Report of the

Developmental Learning Outcomes Trial 2001

In 2001 a group of thirteen preschools in the Barossa Gawler District undertook a project to trial in their centres the *Developmental Learning Outcomes* as documented in the SACSA Framework (3-5 years phase) of the Early Years Band. The project was an action research project conducted in partnership with Curriculum Policy Directorate.

This report documents the project and highlights the learning journey of the educators involved.

The information collated and documented is forming the basis for ongoing debate and documentation regarding preschool curriculum, assessment and reporting accountability and the preschool summative report process.

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Participants in the Barossa Gawler Developmental Learning Outcomes Project 2001

Evanston Preschool

Elsie Ey Kindergarten

Angaston Kindergarten

Williamstown CPC

Tanunda Kindergarten

Nuriootpa Community Children's Centre (both preschool and child care)

Lyndoch Valley Family Centre

Freeling Child Parent Centre

Mallala Child Parent Centre

Gawler East Preschool

Zion Preschool Centre

Cambrai Child Parent Centre

One Tree Hill Child Parent Centre

District Office:
Janet Harris: District Superintendent
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Developmental Learning Outcomes

The South Australian Curriculum Standards and Accountability Framework (SACSA) describes curriculum Key Ideas and Outcomes upon which learners from birth to year 12 can expect their education to be built.

In the birth to age five phases of the Early Years Band of the framework, the *Developmental Learning Outcomes* describe the dimensions of learning and development towards which young children make progress.

The *Developmental Learning Outcomes* are deliberately broad long-term accomplishments. They reflect the integration of learning and development through the Essential Learnings and all Learning Areas and allow for different developmental pathways.

The *Developmental Learning Outcomes* are:

- Children develop trust and confidence
- Children develop a positive sense of self and a confident personal and group identity
- Children develop a sense of being connected with others and their worlds
- Children are intellectually inquisitive
- Children develop a range of thinking skills
- Children are effective communicators
- Children develop a sense of physical well being
- Children develop a range of physical competencies

"I'm tickling him. His name is Buddy. It is his birthday."

Children are effective communicators and talk about their responses to what they see, hear, touch, feel and taste.

Children are intellectually inquisitive and use their senses for exploration, discrimination, comparison and clarification.

Developmental Learning Outcomes and Reflective Practice

Background to the project

The *Developmental Learning Outcomes* trial involving early childhood centres in the Barossa /Gawler District provided the opportunity for early childhood educators to engage with the SACSA framework (3-5 phase Early Years Band) and examine the *Developmental Learning Outcomes* in depth.

The Project was initiated as a collaborative project between the Curriculum Policy Directorate (CPD) and the Barossa Gawler District. It was developed in response to an identified need within the Barossa Gawler District for curriculum change and to incorporate the introduction of the new SACSA framework. Existing issues in the District included disparity between curriculum leadership and curriculum provision and the inefficient and ineffective methods of recording and reporting on children's learning. Recent trends to intensify the focus on accountability, assessment and reporting had perpetuated a focus on the accomplishment of minute skills and 'low level knowledge' rather than on broader, more essential and enduring outcomes.

One of the aims of the project was to encourage early childhood educators to 'think big' and not to be confined and restricted by their current interpretation of the *Developmental Learning Outcomes (DLOs).*

Print (1993) defines outcome statements as the intended result of the teaching/learning process as identified in a curriculum document and expressed as a set of broad, comprehensive, assessable and observable indicators of a learner's achievement. Spady (1993) articulates an outcome as a culminating demonstration of the entire range of learning experiences and capabilities that underlie it. By naming the learning outcomes the goal is clear but it is the pathways to that goal that will vary depending on the child's abilities and skills. What is important is that the goal is ultimately reached, rather than the amount of time taken to reach it. In considering assessment implications, children's achievements are described in relation to the goal, rather than in relation to each other.

An initial full day professional development session was offered to early childhood educators in the district to support them in the implementation of the Early Years Band of the South Australian Curriculum Standards and Accountability Framework (SACSA). This session was facilitated by the Curriculum Policy Officer Early Years (3-5) and focussed on constructivist

pedagogy, the Essential Learnings and assessment and reporting. Educators participating had the opportunity to examine current practice and the implications of the SACSA Framework for their work with children and families.

As a result of discussion and questions generated relating to assessment and reporting during the day educators present elected to undertake some action research and examine in depth the *Developmental Learning Outcomes* in order to become fully conversant with the content of the *DLOs*.

