**[Jen Jackson]:** Hi, welcome to our Twilight Webinar from the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, or VCAA. I'm Jen Jackson and I [was, at time of recording] Acting Manager of the Early Years Unit at VCAA. This webinar will be about some new early childhood learning trajectories created by the Australian Education Research Organisation AERO in partnership with the VCAA and others.

I'll be introducing you to the learning trajectories to start off with and then we'll be talking to some of the brilliant early childhood experts that helped to put the learning trajectories together.

Before we get going, I'd like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the lands that I'm joining you from today, the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation. I pay my respects to elders past and present and to any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people joining us today, as well as the elders on the country that you might be joining us from.

I acknowledge their ongoing care of and connection to the lands and waters and the continuing cultural, spiritual and educational practices of all First Nations people. I'd also like to acknowledge that the learning and development journeys of young children are something that we delight in and share across all cultures, something that brings us together. And I'm hoping that the resources that we look at today will help with that shared understanding of children's learning and development, as well as our ability to talk positively about the different strengths that children might bring, who grow up in different cultures, contexts and communities.

So today's webinar is about learning trajectories, which are tools to help you make focused, informed observations of children's leaning and development. We'll be looking at a new set of learning trajectories created by AERO, the Australian Education Research Organisation, which is Australia's national body for translating evidence for schools and early childhood services.

AERO’s job is to increase the use of evidence in practice across all Australian states and territories. And all their resources including these learning trajectories are available free of charge on the AERO website. VCAA was a partner with AERO in creating these learning trajectories as a tool for supporting early childhood assessment. So we're partnering with AERO today in bringing you this webinar.

You may be wondering if AERO is a national organisation, what does this mean for me in Victoria? So let me say very clearly, what we're showing you today is not compulsory. It's not something that you have to use, whether you're in Victoria or in any other jurisdiction. The learning trajectories are just resources that are sitting there for you to access on the website when and whenever you want to and however you want to, to support learning and development for your children and professional learning, for your team.

The other thing I want to emphasise is that this is not an additional piece of documentation. Okay? So the learning trajectories are easy to read, accessible resources that you can look at, dip in to, discuss with your team, use in your critical reflection, but you don’t have to enter anything, you don’t have to record any information in them. What they can do is help you to get more out of any methods of documentation, assessment or evaluation of children's learning and development that you might be doing already.

Now, speaking of which, you can use the learning trajectories alongside other assessment and observation tools. So I'm thinking particularly of services in Victoria who might be using the Early Years Assessment and Learning Tool created by the Department of Education here in Victoria in partnership with the University of Melbourne. And that tool is a really exciting new development for measuring the strengths, interests and capabilities of young children in 3- and 4-year-old kindergarten programs.

So if you’re one of the services using the tool, you might think about how the learning trajectories we look at today can help you get a deeper understanding of domains of children's learning and development to complement what you're doing in the tool. They might help you see how these domains connect to the holistic outcomes in the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework or VEYLDF. And importantly the learning trajectories might also help you connect the assessments of children's learning and development that you're doing with the tool to that critical learning and development that occurs in the first years of life in the birth to 3 space, So the trajectories can help you join the dots across those age groups.

So switch off any worries you might have about the learning trajectories being an additional piece of documentation and switch on your curiosity. And let's have a look at what the learning trajectories involve.

Now, first of all, what do you think a learning trajectory is? Okay. Even if you don't know, just in your mind, think of an everyday object that represents what you think a learning trajectory might be. Okay, so think of anything at all.

You might have thought about a ruler or something that measures. You might have thought about a staircase or something that children can climb. You might have thought about a tree or something that branches and grows in all different directions. And if you thought of any of these things, then you would have been right. Hopefully, whatever you thought of, it had some idea of change and progress and growth because that’s what a learning trajectory is all about.

Okay, let's have a look at the AERO ones. The first thing we need to know is that the learning trajectories from AERO cover 5domains of learning and development: executive functions, mathematical thinking, language and communication, social and emotional learning and physical development.

