VEYLDF represents), implies a need for our pre-service students to familiarise themselves with new discourses in the early childhood profession.

Entering the discourses of professional practice through becoming familiar with the VEYLDF gives capacity for professional conversations and supports pre-service students' understanding of how young children learn and develop and become citizens of their country, community and family. For early childhood pre-service students to do this requires building a sensitive awareness of the many communicative languages of children by paying close attention to the complex interactions that occur between child, situational context, teacher and family. Such awareness is important for thinking about the complexity of pre-service students' pedagogical roles in leading children's play in the varied early childhood services and educational settings they may find themselves later employed in. Further, early childhood educators also need to be aware of the wider community and the inclusion of diverse communities in their pedagogies as they transition into the discourses of professional practice.

Relating theory to practice conceptually is a critical next step to take in any undergraduate student education course. The demand for taking this next step arose for our pre-service students in their final assignment. The final assignment was a culmination of their year's study and experience. It involved creating a conceptual model of pedagogical play and justifying that model through discussion on how it would be put into practice. Taking this final step, we discovered, involved pre-service students' capacity to meaningfully use and understand the professional discourse expressed in the relevant national framework (VEYLDF). For their pedagogical play model to be useful, each student needed to show how they could bring together the enactment of the VEYLDF principles and practices with some anticipated outcomes.

This paper focuses on how our pre-service students used the VEYLDF discourse implicitly and explicitly to conceptualize their ideas about play having pedagogical potential. We examined how they began their personal transitions into professional practice. We recognised that by re-situating themselves as being embodied, connected, moving into action, responding spontaneously and using their own agentic capacities in order to flow with children's, families, communities, personal, and political agendas, pre-service students were expressing new knowledge. This new knowledge uses a discourse that reflects a special kind of relationship building that began to develop in their transition into professional practice. Further, early childhood educators also need to be aware of the wider community and the inclusion of diverse communities in their pedagogies as they transition into the discourses of professional practice.

We aim to give voice to pre-service students who, in their transitions to professional life, are learning to use a new pedagogical discourse that will frame how they relate to children, families, communities and teaching. We provide evidence of their efforts in realising the complexity of their role through improvisation of teaching moments; in framing learning experiences based on children's interests; and in seeing children as creative actors in shared play, thereby honoring their sociocultural identities. Our data led us to introduce the term *conceptual reciprocity* to describe the special kind of relationship built, when a state of re-situated embodiment in pedagogical play is realised in a generative, affective relationship, and used as a shared place of learning and development by teachers, children and families. We identify pre-service students' use of *conceptual reciprocity* as they enact and engage in their complex pedagogical roles. Pre-service students have understood it as creating a meaningful environment for children and acknowledging the communities children bring to the centers. Their discussions focus on the complexity of how to be reciprocal with children.

## Theoretical Considerations

Cultural-historical theory acknowledges how individual development occurs in participation with communities and these communities in turn, are influenced by the cultural and historical contexts of which they are part (Schousboe & Winther – Lindqvist, 2013). Cultural historical theory provides a foundation for examining affect and intellect in relation to lived experiences. Mahn and John Steiner (2002) discuss Vygotsky's earlier exploration of '*the dialectical relationship between thought, affect, language, and consciousness*' (p.2) for lending support to others to build confidence. They refer to this notion as being a gift of confidence for those they work with collaboratively. The intensity of pre-service student collaborations is a dynamic force as it moves across, off and on campus experiences, to form a new professional space in which the development of *conceptual reciprocity* as a pedagogical approach can be used for supporting academic learning through joint endeavor.

In our findings pre-service students used discourses that emphasized the complexity of finding ways of being reciprocal with children, families and educators. We theorized conceptual reciprocity as pre-service students conceptual understanding of theory and practice founded through the multiple common discourses expressed while being University students and during professional placement time.

Focusing on both pre-service students' performed activity and their felt experiences in that activity, that Shotter (2012) refers to, we find planned inter-actions are explicitly identified and expressed using VEYLDF discourse. We also find as Shotter (2012) did, implicitly expressed attention is given to the affective dimension of pedagogical play activity, about which pre-service students are less consciously aware. The literature suggests that it is important for teacher preparation to analyse their complex understandings of how they express their beliefs for example in pedagogical play (Sherwood & Reifel, 2010). We add in our research to this complexity by analyzing their discourses as they transition from being students to being professional educators.