Project methodology

Educators involved in the project met to discuss the project outline and to undertake professional development relating to outcomes based education and authentic assessment. Each centre in the project selected one of the *DLOs* (3-5 phase) to study in depth for a period of ten weeks. This included collecting evidence from a range of preschool children as to how they achieved aspects of the outcome and examining and describing the different pathways a child or groups of children may take in demonstrating knowledge, understanding and competence in achievement of the outcome.

Educators gathered evidence of children's learning and development by:

- Closely observing children at play
- Discussing with children their goals and outcomes
- Analysing with children any difficulty they were having with developing a skill or concept
- Examining the products created by children and the processes used in their creations

The task of examining the process of obtaining and interpreting data on children's learning and development by observing, recording, and documenting examples of evidence of what children do and how they do it in relation to the examples of evidence stated in the curriculum famework proved to be a challenging one. For many educators involved it was a journey of discovery and reflection and resulted in changed thinking and practice. Fullan and Pomfret (1977) state that a major factor influencing the success of the implementation of an innovation, is the degree to which it requires change in the roles and relationships of those involved.

Project participants had the opportunity to reflect on four points relating to outcomes based education and articulated by Spady (1993):

- **Clarity of focus:** which means that everything educators do must be clearly focussed on what they want learners to ultimately be able to do successfully

- **Designing back:** the starting point for all curriculum design must be a clear definition of the significant learning that learners are to achieve

- **High expectations:** educators should establish high, challenging standards of performance in order to encourage learners to engage deeply with issues about which they are learning

- **Expanded opportunities:** should be provided by all educators for all learners.

Day (1999) believes that continuing professional development is essential if educators are to remain up to date in their knowledge of the curriculum and committed and enthusiastic about their work and the children they teach. Educators need to be able to make informed judgements about their selection and use of a range of pedagogical skills and be confident and clear about their curriculum planning and processes. The trial gave all involved the opportunity to reflect in, on and about their practice. This type of reflection is essential to building, maintaining and further developing the capabilities of educators to think and act professionally, Day (1999).

Educators engaging in and examining SACSA and constructivist pedagogy are aware that you can only gain depth of understanding of an issue or fact when you can put it in your own words and talk about it. For learning to be meaningful we make it our own. We interpret it. This was very evident during the shared feedback session when all participating centres, in a range of creative ways told of their engagement in the project and their learning journey. Every journey was different; each had different outcomes.

Children develop a range of thinking skills and use imaginative thought to generate ideas and responses.

Learning Journeys

In order to share their learning journeys educators involved in the project met at the end of the ten week period to discuss findings and to collate evidence and information relating to the *DLOs*. Each centre gave creative fifteen minute presentations of their learning journey.

Mallala CPC presented their learning journey as a rendition of the '*three billy goats gruff.*' The educators at Mallala reminded us that every learner is different (just as the billy goats) and that learning styles vary with:

- Natural ability or aptitude
- Self esteem
- Visual spatial awareness
- A visual learning style
- An auditory learning style
- Motivation to practice
- Preference to practice alone
- Preference to practice with peers
- Preference for interaction with adults
- Amount of peer or adult encouragement needed
- Imagination

- Understanding of task
- Safety awareness
- Motivation to experiment
- Need to verbalize before or during a task
- Past experience
- Need to demonstrate to others
- Gender
- Culture

(Mallala CPC 2001)

In examining the eight *Developmental Learning Outcomes* early childhood educators used different processes to engage with and examine the content of a particular Developmental Learning Outcome

The educators at Zion preschool undertook a brainstorming task to identify and map what **'*Children develop a range of thinking skills'*** might look like:

Considers and respects the diversity and connections between people

Attitudes
Values
Uses self – relates to self and others
Demonstrates empathy
Use of language – describe feelings
Interacts with peers
Cause and effect
Parental modeling
Resolutions
Reactions
Manners and conventions

Describes, analyses, questions, and hypothesizes and recalls recounts experiences

Modeling, acting out
Relationships, making connections
Constructing one's own experiences
Role modeling
Imagination
Drawing on what you know i.e. past experiences
Level of thinking – use of language egg descriptive and vivid
Physical recording of information by children
Providing alternative solutions to problems

Uses the processes of play, reflection and investigation to find answers to problems

Socio dramatic play
Problem solving at group time
Experimenting
Talking to one another
Sandpit
Cause/effect
Empowerment
Persona dolls