Now, of course, these aren't the only domains of learning and development, but AERO identified them as priority areas where teachers and educators wanted to build their knowledge. Maybe you'll recognise a domain or 2 in that list that you're working on in your quality improvement plan, where your team would like to build their understanding – in which case, dive in!

Each learning trajectory breaks the domain down into subdomains which are its component parts. So within each domain there are 3 or 4 subdomains, which are the smaller pieces of learning and development. And then each of the subdomains is broken into 3 strands. And even just unpacking in domain like this is really interesting.

Let's have a look at one together, we'll have a look at physical development because we think we all know physical development. It's gross motor skills and fine motor skills. Right? Well, the area learning trajectories identify 2 more subdomains in physical development. We've got gross motor skills, we’ve got fine motor skills, we've also got sensory awareness and we've got physical health and self-care, which is children's growing ability to manage their own physical development and wellbeing.

Having a closer look at the sensory awareness domain, remember I said there are 3 strands in each subdomain and they show what changes as the child develops and grows. So the first strand in sensory awareness is that children use their 5 senses to learn and explore. And you can see across that strand there are 4 indicators that show how children get better at doing that as their learning and development progresses.

The second strand in sensory awareness is that children maintain the balance when they are moving or still. And again, you can see four indicators that show how that changes over time,all of them strengths-based. The third strand in sensory awareness is that children develop coordination between all parts of their body. Again, we've got 4 indicators showing increasing complexity, increasing skills and capabilities, and that is our subdomain for sensory awareness.

Now you get the idea, we've got the same pattern across all the domains for all the subdomains, which means that you've got those 3 strands showing how children develop from birth right through to approximately when they start school. Importantly, each strand describes a *construct* – so an aspect of learning and development that changes over time and those indicators are strength based. So the early ones aren't showing what children can't do yet or what they need help with – they’re actually showing what children *can* do. And that is so important for celebrating every step along a learning and development journey. Even for our youngest learners.

There are also some things that you won't see in the learning trajectories. So these indicators don't show you exactly what you notice children doing, right? They’re more about the learning and development that occurs behind the behaviour than the actual behaviour that you'll observe. And that enables children to demonstrate their learning and development in each of these domains and subdomains in lots of different ways, depending on the context, on the culture, on their strengths, on their interests. It creates space for that inclusion and diversity that is so important in early childhood practice.

You also won't see instructions for how to get the child from one step to the next. So the learning trajectories talk about what's happening for the child, they don't say what you'll be doing as the teacher or educator to support that progress. And that's because that's a matter for your pedagogical decision-making. There are some tips and the end of each domain to show how you can create opportunities for children to demonstrate this domain in their learning and development. But they’re not prescriptive, they’re just ideas for you to use in your practice as you respond to your unique children, families and communities.

Most importantly, what you will not see in the learning trajectories is age ranges for any of these indicators. Okay, they're not developmental milestones, and the reason for that is children can be at lots of different points in the trajectories at different times. So a child might be way out one end of one of the strands within a subdomain, but still at the early stages of another strand. And that's the beauty of the learning trajectories, even though it looks like those columns are all lined up because we've got 4 indicators for each strand, actually children can be at many different points at the same time and it really helps you mix and match to create that really individualised picture of each and every child's unique learning journey.

Okay, there are some extra resources – if that wasn't enough! – there are some extra resources on the AERO website to go with the learning trajectories. There's a user guide to give you tips for how to use the learning trajectories in your practice, basically to sharpen up your observations of children's learning and development so you've got some more concepts and ideas and vocabulary to use in those observations, however you choose to do that.

There's also in the user guide an explanation of how the learning trajectories support the practices, principles and outcomes of the Early Years Learning Framework. And as we know, there's a lot of complementarity between Early Years Learning Framework and the VEYLDF. So that information will be relevant for Victoria too.

There's an evidence report that goes with the learning trajectories and interestingly that says there are lots of different early childhood learning trajectories all around the world, so if you’re really keen, you can dive into some of the other ones as well.