Barad (2007, cited in Shotter, 2012) suggests, '*A performative understanding of scientific practices, for example, takes account of the fact that knowing does not come from standing at a distance and representing but rather from a direct material engagement with the world*' (p.49). In relation to the lived experiences of pre-service students directly engaging with their material worlds of practice in the ECEC field, our data indicate increased attention is given to enactment of imagined roles. The material and affective connections made in practice, can support competencies: '*we do not obtain knowledge by standing outside of the world; we know because 'we' are of the world. We are part of the world in its differential becoming*' (Barad, 2007, p.139 cited in Shotter 2012, p.1). When engaged with mentored practice in ECEC, pre-service students started to re-situate themselves and act according to material surroundings and personal intentions. Their choices about what to give attention to and what to '*enact*' are made (Shotter, 2012).

Further to this, the kind of active relational engagement suggested earlier that involves *conceptual reciprocity* (Ridgway, Quiñones & Li, 2015), is formed when a professional discourse is lived in, acted upon and felt. As Shotter notes; '*the meaningfulness of our language does not initially depend on its systematicity, but on our spontaneous, living, bodily responsiveness to the others and othernesses around us*' (Shotter, 2003, p.435). Therefore becoming familiar with the professional discourses of early childhood requires performing both with and within them. The suggested VEYLDF principles and practices influence a re-thinking of the EC profession and require a consequent re-situating of self in the current Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) professional discourses. Re-situating self is therefore a vital component in the formative training of pre-service students in ECEC and learning to relate meaningfully to the common language that comprises the mandated VEYLDF framework is a first step in doing this.

The ECEC discourse as expressed in the VEYLDF is now understood as a starting point for bringing cohesion and quality to all children participating in early childhood education and care services. Other researchers are also questioning and discussing why pre-service students need theoretical and practical knowledge about children's learning and development, for example, when working with infants and toddlers (Garvis, Lemon, Pendergast & Rim, 2013) and why pre-service teachers' beliefs about play need to be examined more closely (Sherwood & Reifel, 2010).

In Monash University's 2011 Early Years Learning Framework Baseline Study Report for Department of Education Employment and Work Relations (DEEWR), on uptake of the EYLF throughout Australia, an important question was asked: '*What existing discourses does the profession use to name their principles, practice, and the outcomes that they work towards?*' (p.6). This report noted that '*Child development discourse relies on both maturational/biological and sociological accounts. Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) was clearly in evidence*' (2011 p.7). It became evident then, that the broader ECEC community discourse was undergoing a transition, one where those involved needed to undertake professional conversations in a common language, in order to share ideas about children's learning and development.

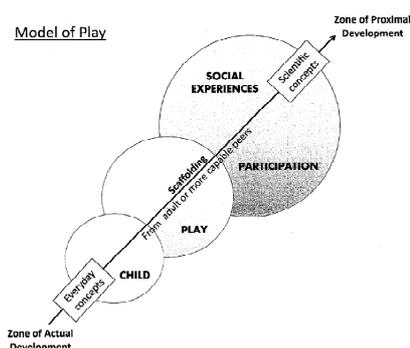
We examine how pre-service students implicitly and explicitly link their practice (practicum) experiences to theoretical understandings. Through this exercise we bring greater awareness of how our tertiary educator roles also require dynamic reconceptualisation as we reflect on pre-service students individually and as a group who share and live common discourses. In our analysis we examine how pre-service students try to link their pedagogical play model to practices when using the VEYLDF discourse.

## Methodological Considerations

New field research experiences (2014) for the Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority (VCAA,) and involvement in writing for published work on visual methodology (Fleer & Ridgway 2014; Quiñones, 2014; Li, 2014; Ridgway, 2014) has led to dialectical thinking about the dynamic and often contradictory processes. The processes involved in the relationships between pre-service students, their lecturers, mentor teachers, practicum experiences and the mandated VEYLDF (and EYLF) are currently central to the development of quality services for all staff, children and families engaged in the field of ECEC service provision.