Blocks
Persistence/ trying again

Engages in critical reflection and analysis relating to justice and injustice

Understanding of rules and routines
Behaviour displayed and expressed
Acceptance
Using word
Turn taking
Offering concern or making comments or follow up
Protective behaviours
Feelings
Acknowledgement
Problem solving

Uses imaginative thought to generate ideas and responses

Sharing at group time
Experiences – going on excursions/ outings egg theatre
Role modeling
Socio dramatic play
Story telling
Puppet plays
Drama
Visual representation
Extending play – having a go – exploration
Communication – dialogue
Trigger points
Symbolic representation
Open ended activity
Cultural experiences
Family
Teacher facilitation

Responds to instructions, initiates change, anticipates difficulties and suggests alternatives

Games
Science experiments – exploration

Resourcing
How they find information to suggest/solve problems wider than themselves
Problem solving
Negotiating with one another
Sandpit construction
Level of understanding
Children's reactions, questioning, suggestions
Hypothesizing ……. what if
Perseverance
Follow through process, complete a task
Behaviour – can follow routine, consequences, social skills – work cooperatively

Reflects on and shapes ideas, actions and just solutions

Problem solving
Shares resources/equipment/toys
Demonstrates an awareness of rules and consequences
Contributes to groups – egg commenting at group time
Evaluating their creations – happy/not happy with what they have done
Exercises some self control, turn taking, children watching others, observations of others behaviour
Participates in group discussion and brainstorms, sets goals, and locates and sorts information and resources
Participates on group time and games – understands rules and processes
Interdependence
Sequence, organized, ordered
Level of confidence
Hypothesizing
Practice
Repetition
Approaches and accesses teacher and other children
Demonstrates interests – further extension for example dinosaur – make costumes –play area-internet access
Communicates ideas and problems with peers
Questioning
Book use
Creative

What are the factors that might influence a child's critical thinking skill development?

- Health – wellness vs. unwell
- Sense of security
- Confidence
- Tiredness
- Emotional disturbances
- Family positioning
- Personality
- Past experiences – knowledge building
- Appropriateness – relevancy of curriculum
- Experiences
- Family values

Children develop a sense of being connected with others and their worlds through investigating and developing an awareness of similarities, differences, patterns and changes and questioning why things happen and how things work.

DIFFERENT WAYS OF THINKING

CREATIVE	LOGICAL
• Imagining • Wondering • Brainstorming • Generating ideas	• Mathematical: sorting, classifying, adding • Comparing • Patterns: able to follow, create a pattern
EMOTIONAL	**PRACTICAL and SCIENTIFIC**
• Understanding feelings – your and others • Thinking through social situations • Thinking about fairness, justice and injustice	• Problem solving • Experimenting • Discovering the properties of materials through play

Zion educators also prepared a survey relating to *critical thinking skills* to elicit further information relating to children's understandings of thinking.

Questions:

What's inside your body?	Heart, tummy bones, blood, muscles, cells
Where is your brain?	Up in your head, inside your skull
What does a brain do?	Thinks, helps you read, makes you swallow stuff, makes your arm move
What does your brain tell your body to do?	Sing, dance, hop, skip, jump, everything, pick up things, exercises, breathe, to get dressed, play, ride 2 wheeler bikes
What is thinking?	Hard work, how to remember what you've done, ideas, it's a word that you try to say

How do you think? How do you do it?	Stop and listen with your brain, by putting my hand under my chin, I think when it's nice and quiet, when someone moves a glass, you have to wiggle a bit

Zion Educators also asked parents to fill in a survey.

Questions:

What does it mean to think?	To wonder about things It means you develop an opinion of your own To make creative decisions To take in information and interpret it
How do children think?	In pure, direct and uncomplicated ways Quickly: unconventionally: illogically By doing or saying In pure, direct and uncomplicated ways Experimenting and asking lot's of questions By relating to similar situations they have already experienced By questioning and listening to others
What do you see children doing when they are thinking?	Stare into space Asking the question 'why'? Sometimes they talk to themselves Can look like they are day dreaming Stand still and look at things It looks like the 'cogs are whirring Playing with their hair' You can see it in their faces, in their eyes
What is parent's/caregivers role in helping children think?	Answer all their questions. Take their questions seriously because they remember every answer you give To encourage alternate ideas Encourage them to make decisions for themselves Provide a nurturing environment and take part in their games Encourage imaginative play Try to make them inquisitive, make them ask questions and encourage their thoughts

The educators at Zion chose to do a very in depth analysis of the Developmental Learning Outcome and in evaluating their involvement in the project identified the following issues:

- Workload – teaching, other priorities – remember to observe and consider *DLOs* in daily interactions
- Constantly questioning what does it mean/how do we interpret?
- Working towards recognizing areas in which our program needs further attention
- Have we got enough information?
- Questioning – are we on the right track?