And that report also gives the concise summaries of the research evidence around each of the domains. So around mathematical thinking, around language and communication around executive functions. And those little summaries will be very handy if your team chooses to focus on one of those domains in your quality improvement plan.

Lastly, there's a little thinking exercise that you can do, which I absolutely love, to connect the domains of learning and development to the holistic outcomes in VEYLDF and EYLF.And this really helps you stretch your thinking and see how specific domains of learning and development and holistic outcomes are connected.

For example, when a child becomes familiar with the day-to-day routines in their room, they’re demonstrating wellbeing and belonging according to VEYLDF and EYLF but they’re also building the foundations for mathematical thinking according to the learning trajectory, because they're starting to notice patterns and make predictions, which is the basis for mathematical thinking.

Another example: when a child learns to stop or pause and impulsive behaviour, they’re not just demonstrating executive functions according to the learning trajectory they are also connecting to and contributing to their world by making that group of children that they're in a better, more harmonious place to be. This way of thinking really challenges you to realise that you can take one observation of a child and interpret it in many different ways, depending on which domain or outcome you're looking for.

Hopefully by now you're curious and keen to have a look at the learning trajectories yourself. But before you do, let’s have a chat to a couple of the experts who helped put these learning trajectories together. Now a lot of you will know these names already. We've got the wonderful Professor Susanne Garvis at Griffith University and also the fabulous Professor Caroline Cohrssen, who's now at University of New England.

Susie and Caroline are both well-known experts in children's learning and development, and they led a team of researchers to work with AERO, also in partnership with the VCAA, to put these learning trajectories together. We've also got Dr. Katey De Gioia talking to us today from AERO to talk more about what's happening next with the learning trajectories nationally.

So settle in and let's have a bit of Q&A with these experts and find out more about what the learning trajectories are all about.

Hi Susie. Thanks for taking the time to talk to us about your work. There's a lot of buzz around things like learning trajectories or learning progressions at the moment. So tell us what are they and why are they so important?

**[Professor Susanne Garvis]:** First of all, what is a learning trajectory is really important to understand. And for me, it's a synthesis of current research where we can actually map out children's learning right from the very beginning. And the idea of a trajectory really allows teachers and educators to understand where a child is coming from in their learning journey, but also where they're going as well.

**[Jen Jackson]:** There are a lot of resources around already though, that help teachers and educators with the planning cycle and with things like assessment and evaluation. Where do learning trajectories fit into the planning cycle?

**[Professor Susanne Garvis]:** Absolutely. So the learning trajectories really align with the planning cycle because they really help with focused observations. So this allows the teacher or the educator to focus on a specific area of learning and really think about what this looks like in pedagogical practice, which will then help inform a learning cycle.

So we're looking all the way from how it can inform observation, but also planning for the next learning as well that will take place. And part of that can also be around the evaluation, the assessment of the learning and also the critical reflection on what's actually been observed as well.

**[Jen Jackson]:** You've talked about using the learning trajectories in groups of teachers and educators, but it is a big volume of information. You've got 5 learning trajectories, the user guide, everything else that goes with it. If I'm an educational leader and I want to start working with a group of educators and teachers, where do you recommend that I start?

**[Professor Susanne Garvis]:** So you're exactly right, there are 5 learning trajectories, and the best piece of advice is to actually start with one trajectory at a time.And we had some great advice from our field trials with educators and teachers in Victoria who suggested one trajectory at a time will change the world. And it's about small snippets of coming to terms with and understanding what's actually in the trajectory, but building on that as well.

**[Jen Jackson]:** So it sounds like engagement with the learning trajectories isn't just something that you do once, it might be something that you come back to many times. Is that the idea?

**[Professor Susanne Garvis]:** We noticed from the field trials that teachers and educators would do an initial read of the trajectory and then they come back to it multiple times again. And the more reading and discussion they had around the concepts, the deeper their understanding of what it actually meant. And it was fantastic to actually see that perhaps in the initial read there were some questions of “I'm not quite sure what this means”, but as discussions happened around what the concepts were, teachers and educators were able to build their knowledge and understanding around what key concepts were.

