‘Not Just a Walk in the Park’ -- Excursions as Opportunities to Connect with the Community

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Educators have moved beyond thinking that connecting with the community is about occasional ‘special’ excursions and encounters with traditional community helpers. The EYLF and NQS ask educators to embed connections with and contributions to the community in their program in a variety of ways as well. The EYLF and NQS also expand notions of what constitutes community. Not only does the term community refer to the local geographical area, it also refers to the group of children, families and educators in a service and the larger global community as well as the communities in which the families live and where the service is located.

The NQS and EYLF emphasise both explicitly and implicitly how children’s contributions to and connections with the community affect their sense of identity as well as their understanding of their rights and obligations to others as members of communities and the benefits of connections and contributing to others’ wellbeing.

Going out into the community is an obvious and particularly powerful way to promote children’s connections with and contributions to the community.

Some important considerations about excursions include thinking about the following:

- links between community connections and contributions (EYLF Learning Outcome 2) and citizenship
- various authentic ways, both simple and more complex, to plan for connecting children with different types of communities
- the importance of basing connections and contributions on children’s interests and abilities
- considerations about what learning opportunities to offer and why (including managing risk and ensuring safety)
- extending experiences meaningfully rather than treating them as ‘one-offs’
- being flexible and taking advantage of opportunities that arise
- communicating with children’s families about the benefits of children’s community connections.
Connecting with the community through excursions can also enhance children’s respect for the natural environment and their understanding of how to care for it and their understanding and appreciation of sustainability.

**Questions for reflection**

*Learning Outcome 2 in the EYLF is about community connections and contribution. What comes to mind when you think of those Learning Outcomes? What are the implications for the program or curriculum?*

*What are some examples of everyday ways to promote learning about community connections and contributions?*

*What are some of the most important teaching and learning opportunities that excursions can offer? That is, why are they an important part of the curriculum?*

*Are excursions/outing are an essential part of offering good quality education and care? Is it possible to offer good quality and NOT go on excursions?*

*What are some of the typical kinds of excursions that are part of your program/curriculum?*

*What are some examples of excursions that have been successful? What features contributed to their success?*

*How important is it to have clear aims or purposes for an excursion and to balance that with being flexible and open to learning opportunities that you may not anticipate?*

*What role do children play in planning excursions/outing?*

*What are some of the pitfalls or things that can go wrong with excursions that contribute to making them less than successful?*

*How can educators who are reluctant to take children out into the community be supported to go on excursions? What are their concerns and how can they be encouraged to make a start?*

*How do you minimise the risks involved in excursions?*

*How important is preparation and follow-up with children?*

*What is a good balance between special and ordinary excursions?*

*What value is there in repeating an excursion more than once -- that is, going back to the same place a number of times.*
*How can excursions contribute to children’s understanding of sustainability?

*What are the benefits of family members coming along on excursions? Are there any challenges as well?

*How do you let families know about the importance of community connections and contributions -- particularly the value of going out into the community?