One of the goals of the project was for educators to examine and document the different pathways children take in the achievement of goals. The challenge was for educators to use authentic assessment to gather evidence of learner achievement. Educators documented a range of descriptive narrative that described how children processed information, constructed new meaning and solved problems. It enabled staff teams to integrate all the information on a child into a cohesive picture.

Children develop a positive sense of self and a confident personal and group identity and participate in collaborative activity and contribute to group goals.

Tanunda educators examined the outcome relating to

Children are effective communicators

and developed a range of photographs to highlight children's achievement of the outcome and the different pathways being taken in this achievement.

Children are effective communicators when they use language and engage in symbolic play to imagine and create roles, scripts and ideas

The photograph shows the child's finished product.

The educators' description highlights the process:

- Ali used boxes and other collage to construct a horse
- Ali used language as she was constructing, 'I need a long thing to ride on'
- As she was talking through the making of her construction she demonstrated previous knowledge and understanding of mathematical concepts
- Through her conversation she stimulated her peers to also construct a horse
- Initially she engaged in parallel play and invented a simple script 'I'm riding my horse home. He's going really fast'
- Ali engaged in symbolic play and elaborated her script
- As her peers became involved a more dramatic script developed and children were feeding their horses, riding them around the yard and making stables for them to sleep in.
- The play continued over many days and at the end of the week S took her horse home and continued the game with her siblings.

From this information Ali's educators were able to identify that Ali demonstrated the ability to:

- Engage in symbolic play both individually and in groups
- Imagine and create roles, scripts and ideas
- Interact with others to explore ideas and concepts
- Engage in dramatic play
- Set goals and generate ideas
- Play, interacts and participate purposefully
- Use physical skills for exploring creative media and creative expression
- Make decisions
- Use her senses to explore, compare and classify
- Gather information, ask questions and seek clarification

The educators at Evanston examined the outcome

children are intellectually inquisitive

and in the process examined their own intellectual inquisitiveness. They questioned whether there were an equal number of girls and boys in the observational evidence they had collected.

More girls were observed in using ' *senses for exploration, discrimination, comparison and classification'*

More boys were observed experimenting *'with mathematical and scientific concepts and representations and uses this knowledge for problem solving and investigating'*

No evidence had been collected for the area '*critically investigates the form and use of everyday products and uses this information to generate ideas for new products and inventions'*

The Evanston educators reflected on this evidence and using the Spady (1994) notion of *'designing back'* constructed learning experiences to support all children's intellectual inquisitiveness. *'Designing back'* allows educators to trace back from the 'desired end result' and identify small steps of learning and plan experiences that enable children to achieve in order to eventually reach the long-term outcomes.

This does not mean that curriculum in early childhood is linear, but rather that planning, teaching and assessment decisions are related to the developmental learning outcomes that children are to achieve and the processes children engage in to achieve the outcome.

As one of the educators reported:
Lee was 'cooking' in the sandpit and wanted a stove to 'cook' her food in. After discussion with the educator she decided she could make one. She went with the educator to observe the stove in the kitchen and with support made a list of different components of the stove and what materials she would need to make the stove, including cardboard, sticky tape, the glue gun, textas and corks. Lee made her stove and used it to support her play in the sandpit.

The educators had supported Lee to investigate the form of an everyday product and then to use this information to create a new product.

Curriculum Planning

It is important that objective, descriptive narrative supports ongoing curriculum planning.

This example is from Angaston Kindergarten.

As part of 'learning about our world' we have been experimenting with sauce bottle harmonagraphs.