**[Jen Jackson]:** Okay, great. So let's turn our imaginations on for a minute, because I think this will really help people understand what difference learning trajectories can make. Let's imagine a group of educators doing assessment and evaluation of children's learning without the trajectories. And then let's imagine another group doing the same thing with the trajectories. What's the key difference you think we might notice?

**[Professor Susanne Garvis]:** The group that has the trajectories will know exactly what to focus on within the learning, and they will know also from the trajectories how to plan next for the next stage of the learning as well, but also understanding where the child has come from in this trajectory.

So it's all about understanding that the child's learning is continuous, but also supporting the child throughout the learning journey as well.

**[Jen Jackson]:** Okay, so we know that the learning trajectories were initially trialed here in Victoria. Tell us a bit about who participated in the field trials.

**[Professor Susanne Garvis]:** We had 3 learning trajectories that were implemented and then afterwards we were really interested to see how they had actually gone in the field trial and we had wonderful feedback from our 22 participants and a key message was that they wanted the learning trajectories as soon as possible to help with their practice.

**[Jen Jackson]:** And where were all the services in their practice journeys with assessment, was it something they were really good at, or was it something that they were working on? Give us a sense of where they were at.

**[Professor Susanne Garvis]:** So the practice journey was varied across the centres or services that were involved, and it was wonderful to actually see that many could use the learning trajectories as part of their quality improvement plans or more focused on professional learning as well across staff.

Staff made connections as well of how it would be useful for transitions, especially for children from one room to another. But it also allowed staff to take a pause and actually reflect on what is important to children's learning and this was very much the “aha” moments within the field trial where the teachers and educators would then reflect sometimes in the groups as well,

if groups had participated in the field trial, where together they're involved in a lot of discussion around what some of the terms actually meant, but how you could actually observe it and assess it in practice.

**[Jen Jackson]:** That does sound like wonderfully rich professional learning. How did it work with the smaller services though, where maybe there wasn't that opportunity for collegial reflection? Were the learning trajectories still helpful for teachers who were maybe a little bit more isolated?

**[Professor Susanne Garvis]:** It was very useful for teachers who may be the only early childhood teacher, for example.

So it allowed them to actually reflect on their own understandings. But also they would reach out sometimes to others to ask questions or to think as well. And so it was really useful for developing a common language. And I think this is actually a really important part of the trajectories where when someone is talking about an apple, for example, everyone knows what the apple is.

So that's the great thing about the trajectories is that when there is a term or a concept in there, people will then have a shared understanding or they will develop a shared understanding around what that actually means.

**[Jen Jackson]:** I'm intrigued by this idea of *concepts* because often we focus on behaviours, what we can see children doing, and I notice that when we look at the learning trajectories, they're often not describing a specific behaviour.

Talk to us about the difference between making an observation of a child's behaviour and then that understanding of the concept that the learning trajectories might provide.

**[Professor Susanne Garvis]:** So one example we had from a teacher and educator was actually around behaviour or what they thought was negative behaviour of a child. When they were actually looking at the trajectory, they suddenly realised it was a part of the child's social and emotional development journey.

So it made them think about what was actually going on in their practice, but how they could actually support the child as well within social and emotional learning. So again, the great thing about these trajectories is, it allows us to focus not so much on the behaviour, but actually think about the concepts that are there, and the development of them as well.

And it's really important that we think about this because children are on a learning journey, and it's important for us to recognise that all children are at different stages of their learning journey as well.

**[Jen Jackson]:** I think a lot of educators will like that. The learning trajectories show them where the child can go next, but they don't really tell us how to get there.

So tell me where the trajectories sit alongside that pedagogical decision-making that teachers and educators are doing. They're not a recipe are they? But they are going to help that decision-making in some way.

**[Professor Susanne Garvis]:** So the trajectories definitely aren’t a recipe, but they allow the critical reflection on what pedagogical practices can be implemented to support the next parts of the learning journey.

And it's a great idea that when the concepts are actually discussed individually or in groups, there can be a shared understanding of the pedagogical practices to achieve the next step as well. And we had examples from the field trials where educators and teachers were really prompted by certain concepts within the trajectories that they may not have thought about before, but it got them thinking about their pedagogical practice and how they could actually work as a team to support children for the next stage of their learning.