In undertaking these recent experiences we realised the important struggle that is currently happening with efforts to implement and establish a common discourse for those such as maternal and child health nurses and local government project officers working in the wider ECEC field. Whilst preparing case study notes and syntheses (VCAA, 2014) we were prompted to examine afresh how our pre-service students were using the VEYLDF discourse whilst undertaking their studies in Play and Pedagogy. We wondered what forms of both explicit and implicit use of the VEYLDF discourse were being expressed. By linking the glossary of terms identified clearly in the VEYLDF with the common language used by pre-service students we began a shared dialogue commentary that involved each researcher independently selecting quotes identifying elements of pedagogical play. We then exchanged a document with students' quotes and shared ideas and our views of student discussions. Each of us offered and added interpretation to what students explained and then recorded our interpretations. We found this enriched our data analysis. This exchange also gave us insight into, and appreciation of, the importance for pre-service students to really understand the new early childhood education and care discourse and to be able to use it effectively with vitality, enthusiasm and purpose, in future professional conversations.

In our original study, pre-service students were approached to participate the week before final Semester ended (Ridgway & Quiñones, 2012). Those interested, volunteered permission by email after their work had been assessed and returned. Twenty-six students from our fourth year Play and Pedagogy unit volunteered play model assignments, which were then de-identified as Student 1 (S1) to Student 26 (S26). Data were read together, and in line with using a cultural-historical approach (described more fully following this section) we entered a shared dialogue commentary through email that enabled final identification of 49 conceptual elements in pre-service students' play models.



**Figure 1: Pre-service student example Model of Play**

Pre-service students created models of play and in their assignment they explained how their model linked to theoretical ideas. For example, in the Fig. 1 model of play, student 20 explained how children learn and acquire knowledge through participation in social practices and interactions with others. Student 20 model aligns with cultural – historical theory in that it was used to frame our play and pedagogy unit.

From the students' models we generated a coded reference table identifying the theoretical concepts and most importantly for this paper, we noted in particular the common language (play discourse) used by pre-service students to elaborate on their concept diagrams/play models.

Sifting through the general findings sections of the pre-service students' assignments we found both explicit and implicit discourse examples and listed these, then aligned them with the VEYLDF glossary terms. In doing so we were able to shed light on how the pre-service students were making sense of the ECEC discourse. In reviewing our pre-service students play and pedagogy models and aligning them with their actual practice examples, we noted some rhetorical and assumed understandings evident in the language used. In the data the discourse used such as 'intentional teaching', 'mediating role' and 'open ended play', reflected the complex roles pre-service students were grappling with. These terms however were scattered throughout assignments with no meaningful explanation. For this reason we looked carefully to find if the language pre-service students had used in describing their ideal model, was also used in their discussion of practice examples. In the pre-service students' discussion of applying their play model in practice, we expected the VEYLDF discourse to be evident or made clear and it was. Data were carefully examined for both explicit and implicit reference to the VEYLDF and this discourse analysis is shown in Tab. 1.

We have theorized the playful moment of exchange where we see how reciprocity can form into a shared intention as 'conceptual reciprocity' (Ridgway, Quiñones, Li, 2015). For *conceptual reciprocity* to be used as an affective and effective pedagogical practice in early childhood education and care, an appreciative understanding of how to locate and attune to the child's perspective is critical. We therefore sought to find pre-service students' references to, and interpretations of, what the child's perspective might be in terms of influencing their pedagogical practice.

## Analysis of Findings

We now examine pre-service students' use of ECEC discourse in their final assignment examples. We sought to identify explicit and implicit discourse used by pre-service students to provide evidence of early childhood students' creative interpretations of the curriculum framework. In any creative interpretation, pre-service students may be seen as re-positioning themselves in an effort to imagine their future professional roles in early childhood education and care.

Our analysis focused on looking at how students conceptualized play as pedagogical and how they saw their role with children. We also focused discussion on how students found creating significant relationships with children in play, and with parents and the wider community important. This creation of significant relationships has been theorized as conceptual reciprocity.