A water bottle was connected to the swing and children were observing the dripping water. Jo was fascinated by the patterns being made by the dripping water and was keen to try to repeat the pattern using paint in a 'squeezy sauce bottle'. The sauce bottle was suspended under the climbing frame.
Initially it was 'too runny' and after discussion with the adult Jo decided it needed thicker paint and larger paper underneath to catch the drips. She experimented with how to change the patterns by alternating the swing of the bottle.
Jo talked about the 'great spiraling patterns' she made and she also observed that each one was different.
This narrative reflects the child's voice, the child's learning story. It gives evidence of the child's learning and provides the educators with information for ongoing planning. The educators had evidence that Jo was using mathematical skills and understandings to investigate her physical worlds. Using materials, equipment and processes she was making different patterns. The learning was extended and the children and educators constructed, ' 3 sand funnel harmonagraphs' and observed the spiraling patterns made by the sand.

Educators were encouraged to reflect and ask the question:

If I can't plan from it should I be writing it down?

Does the narrative I recorded tell something about the child's learning journey?

What does the evidence tell me about the *developmental learning outcomes* and my future planning?

"Photos tell a 1000 words".

A frequent statement made by educators but what does this really mean? What are the implications of this for our recording and planning?

What does a photo or computer generated image really tell us?

Without the narrative the photo is open for multiple interpretations and shallow understanding.

The following points offer some direction for recording observations and narrative of children's learning journeys.

- Reflect the actual language of the children
- Document verbatim as far as possible
- Distinguish your interpretation form the actual observation
- Use concrete language – nouns and verbs, what you see, hear, taste, smell and feel
- Be as specific as possible

Office of Review (2001)

Project comments

Throughout the project all educators involved engaged in collaborative learning and a willingness to share their processes and new understandings. There was a recognition that sharing involves disclosure about one's understandings and opening oneself up to the possibility of 'feedback' (Day, 1999). There was also a recognition that changing, trying new ways, can be difficult in that it requires time, energy and sometimes new skills. It can be threatening, but it can also be very satisfying.

What emerged was a strong district early childhood learning community that benefited from the collective wisdom and intelligence of the group. The project highlighted the need for strong connectivity between learning outcomes, assessment processes, the curriculum content and teaching methodologies.

Children are effective communicators and represent and record their thoughts using creative processes.

The project allowed educators to investigate and describe the *Developmental Learning Outcomes.* In this process they were:

Creating knowledge
(*research)*

Using knowledge
(*action)*

reflecting on the daily reality of practice
(reflective practice)

Developmental Learning Outcomes

Questions to ask:

- What are the characteristics of each DLO?
- What kinds of acts, activities, language, work, relationships, events, and feelings will show a child is achieving a specific DLO?
- What results can you predict will result from these?
- What steps might lead to these results?
- What are the characteristics of these steps?

Office of Review (2001)

As a result of their involvement in the *Developmental Learning Outcomes* pilot, early childhood educators in the Barossa/Gawler District have developed deeper understandings about the *DLOs* and the range of evidence that can indicate progress in children's learning and development. Above all they have re examined the importance of documenting children's learning when children are engaged in absorbing, complex and interesting projects worthy of documentation.

Moving forward

As a result of the project the *Learner Educator Network* in the Barossa Gawler District has engaged in further investigation regarding improving processes for recording children's progress and development.

The Network plan to develop in 2002:

- Guidelines for staff for the collation and management of appropriate data that indicates children's learning and development. Guidelines will address issues relating to stress and time management and will emphasise the value of play as being central to an effective early years curriculum.
- Ways of sharing information about the strategies educators use to record and document evidence of children's learning and *developmental* progress, based on the *Developmental Learning Outcomes* (3-5 years).
- A power point presentation to be provided to all sites to support them in informing their communities about SACSA and assessment and reporting processes.

As part of the District's information gathering in 2002 a random survey of parents across the District was undertaken in March.
Parents were asked to comment on:

- Current methods of receiving information on their child's learning and development
- The most valuable information they receive about their child's learning and development
- The preferred way of receiving information about their child
- Information they like to share with educators about their child
- Any questions they have about their child's learning.

The data received from parent surveys will be collated and will inform *The Learner Educator Network* about any changes required to current assessment and reporting processes in the District.

Empowerment

The *Developmental Learning Outcomes* Project has had a positive and empowering effect on the educators in the Barossa Gawler District. A nucleus group of early childhood educators is driving the ongoing projects and resulting change. Consultation and commitment across the District is dynamic and several project participants have been involved in presenting professional development relating to the project to educators and parents in other Districts. One District Coordinator Children's Services after a session in her District reported:

' … *the Barossa Gawler children are so lucky having such dedicated and vibrant early childhood educators. The examples and discussion the two Directors provided will be the catalyst for change in our District.'*

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