**[Jen Jackson]:** So how might the learning trajectories get us away from deficit views of children's learning and development? And orient us more towards their strengths?

**[Professor Susanne Garvis]:** So from the learning trajectories, we can think of children's learning through a strength-based lens, which means we're actually acknowledging what the child knows, where they're coming from, but how we can actually support them for the next stage of learning as well.

**[Jen Jackson]:** Now, many teachers in educators might wonder about cultural differences or neurodiversity or all those aspects of diversity that matter so much when we're being responsive and inclusive. How does a learning trajectory that describes learning and development for every child respond to those differences?

**[Professor Susanne Garvis]:** So we know from children's learning that all children develop individually, and this is acknowledged within the learning trajectories as well, where it's not stage or aged focused, it's not based on developmental checklists.

The idea is that children have a map of their learning so we can understand individual children and where they're coming from. But also where they're going to as well within this learning journey. The important thing is we're understanding the concept, but then we're also implementing pedagogical practice that is culturally responsive to the child. And this is important critical reflection, is actually understanding how as teachers and educators we can implement effective pedagogical practices for all children and that we have high expectations for all children for their learning.

**[Jen Jackson]:** And how about engaging with families? Did you see anything in the field trials about those conversations?

**[Professor Susanne Garvis]:** In the field trials, the teachers and educators loved the idea of using the learning trajectories with the families and in particular actually providing opportunities for families to see where children are coming from, but where they're going to as well. It also provides opportunities for common language with families and it also allows families to become more involved in the children's learning within the 5 areas.

**[Jen Jackson]:** Talk me through how the learning trajectories could support those collaborative conversationseven where people might be coming from really different professional training or disciplines.

**[Professor Susanne Garvis]:** So the great thing about the trajectories is that because the concepts are coming from informed research or from the research field themselves, the concepts are very similar across the different professions or disciplines. So it really develops a basis for actually understanding, but also working with some of these concepts for children's learning journeys.

**[Jen Jackson]:** I know a lot of educational leaders would be very excited if these were resources that they can use with all teachers and educators, whether they're at the beginning of their careers or maybe at different qualification levels. What did you hear in the field trials about whether the learning trajectories worked for different types of educators that we might find at a service?

**[Professor Susanne Garvis]:** So from the field trial, the accessibility from the trajectories for a range of different educators and teachers at different stages of their career was very strong. So the teachers and educators could see that they could jump in at any stage within their career and start to develop an understanding of the terms and the concepts. But also there was further evidence available if they wanted to go in and build that understanding.

**[Jen Jackson]:** Okay, there'll be people watching this today and sitting their thinking “What about play?”. We're very aware of the importance of play and relationships as the cornerstones of early childhood pedagogy. What would you say to people who are wondering “How do the learning trajectories fit alongside play based learning?”

**[Professor Susanne Garvis]:** We know the importance of play-based learning, and it's not that we're saying that play isn't important for children, we're saying that the trajectories are within play as well, and it's about knowing what we're actually observing within play, but how we can support play as well.

**[Jen Jackson]:** What a great point to finish on. Susie, thank you. That was Professor Susie Garvis from Griffith University, who is one of the lead experts who developed the learning trajectories. I took away from what Susie said that these learning trajectories are a tool for professional development.

They're a tool for getting better at what we do already. So they're definitely not an add-on or an extra. But let's hear some more about the learning trajectories and have a chat to Professor Caroline Cohrssen, who is the other lead expert on the Learning Trajectories team.

Hi Caroline, welcome to the webinar. Thanks for joining us and congratulations on a terrific piece of work. Now I asked Susie this too, but I'd like to know from you: why are learning trajectories important?