For this analysis we looked into the main findings in the pre-service students' volunteered assignments. We chose any explicit links they made to glossary terms listed in VEYLDF and took this as evidence of entering the framework's stated discourse. Two examples here show pre-service students who made explicit links to the VEYLDF in their general discussion: S14 referred to *Understanding the bigger picture of early childhood professional roles* (VEYLDF, pp. 38 - 39) and S2 noted *Key discipline specific resources* from (VEYLDF, pp.44 - 46). In addition we realised other pre-service students didn't quote directly from the framework but instead, made a more implicit reference to it. Implicit meanings are in some ways more powerful than explicit statements as implicit meanings can be felt and experienced (Shotter, 2012).

Through the analysis of discourses of pedagogical play we aim to capture how pre-service students use their own common language to transverse explicit and implicit discourses situated in their practice and reveal the influences of theory and curriculum in their understanding.

## Main Findings

The following Tab. 1 left column shows pre-service students' implicit discourse with links to explicit glossary terms referenced in the VEYLDF- Appendix 5 (pp. 51-53) in right column.

| <b>Implicit pre-service students' discourse related to VEYLDF</b> | <b>Explicit professional discourse used in glossary of VEYLDF</b>   |
|---|---|
| <i>Non threatening environments</i>                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communities- share a common purpose</li> <li>• Wellbeing- basic needs met happiness satisfaction</li> </ul>  |
| <i>The wholeness of an interest</i>                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involvement - whole hearted mental activity</li> </ul>   |
| <i>In a supported environment</i>                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Active involvement in learning- make connections</li> <li>• Agency - make choices and decisions</li> <li>• Inclusion- recognised and valued, equitable access</li> <li>• Attunement –alignment of states of mind, affect is communicated</li> <li>• Shared sustained conversations- solve a problem, extend ideas</li> </ul>   |
| <i>Actively engage</i>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Active involvement in learning- explore, interact, make meaning, negotiate</li> <li>• Attend- being attentive and aware</li> </ul>   |
| <i>Learn through play</i>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pedagogy- Early Childhood professional practice building and nurturing relationships</li> <li>• Spirituality- sense of awe and wonder the exploration of being and knowing</li> <li>• UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) – participating in their social worlds through their relationships with others including: protection against discrimination – opportunities for play, learning and education... (p.53) (<i>We note this is the only time the word play is used in the entire glossary</i>)</li> <li>• Wellbeing – effective social functioning, dispositions of optimism, openness, curiosity and resilience (p.53)</li> </ul> |
| <i>Develop holistically</i>                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multidisciplinary approaches – coordinated services for children and families</li> <li>• Transitions – moving between a range of different settings</li> <li>• Texts – multimodal, integrating images, written words and/or sound (p.52)</li> </ul>  |
| <i>Transdisciplinary themes</i>                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Literacy</li> <li>• Multidisciplinary approaches</li> <li>• Numeracy</li> <li>• Transitions</li> <li>• Technologies</li> </ul>   |

**Table 1: Transversing – implicit and explicit VEYLDF discourse**

Tab.1 exemplifies the transverse nature of implicit and explicit discourses and from this we can begin to identify in closer detail how pre-service students creatively re-work and interpret the VEYLDF framework discourse in order to re- situate themselves for future professional conversations and build teacher identity. It is evident in this re-alignment and attunement to personal experiences, that pre-service students are in the process of transforming professional conversations and understandings of the VEYLDF discourse in order to encompass, embody, and embrace their future teacher identity in a way that is personally meaningful for them.

We consider the question of how did pre-service students use the framework explicitly and literally and what quotes, if any, do they use from the VEYLDF. In our analysis of pre-service students' assignment data we focused on analyzing the transitioning discourses that they had of themselves as educators, and how they understood the notion of conceptual reciprocity in relation to their active engagement with children as they used the VEYLDF.

### **Discourses of Conceptual Reciprocity in a Supportive Environment and Active Engagement**

Several students made explicit links (see tab.1 headings) to the VEYLDF to support their views on how children need a supportive environment to learn and how educators need to be actively engaged in children's play.

