

# The Early Years Learning Framework in practice – one year on in the journey

by Heather Barnes

The *Early Years Learning Framework* (EYLF) was endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in July 2009 and is one of the key components of the Australian Government's National Quality Framework for the early childhood education and care sector. A draft *Framework for School Age Care* has also been developed to build on the EYLF to ensure a seamless transition for children from early childhood services to school age care. Both frameworks encourage educators to think more deeply about their service's approach to learning, development and care, and the way in which they guide everyday practice and development of the program.

In March and June 2010, three Victorian services were featured in *Putting Children First*. They shared their stories about starting to implement the EYLF in their settings. These services have kindly agreed to talk about their experiences after a year of putting the EYLF into practice. They were asked to describe the successes and challenges that they had experienced whilst engaging with the EYLF over the past 12 months and whether they had any advice or message for other services that are embarking on the journey.

## The University of Melbourne Queensberry Children's Centre

Cathy Simpson (Director) and Liz O'Brien (Second-in-charge)

### Successes

We had two professional development days focussing on the EYLF during 2010. The first focused on critical reflection and was facilitated by early childhood consultant, Catharine Hydon. Following the training we encouraged educators to practice their critical reflection skills by participating in mind mapping activities on challenges, successes or questions they were facing within their rooms. Educators initially did this within their room groups and we allowed some time at the start of each staff meeting for ideas to be shared with other members of the team. Early childhood consultant, Dr Anne Kennedy, led the second day with the focus



Ryka explores the creative process at Queensberry Children's Centre

on intentional teaching, which was also very stimulating.

Two educators attended the Bastow Institute's Contemporary Early Childhood Theory course. As a result they have been able to instigate conversations and inspire enthusiasm about the EYLF within the centre. We hope to send more educators next year to continue this learning and build a strong base of pedagogical leaders within the service.

Cathy and Liz completed the four modules offered by the Victorian Professional Support Coordinator, (Community Child Care) and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development on the *Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework*, which is strongly linked to the EYLF.

We are presently exploring the National Quality Standard. At each staff meeting we are reflecting on one of the Quality Areas and each staff team brings a question or a scenario that prompts discussion and learning opportunities.

Educators are at different stages of their journey with the EYLF, but it is pleasing that a significant majority are becoming comfortable with the framework and are becoming confident in showing links in their programs and within their planning.

### Challenges

One of our challenges is to come up with interesting and different ways to promote

opportunities for continued learning and discussion around the EYLF and to engage the team with the framework. We also want to include part time educators who do not necessarily have formal planning responsibilities.

Another challenge is to be aware of who needs extra support and guidance during the exploration stage.

At this point we are sharing our knowledge and learning with families as it happens both formally and informally, however we feel that over time families will have a greater understanding and appreciation of the EYLF.

### **Key messages for other services**

Though it may feel overwhelming, don't be scared to try different ways of exploring the EYLF. Involve as many people as you can and collect a variety of resources to help you and your team. Identify the team members who seem keen and provide opportunities for them to learn more, whether through formal courses or access to resources. There are a lot of good online forums that will help to guide you.

## **Boroondara Family Day Care**

*Mardi Luff (Team Leader Occasional Care and Family Day Care)*

Early in 2010, Louise Dorrat (former Coordinator Children's Services) facilitated an EYLF session with the educators mainly focusing on the Principles. This was followed up by discussions with the Resource and Support Officers and educators during the home visits.

A newsletter is distributed quarterly to educators and a 'Frameworks in Focus' section has been included, focusing on a different Principle each time. This includes examples of what educators are currently doing, or can do, to support the Principle. Providing real examples has proven to be more effective and less daunting for the educators, and has allowed educators to acknowledge what they are currently doing and what they already know.

Our Resource and Support Officer, Sue Armstrong, has been looking at ways to support educators with planning and documentation in relation to the EYLF. During 2011 she will be spending more time with educators on home visits to assist in planning and reflecting on the framework. This will be particularly useful for the educators who have English as their second language and for those who are less confident.



*'Visible learning' at Boroondara Family Day Care. Educator, Petroula, with children Sonny, Ferris and Noah.*

Together, Sue and the educators will be able to find what will work for them.

### **Challenges**

'Reflective Practice' is the Principle which is the most challenging for our educators. As most of the educators work full time and long hours, finding the time to sit down and gather information, research, plan, and reflect on the plan is a challenge for them. We will be addressing this at each meeting with educators.

### **Key messages for other services**

Keep it simple, keep it real. The family day care educators are isolated and are so busy, they do not need added stress and if it becomes too difficult, they will not embrace it. If the coordination unit embraces the EYLF and continually talks about it in a positive way, then educators are also more likely to engage with it.

## **Homestead Child and Family Centre**

*Samantha Bruno (Acting Director)*

There has been increasing consolidation at the centre over the past twelve months in our engagement with the EYLF and collaboration with other services within the City of Hume.

One of our major successes has been in encouraging educators to stop, look and listen and just 'be' with the children.



*Educator Heather, with Omar and Ali, at Homestead Child and Family Centre*

Another has been the focus on critical reflection and inquiry. Asking questions such as “Why are we doing this?”, “What is best for the child?”, “What is best for the family?” has encouraged educators to examine their practice rather than just continuing to do something just because that is the way it has always been done.

There has been a greater focus on collaboration and sharing of learning within all parts of the centre which has helped to facilitate conversations and reflection. For example, once each term a professional development evening is held for all educators across Hume City. Every three weeks an early morning team meeting is held between the long day care room leaders and the kindergarten teachers where they share feedback from the Hume Mentor and Peer Support Group and discuss current issues in early childhood. Short daily room briefings also occur so that all educators are informed about any relevant issue as well as current program communication around supporting learning outcomes for the children.

Practical strategies such as removing the television from the staff room and using written memos as a communication tool for all ‘housekeeping’ issues has promoted more time for conversations about practice at meeting times.

## Challenges

The meeting spaces that were designed to capture children's voices have become more informal and can happen outside or anywhere in the rooms. A challenge is that educators need to be better attuned to children, and better skilled at listening and seeing in order to accurately notice, recognise and respond to children. A better theoretical understanding will assist educators to reflect more on practice.

We have made progress in focussing on families as the children's first teachers but want to continue to focus on a stronger family-centred approach.

## Key messages for other services

Read it, read it and read it! Pull it apart and explore the whole document. Explore what *belonging*, *being* and *becoming* mean for educators, the children and the families.

If possible, access funding to provide mentoring support and provide a professional development program for educators, to encourage and support deeper understanding of the framework which will enable and promote conversations and reflections and increased collaboration.

## Conclusion

Each of these services has adopted their own unique approach to incorporating the EYLF into their everyday practice, and each has encountered some challenges as well as experiencing many successes. Regardless of their individual approaches, the common message that all these services have for educators who are yet to embark on the EYLF journey is to be proactive and to explore it collaboratively with colleagues and other support networks ■

## References and further reading

- Broderick, H. (2010). Homestead Child and Family Centre: A reflective journey six months on. *Every Child*, 6(4), 36-37.
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