**[Professor** **Caroline Cohrssen]:** I think the first thing to say is that the most important things are the things that we're already doing really well. So the most important thing before we start talking about learning trajectories, are those warm, responsive, reciprocal relationships with children and families. That is absolutely the threshold condition and that frames everything that we do in early childhood education and care. What the learning trajectories do is they then build on that. Our perception from feedback that we've received from the field is that educators and teachers are looking for more information about what it is that they need to be doing or what they need to know to support children's learning and development that goes beyond what's included in framework documents.

The learning trajectories aim to achieve that. They flesh out some of those big ideas and they provide more nuance and more detail and also a sense of: if a child is demonstrating a particular capability, what can we assume preceded it and what do we know will support scaffolding that child's learning based on what the research is telling us?

**[Jen Jackson]:** Now, I know you've been involved in change in early childhood practice for a while, so talk to us a bit more about why the learning trajectories respond to where we are now and the next steps that we need to take for practice.

**[Professor** **Caroline Cohrssen]:** There's a lot of interest at the moment in assessment, child assessment and the diverse ways of assessing what children know already.

And this falls squarely within the enactment of the Early Years Planning Cycle and in this way as well, supports services meeting the National Quality Standard, particularly around assessment and planning. So it's responding to really current interest in the sector. And what it does is it equips educators and teachers with confidence in terms of recognising what it is that children are learning at the moment, what their interests are as well, but helping them to enact the Early Years Planning Cycle.

So people will be familiar with the Early Years Planning Cycle from the Early Years Learning Framework or the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework.

**[Jen Jackson]:** So it sounds like the learning trajectories are actually supporting a lot of what we do already. That planning cycle has been in place for a while in both the VEYLDF and then elaborated in the new EYLF version 2.0.

Are the learning trajectories asking educators to do something new or maybe just do what they're doing already a little bit more deeply?

**[Professor** **Caroline Cohrssen]:** Absolutely. They're not asking anybody to do anything that they're not doing already. But what they are going to do is support educators’ and teachers’ understanding of what children are demonstrating to them already. So if the children are dancing, for example, it will really help to hone what it is that the educators and teachers see within children's dance, whether it's looking at spatial thinking, whether it’s looking at mathematical concepts… What it does is give them a really clear lens that enables them to do what they're doing already, but do it perhaps in a more targeted way, and perhaps also a more confident way because they then have a resource that they can turn to and say "Well, I've observed this, what does it actually tell me about what the child knows already? What does it suggest to me about where I could go to from here?”

**[Jen Jackson]:** The learning trajectories do synthesise a big body of knowledge. So is that all teachers and educators need to read? Or do you encourage them to still do their own reading and research and engage with the evidence as well?

**[Professor** **Caroline Cohrssen]:** I would totally encourage educators and teachers to do their own reading. What we hope this will do is spark an interest or help to create new insights into what people are seeing children demonstrate in their play. For the learning trajectories to reflect every nuance, every progression point along the continuum, they would be a massive document and what we're aiming to do, what we're hoping the documents will achieve is to frame educators’ and teachers’ thinking or perhaps hone their thinking and a little bit more, and that will prompt them to go and do a bit more research on their own about the behaviours or the interests that they're seeing children demonstrate.

**[Jen Jackson]:** Now, I know along the way we encountered all kinds of perceptions of what the learning trajectories were, and some of them may not have been quite right. So talk me through a few of the myths around learning trajectories that you've encountered and that maybe might still exist out there.

**[Professor** **Caroline Cohrssen]:** What the learning do is provide greater confidence, we hope, to educators and teachers that the planning that they're doing to consolidate and extend children's learning is informed by research evidence.

What the trajectories documents also do is provide the research that underpins them for educators to read further as well. So to come back to the main point, it's not a developmental checklist. What it is, is a more nuanced unpacking perhaps of some of the big ideas that are encapsulated in the framework document. What the learning trajectories do not do as well is suggest that by particular age a child should have achieved a particular standard.

What the learning trajectories do is recognise that learning occurs along a continuum and that for every child, learning and typical learning varies based on what they've experienced at home, based on what they bring to the learning themselves, based on what they've been exposed to in their lived experience. And so the learning trajectories do not set age-based targets for children to achieve particular outcomes.