Pre-service students are giving evidence of making links to their own desired pedagogy and acknowledging how children can be free while at the same time they can be engaged. Student 5 acknowledges there should be a balance between free play and the educator engaging with children. S5 commented on three important explicit notions from the framework: wellbeing, improvisation of teaching moments, and holistic development in learning through play.

In terms of professional discourse it is useful to note that S5 discusses ways to extend children's thinking through involving herself in further interaction, thereby offering an example of pre-service students' use of *conceptual reciprocity*. Student 5 writes:

*The role of the early childhood educator is that of facilitator, where they are available to be engaging in conversations with children to extend their thinking; where they create interesting learning environments for children to explore; where they are able to improvise teaching moments and enable continuity in children's learning; where they encourage and model positive relations with others (VEYLDF, 2009). From my experiences with early childhood educators, I see that they have put in a tremendous amount of work each day interacting with children and noting down observations. This is just so that they understand each child well enough to plan for creating learning opportunities within the environment, keeping in mind the importance of children's wellbeing too.*

Student 5's active reference to placing children's interests at the forefront for developing in particular the child's well-being, is significant for creating *conceptual reciprocity*, which as discussed earlier, is an affective, pedagogically sound support. S5's discourse of practice includes nurturing children's learning through attention given to provision of interesting learning environments, the improvisation of teaching moments, and noting the importance of continuity for meaningful learning. This explanation is explicitly linked to VEYLDF (2009) that invites educators to create a safe and stimulating environment to deepen children's knowledge and understandings. This student extends this idea by saying how it also includes careful observation, planning and interacting with children.

Student 16 has carefully analysed how the child's perspective impacts on how the environment is being organized by the educators. She explains that she has learned through different placements how in structured programs, children were rarely active in playing and participating. Her most recent placement was about children being active participants in their learning and the role of educators was about participating with children and being involved in their play. These activities show implicit links to the VEYLDF.

In our theorization of *conceptual reciprocity*, we argue that children and educators need to collaborate and be responsive to developing purpose/intention with children's learning. Student 16 suggests educators need to be in a responsive relationship with children as they actively participate. Through her analysis of the difference between programs, S16 suggests children should not be seen as passive and educators shouldn't plan without children's input. Her view is that children need to

make their own decision about what to learn and play and educators need to be involved in accounting for children's agendas.

*As I reflect, there are two particular placements which come to mind that have left their mark. The first placement I am thinking of stays with me as I remember the practices were ones that I did not agree with and I recall thinking that 'this is not how I want to do things'. At this preschool the program was very structured. The children had 'work' to do and the teacher would tell the children what was expected at an activity, for example they had to draw a certain object. The staff would rarely participate with the children in their play. Instead they would observe and make sure the children were using the materials correctly, for example holding the pencil correctly when drawing.*

*The second placement that has left its mark is my most recent placement. This experience was truly refreshing. The preschool's practices reflected my own personal values and beliefs about teaching and learning. The children were viewed as unique and capable individuals and were active participants in their learning. The program was open ended, play based and staff got involved and participated in the experiences with the children. Overall it was great to work with professionals who share the same philosophy as me.*

Student 16 uncovers the dilemmas and dynamics of transitioning into professional practice by sharing the idea that when one's own values and beliefs are reflected in the practices, the teacher's and children's intentions merge unto a unified meaningful learning landscape.

Student 8 provides a discourse around role play, and a view that really encompasses the child's perspective. In this example, the notion of *conceptual reciprocity* is evident implicitly in the collaborations and positive relationships mentioned. S8 chooses a topic of enquiry (sleep) that becomes highly important for children's learning and the discourse she uses in her discussion of the practical work, reflects a fully organised pre-service student interpreting the VEYLDF meaningfully.

*Next, I began thinking broadly about ways to incorporate sleep into my week in control. "the adult has a role in extending it in whichever way they see fit to extend it" (Fleer, 2010, p.36). I decided to implement through sustained shared thinking using role play from the child's perspective during group meetings. This method of teaching allowed the children to be a part of the activity enriching the experience and making it their own. Collaboratively, role play engaged children in scenarios that scaffolded their understandings of the topic of inquiry sleep, by carefully listening to children's attempts and expanding their thinking through acting and questioning. The children were enthusiastic about the role play activity.*

S8 shows implicit use of *conceptual reciprocity* in the role play described above and she brings to attention the notions of careful listening and actively responding to children's thinking. Reciprocity is more than a bi-directional act; it forms within relational purposeful action between child/ren and adult/s.

