Intentional Teaching

What does ‘intentional teaching’ mean?
When educators explicitly teach knowledge and skills to individuals or small groups that supports the children learning it is intentional teaching. As the Early Years Learning Framework puts it 'Intentional teaching involves educators being deliberate, purposeful and thoughtful in their decisions and action. Intentional teaching is the opposite of teaching by rote or continuing with traditions simply because things have ‘always’ been done that way.’ (p. 15)

Why is intentional teaching important?
While children initiate play-based learning there are times when they need active support from more experienced, knowledgeable and skillful others (e.g. educators, older children, specialists in school content, parents) to learn those things valued by schools and society. Educators intentionally intervene by changing the experiences, expectations, environment, or social groups to maximise learning. They also provide just-in-time instruction to enhance and extend e.g. children’s development of literacy, numeracy, thinking and understanding.

What does intentional teaching look like in practice?
Children will be involved in a variety of play-based experience initiated by themselves for most of the day with educators providing specific, focussed interventions for individuals and small groups. Each intervention will be tailored to the children’s needs at the time resulting in different processes and products for different groups of children. You will not see 30 identical worksheets or whole group interaction. Intentional teaching focuses on the individual child and his or her learning.

What you will not see
- Whole class or group teaching
- Children sitting on the mat for long periods of time with an expectation that they will listen to the educator
- ‘Intentional teaching’ unrelated to children’s needs or interests

Some questions to think about
- How much of your teaching is intentional teaching?
- When the children are involved in play-based learning activities what are your focuses for intentional teaching?
- How do you record the children’s learning as a result of your intentional teaching practices?

Some things to do
- Observe children’s play-based learning and identify the skills n knowledge that you can intentionally teach (e.g. children in the block corner and identify the social skills, planning skills, construction skills, reading and writing skills that can be intentionally taught in order to extend and enhance the children’s knowledge and understanding).
- Look at another educator’s program. Find ways they have documented their intentional teaching. Look at the ways in which the learning from intentional teaching has been assessed and recorded.
Some more to read
Kath Murdoch  Classroom Connections

Kath Walker  Time to Play
Constructing Classroom Learning Experiences