What they do is recognise that every child is an individual and provide an opportunity for the child's learning to be differentiated along individualised learning pathways.

**[Jen Jackson]:** Caroline, to finish with, what's the one thing that you'd really like to see change in early childhood services when teachers and educators start using learning trajectories in their work?

**[Professor** **Caroline Cohrssen]:** I think we've spoken already about how the learning trajectories provide educators and teachers with the words they may be looking for to describe children's learning and development.

This is something that comes through quite clearly in my research and also in conversations with early childhood educators who are who are interested in studying further, in fact – that there is a concern that they don't have the right words to use and that somehow gets in the way of their recognition of what great work they're doing. And I think one of the contributions the learning trajectories will make is providing the language that may be helpful to people to articulate the right practice.

And I think this also perhaps addresses the professionalisation priority that we have in the field, that providing educators and teachers with the right words that they feel they're looking for may help them in advocating for their own practice; but may also help them in articulating children's learning and development as they transition from the prior-to-school space into formal school education and also in conversations with parents.

So it will hopefully help shift the focus from now – that we “just play” in early learning – to actually the learning that's occurring in play-based learning. I think that's perhaps an important contribution that the trajectories will make to the field.

**[Jen Jackson]:** Caroline, thanks so much for sharing those insights with us today. It's been lovely talking to you. That was Professor Caroline Cohrssen from University of New England in Armidale, New South Wales. Now we've got one more guest to join us today, and that's Dr Katey De Gioia, who's the Director of Engagement for Early Childhood at the Australian Education Research Organisation or AERO, the organisation that brought these learning trajectories into being.

Katey, thank you for joining us today. We've heard wonderful things about the learning trajectories from Susie and Caroline, but I'd like to hear from you as well.

AERO does a lot of different projects across the early childhood space. Why did AERO decide that learning trajectories were important?

**[Dr Katey De Gioia]:** Hi Jen, AERO’s vision is about achieving excellence and equitable educational outcomes for all children, and we want children to have opportunities to learn and develop as best as they possibly can. What we have found is that for teachers and educators, there can be a gap in knowledge and understanding of how children learn and develop, particularly in some of the concept areas.

So what we wanted to do was to work with experts to develop meaningful resources that teachers and educators would be able to use that would support learning and development of children from birth to the years before school. We were really keen for teachers and educators to be able to understand learning and next learning steps and to be able to use that as part of the planning process.

**[Jen Jackson]:** Thanks, Katie. Caroline and Susie have told us a lot about how the learning trajectories can help teachers and educators to do that. But I'm interested what AERO is doing with these learning trajectories now. So they're sitting up there on the website and we know all teachers and educators can access them. Is AERO doing anything else to help bring the learning trajectories to life?

**[Dr Katey De Gioia]:** Yes, Jen, we are. And it's actually really exciting. We've started some small-scale implementation, to really understand what these might look like in practice. We've got 9 sites across the ACT and New South Wales and Tasmania that we're working with: family day care, long day care, preschool and kindergarten. And what we're doing is using the learning trajectories as a resource to support assessment for learning.

What we want to understand is what are some of the promising approaches to implementation? And we're looking at enablers and barriers and also thinking through what strategies work best with teams. And so things like coaching, things like professional learning. What is best for those particular services? We're also working closely to share this information with jurisdictions, with government leaders, and also with sector leaders, peaks and providers so that we can get the messages out.

We'll also be delivering some webinars, so offering opportunities for teachers and educators to hear more about the learning trajectories. And we're also very aware of work that's happening in other sectors. So we know that these learning trajectories are to be used with children from birth to school age. So understanding what that looks like in some jurisdictions where there are other assessment tools and how they can work together with these different types of resources.

**[Jen Jackson]:** So again, Katey, whatever teachers and educators are doing already in whatever state and territory they might be located, there will be a way that they can find a use for these learning trajectories. But perhaps not everyone will use them in exactly the same way?

**[Dr Katey De Gioia]:** Absolutely. And that's what's been really interesting about small-scale implementation. And we're only in early stages, but we're already starting to see some of the differences that are happening in services and the ways that they're using the learning trajectories.