In addition S8 offers a personal interpretation of the VEYLDF that reflects a professional positioning which shows how she transitions through to professional identity by living with a contradictory harmony of her own ideas. The process involved in seeking teacher identity comes hand in hand with varied interpretations of the role of the teacher in the VEYLDF (2009) as it is explained that the educator also needs to enjoy children's achievements and this links to what the student says on being enthusiastic about children's role play activity. This relates to outcome one in VEYLDF (2009) where, by being enthusiastic, educators can develop in children, a strong sense of identity and at the same time add to their own identity through being re-positioned in the interaction.

S8 notes that there is a child's perspective to be understood in teaching however the scene for learning and development of the child is set by the teacher's skill and capacity to respond and relate.

*From a child's perspective positive relationships are a mandatory necessity in order to belong, be and become in their development. Critically evaluating observations both in my work place and on placement, reveals teachers influence the foundation of a child's eagerness and ability to learn, my model of play suggests teachers are skilled at constructing scaffolds for children to acquire new knowledge.*

S8 then goes to another reading and the complexity of teasing out relationships becomes clearer in the rhetoric of quality assurance.

*"The Quality of an Educator is fundamental as the teacher creates the setting, dynamics and temperament of children within the educational context: the teacher is the manager of the conditions of learning." (Gagne, 1970, as cited in McLachlan, Fler & Edwards, 2010, p.16). Children learn the most in early years, it's a crucial stage where important foundations skills are grounded for life, it's essential as leading mentors communicate the importance of play in children's learning and to listen and foster respectful relationships, to effectively allow children to invite the mediating role for teacher into their interactions throughout play.*

In summary, S8's transition to professional discourse work reflects mixed interpretations of the teacher's role and also highlights the complexity of finding a common discourse for teacher identity, child development and learning.

Similar to S8, S26 discusses the importance of being an active educator who engages with, and is responsive to, children. In her explanation of her model she directly acknowledges the importance of play and VEYLDF curriculum. She focuses on the social worlds of children which for her relate to a tapestry of ideas including the educator's imagination where mixing, blending interests and perceptions, and refining knowledge of children, can happen. She explains how this takes careful attention from the educator who draws on her knowledge and ability to imagine.

*"The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia describes play learning as 'a context for learning through which children organize and make sense of their social worlds, as they engage actively with people, objects and representations.' (DEEWR, 2009, p.6). Further, the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (DEECD, 2009) states that: 'play is essential to stimulate and integrate a wide range of children's intellectual, physical social and creative abilities; (p.12) and defines the effective educator as responsive to and supportive of play, using combination of child-directed play, guided play and adult led learning (p.12).*

*As effective educators, we acknowledge the child's perspective when we honor their sociocultural context of the child using a collaborative approach to shared curriculum design, respecting family practice and beliefs, and making learning relevant to same. We create an environment that enables the formation of effective relationships by providing multiple opportunities for creativity and imaginative play, choices within play and teacher-led activities to develop conceptual play. The practical 'mixing' and 'blending' of knowledge, interests and perceptions within a supportive framework of inclusive relationships and a diverse environment form a significant part of my model of play.*

Student 26 explains how her views have changed from being a TAFE student to a University student. She says she has learnt the importance of materials in children's play however she also noted being a responsive educator. She suggests that this responsive approach involves temporal and spatial dimensions and continuously progressive and deeper conversations with children. These conversations are seen as imaginative, where the educator has to understand the child's imagination and what they want to design, for the educator to make it happen.

