

# How theories inform our work in the early childhood sector

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Working in the early childhood sector is exciting for many reasons – not least that we can draw from numerous theories to inform our work. As outlined in the Early Years Learning Framework V2.0 (Australian Government Department of Education 2022), these cover developmental, sociocultural, practice, critical, and feminist and poststructuralist theories, place-based sciences, as well as ancestral knowledges that inform ways of knowing, being and doing. Use the following questions related to each of these theories to reflect on the ways of working with young children and their families that you value. Think about which theories you most align with, which prompt you to think more about your pedagogical practices in childcare and which challenge the way you currently work.

## Developmental theories

- ✦ How do my views of children's development impact on my practices and program?
- ✦ How do I support the child to discover and construct their own meanings?
- ✦ How does my program respond to children's different interests and needs?
- ✦ When I observe children, what aspects of their development do I focus on? Why?

## Sociocultural theories

- ✦ How often do I think about what children may learn from my interactions with them?
- ✦ How often do I listen to children as a way of understanding and respecting their learning?
- ✦ In what ways do I attempt to bring the wider community into my programming?
- ✦ What role or roles do adults play in children's learning?

## Practice theories

- ✦ When observing children, what do I notice about their interactions with resources and materials?
- ✦ How would I define the affordances that my indoor and outdoor environments offer?
- ✦ How does the context I work in – such as the cultural-discursive, social-political and material-economic arrangements – influence my practices?
- ✦ Have I ever considered how social life and learning are produced and reproduced in my practices?

## Ancestral knowledges

- ✦ How does our early childhood service show respect for ancestral knowledges?
- ✦ How can I authentically include ancestral knowledges and ways of being and doing?
- ✦ How can I find out about local protocols when engaging with an Indigenous community?
- ✦ What are some ways in which I can build ongoing relationships with the local Indigenous community and Elders to benefit the children I teach?

## Place-based sciences

- ✦ How do community, culture, curriculum and climate influence my practice values?
- ✦ What is my vision for young children and natural spaces?
- ✦ In what ways do I connect the children to their local community?
- ✦ Does our service focus on environmental sustainability? Are children involved in decision-making processes about waste and recycling?

## Critical theories

- ✦ How do I begin to identify and challenge taken-for-granted practices and aspects of the program that are inequitable for children and their families?
- ✦ How can I create a challenging democracy in my early childhood program that includes the views of children?
- ✦ Which decisions about their day can children have input into?
- ✦ How do the socialised norms guide ways of behaving and thinking in our service?

## Feminist and poststructuralist theories

- ✦ In what ways do my colleagues and I nurture each child's construction of a knowledgeable, confident self-concept and group identity?
- ✦ How do I cater for different ways in which children think and learn?
- ✦ When I am planning experiences for the children, do I consider the subjective and incomplete nature of knowledge and ways of knowing?
- ✦ In my programming, have I ever considered the difference between knowing 'truth' and knowing 'knowledge'?

Reference: Australian Government Department of Education (2022) *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (V2.0)*. Australian Government Department of Education for the Ministerial Council.