So, for example, in one service they're talking about using a domain that they're very familiar with and then one that they're not so familiar with. So picking up something like executive functions and then also looking at social and emotional development. In other services, they're picking them up and working across all of the leading trajectories because that's what they feel that they can then decide in rooms would work better for them.

So I think there's a whole lot of ways that we can work with these learning trajectories, and the user guide also provides some really great opportunities to think about context. The other thing to be mindful of as well is service types. So it's going to look different in family day care perhaps to how it looks in long day care. Thinking about working with teams.

So whether we’re just working with the educational leader or whether we're working with all of the teachers and educators across the service or perhaps just room leaders, and then they're working more directly with their teams. It's also about thinking through what is in quality improvement plans and the relationship of the learning trajectories – or perhaps through assessment for learning in the quality improvement plans.

So there's a whole lot of different ways that are influenced by context in these services and I think that what's really important is thinking through context, understanding what's going on, how this is going to be meaningful; and whether it's about starting small, perhaps with one learning trajectory, perhaps with one particular subdomain might be more meaningful for a particular service rather than seeing all 5 of them in one go as a really huge piece of work.

**[Jen Jackson]:** So, Katey, tell me, what would it look like not just for teachers and educators, but for children and families when the learning trajectories are being used well?

**[Dr Katey De Gioia]:** When the learning trajectories are being used well Jen, I think for teachers and educators, we're going to see some really great reflection on learning and development of young children and some really robust conversations.

And I think that's really exciting that we're talking about where children are at – having conversations around different domains, for example, executive functions, thinking about the language that we're using to analyse children's learning and development, and really highlighting that as part of our documentation. So I think that's really exciting for teachers and educators. I think it's also exciting in terms of almost like having permission to understand that we don't know exactly everything about each of these learning trajectories from birth right through to the year before school.

So picking those up and seeing what comes before and what comes after where a child might be is also a really positive conversation to be having in rooms. I think that for families there are a number of opportunities here. For families, there are opportunities for educators and teachers to engage more deeply in children's learning and development and share with families what it might look like in terms of where children might move to next or sharing, for example, that mathematical thinking happens at birth, which perhaps families hadn't thought about and supporting families and understanding what they might say at home or what they might be able to do to support their children's mathematical thinking, particularly in infancy. So I think it's an opportunity to share with families where children are at and what it is that they'll be doing next, and offering perhaps ideas of what they might like to look out for with young children.

**[Jen Jackson]:** Katey, thanks very much for joining us and helping fire our imaginations about really terrific assessment of learning and development. Is there anything that you'd like to share with us today about the learning trajectories, any messages that you'd like teachers and educators to take away?

**[Dr Katey De Gioia]:** I think the key message, Jen, is that this is part of the work that we're already doing. It sits so beautifully in our assessment and planning, but it actually gives us the tools to do it better.

And I think that's what's so exciting about these resources. It's that opportunity to do something better and to really think quite deeply about learning outcomes for children.

**[Jen Jackson]:** Thanks, Katey, lovely talking to you today and thank you to AERO for making these resources available to teachers and educators.

That was Dr Katey De Gioia, Engagement Director for Early Childhood at the Australian Education Research Organisation. Now, as Katey said, the learning trajectories are there available on the AERO website. Hopefully you've enjoyed getting to know the learning trajectories and walked away with some ideas for how you might use them in your own professional learning and in the conversations about children's learning and development that you have in your teams.

If this is the first time that you’ve encountered the idea of a learning trajectory, that's great because I am sure we will be seeing more about learning trajectories as more teachers and educators start using them in their practice, including developments in Victoria and nationally. I think the thing that I like best about the learning trajectories is even though we've got a lot going on in early childhood at the moment and “just another thing” can seem overwhelming, they bring us back to what we most enjoy thinking and talking about, which is those magic moments of children's progress and the learning and development that we see every day.

So enjoy the conversations that hopefully the learning trajectories will spark. Thank you for the wonderful work that you do and thank you for tuning in to our webinar.

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