*My diploma education took place when the approach of materials doing the teaching was strongly advocated, and although I now have further knowledge of the benefits of a responsive approach, it is something that I need to be continually conscious of in order to alter my pedagogical methods. Through deeper conversations and response I was able to assist the child to make some progress in his learning and he was able to recognize how a design concept can be put into real place (“I think your plan is working”). This observation illustrates that the increased responsiveness of the educators to the child’s previous experience and knowledge along with further conversation can extend learning.*

For this student being responsive is very complex as she makes sense of what this is. This responsiveness not only involves conversations with children, but further extends through responsiveness and sensitivity by carefully reading what children are thinking. It can be seen that this pre-service-student has a strong image of children. As mentioned in the VEYLDF (2009) children are confident and involved learners and a skilful teacher is one that is able to take up their perspective through careful reading of what they might be thinking or feeling. This also links to our theorization of conceptual reciprocity.

### **Discourses of Conceptual Reciprocity where Children Develop Wholistically**

The VEYLDF has multidisciplinary approaches to account for how children develop wholistically through coordinated services for children and families. The following pre-service student quotes describe the transitions – moving between a range of different settings that children experience.

For Student 11 the importance of meaningful relationships between educators and children in institutional practices is the focus. She mentions ‘responsiveness’ and uses a quote taken from the framework p.15 where she notes shared decisions, respect and trust. S11 critiques her role and uses reflection both of which form part of the VEYLDF practice principles (DEECD formerly DEEWR, 2009). She stresses the importance of interactions with mentor teachers, finding value in having highly experienced professional conversation; the kind of conversational discourse required for transitioning into a teaching role in ECEC, and in this case, Long Day Care. This student has carefully thought about effective transitioning as explained in the VEYLDF (2009) and considers the value of conversations as important in these transition periods of change; not only do children need to feel safe and secure while transitioning but interactions with mentor teachers are important for the student transitioning into professional practice.

When S11 suggests that question making (or forming) needs practice, it is evident she gives forethought and skill by noting the effects of her own responsiveness- trust, respect. She makes an explicit link to VEYLDF principles for learning and development – showing how she is being collaborative, effective and reflective through attending to the notion of responsiveness. S11 notes:

*When referring to her adaptation of Hedegaard’s model, Fler (2010, p.191) describes institution as “places and spaces, organized within society, that have their own procedures, rules and traditions for daily practices”. I have formed this model of play in order to consider the institutional practices of my workplace (a 60 place Long Day Care Centre for children 0-6 years of age) with a focus on the importance of meaningful relationships between Educators and Children. That is; for children to successfully further their development, a relationship of “responsiveness” needs to exist between Educator and the Child for them “to learn together and share decisions, respect and trust” (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009, p.15).*

Student S3 conceptualizes her relationships as dynamic and involving not only children but families and communities. In her role as the educator, S3 explains the complexity of her role as an educator by showing how she needs to give opportunities for spontaneous play and from these learn to frame and support children's learning. Implicit links are made to VEYLDF as she explains how an educator needs to deliver intentional plans and engage in play curriculum. She explains in her model how this can be done through having open ended activities, framing play so children can engage in meaningful play scenarios and being intentional throughout these different platforms.

*I understand the conceptualizing of an ideal play model has serious implications for early childhood pedagogy and optimal educational opportunities for young children in reaching their full potential. Through the development and implementation of a formatted play model as a single pedagogical platform that encompasses a circular motion of three play approaches open ended, framed and modeled becomes to the educator a transformation of participation via a commitment to furthering knowledge and pedagogical practice that is active, ongoing and supportive towards children's engagement in relevant and meaningful play scenario. Findings from this approach suggest intentional teaching and play based learning can be framed according to the integration of three play types. Movement towards this form of play based curriculum signifies unity through a dynamic relationship between children, families, preschool, and community. Cultivating it becomes towards communication and the learning of specific skills and concepts that nurture children's development of more mature forms of play and higher order thinking. Most importantly this approach is aligned with research and theories that postulate benefits of play and pedagogy that is bidirectional and whereby educators deliver integrated pedagogies that are intentionally planned whilst engaging play curriculum that is still generated from children's spontaneous interest and activities.*

Student 22 made explicit links to VEYLDF showing the importance of having partnerships and relationships between children and their families to support children's learning. This student shows the importance of engaging with families to support her work with children. As stated in the VEYLDF (2009), educators need to understand, support and respect families and children for children to expand or advance their learning and development at home and in their community.

*I believe my model of play to be pedagogically sound as it emphasizes the importance of relationships between teachers, students and their families. The Victorian Early Years Learning Frameworks tell us that "children's learning and development is advanced when they are provided with opportunities, support, engagement within their families and in partnership with early childhood professionals" (State of Victoria, p. 9). It also recognizes that the practice principles, which incorporate these relationships, "are based on the latest international evidence about the best ways to support children's learning" (State of Victoria, p.9).*

Pre-service student interpretations suggest they are implicitly and explicitly using the VEYLDF to explain the importance of *conceptual reciprocity* which involves responsiveness to the whole situational context where interaction with children is happening. This involves engagement with families and creating community partnerships with early childhood professionals to support children's learning.

## Conclusion

We have theorized conceptual reciprocity in relation to pre-service students' discourses about what their pedagogical role is and how this links to the VEYLDF. For *conceptual reciprocity*

to be used as an affective and effective pedagogical practice in ECEC, an appreciative understanding of how to locate and attune to the child’s perspective is critical.

We found pre-service students’ discourses show an awareness of their complex roles and common language as they transition to professional practice. Their pedagogical role includes understanding children’s environment and how relationships need to be purposeful for children’s learning. Tab. 2 summarises pre-service student views linked to our notion of conceptual reciprocity.

| Conceptual Reciprocity in relation to the VEYLDF  | Student Discourses related to VEYLDF  |
|---|---|
| <i>Conceptual reciprocity</i> as form of the educator’s appreciation and understanding of children’s learning environment.  | Pre-service student discourses related to understanding children well to create a meaningful environment.   |
| <i>Conceptual reciprocity</i> involves responsiveness to the whole situational context where interaction with children is happening.  | Pre-service student discourses related to acknowledging children’s sociocultural contexts and respecting different family beliefs and practices.<br>Pre-service student relationships are dynamic as they are seen in relation to parents, children and other educators.  |
| <i>Conceptual reciprocity</i> involves careful listening and actively responding to children’s thinking and perspective. Reciprocity is more than a bi-directional act, it forms within relational purposeful action between child/ren and adult/s. | Pre-service student discourses relate to providing effective, creative and affective relationships with children. Reciprocity in play was seen as giving choices to children and teacher-led activities though mixing and blending knowledge between what children know and educators’ extension of this.<br>Pre-service students suggest play should be collaborative where educators expand children’s knowledge through careful listening. |
| <i>Conceptual reciprocity</i> is about educators acknowledging and working with the child’s intentions, agenda and perspective.   | Pre-service student discourses focus on seeing children as unique, capable and active participants in learning.   |

**Table 2: Professional Discourses that lead to Conceptual Reciprocity**

Most of our pre-service students are able to recognise (as they transition to their professional life) that they can be active and skillful educators when interacting with children while they play. They are able to affectively support children and their families in creative ways and potentially see how and *what the future can become* through extending children’s knowledge of the world – *with children*. This future encompasses pre-service students imaginatively and affectively seeing who they will become and what kind of teacher they want to be. Reciprocity is an essential element in their interactions with children as they express intention and purposeful action when being with children.

Pre-service students are able to be active and lead children’s learning through careful listening, taking children’s perspective and being aware of supporting children. Through analyzing their ideas on how they see their pedagogical roles in play we can see in the way they conceptualize their models that they are able to reflect on how taking children’s perspective involves conceptual reciprocity. Educators have complex roles- participating, being involved, looking at children as a whole, collaborating and reflecting, and overall being reciprocal with children’s agenda and ways of being. This is understood in the common language that students are expressing through new knowledge which enables them to situate themselves within the VEYLDF discourse and conceptualize their pedagogical roles.

We can see our new concept (conceptual reciprocity) is linked to the discourse that pre-service students use. We suggest that *conceptual reciprocity* brings to pre-service student relations

with children and others, a new tool for developing an active and generative sensibility towards pedagogical activity and professional identity. This highly developed form of reciprocity has the power to engage, nurture and sustain learning. When used wholeheartedly and embodied in shared intentions of teachers with children, *conceptual reciprocity* forms an important part in the process of transitioning into the discourses of professional practice.

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