

Special Feature

Getting to know the Early Years Learning Framework and making it everyday practice

Becoming familiar with the EYLF

By now most child care professionals will have begun exploring the *Early Years Learning Framework* (EYLF) document, perhaps starting with a section that grabs their interest. This is a good way to begin thinking about what is included and to begin to analyse how it applies to daily practice. Over time it is important to read the whole document to become familiar with its design and structure and to continue to re-read it as changes are gradually introduced.

Consider documenting group discussions to keep a record of your service's journey as you begin to explore the *Framework*. This may also be helpful to keep track of areas that may require further consideration or follow-up.

Possible ways of approaching discussion of the sections:

There is a helpful *Glossary of Terms* at the back of the document (EYLF, p.45). Start with a discussion about these terms so that everyone understands their use. For example, the use of the term 'educator' recognises the teaching role of child care professionals, regardless of qualifications. Educators are defined as people 'who work directly with children in early childhood settings'.

It may be helpful to allocate specific sections of the document to individuals within the service and encourage them to share their thoughts about the content and how it relates to current practice in the service.

The Vision

A Vision for Children's Learning - All children experience learning that is engaging and builds success for life. (EYLF, p.7) .

Considering the following questions may assist your reflections and discussions about the *Vision* in your service:

- How do you know if children's learning experiences are engaging?
- Are you building relationships that help to promote children's wellbeing, and positive attitudes towards learning?

by Heather Barnes

This article relates to:

FDCQA Principles:	1.1 – 1.5, 2.1 – 2.3, and 3.1 – 3.7
OSHCQA Principles:	1.1 – 1.3, 2.1 – 2.3, 3.1 – 3.3, 4.1 – 4.4 and 5.1 – 5.4
QIAS Principles:	1.1 – 1.5, 2.1, 2.2, 3.1 – 3.3 and 4.1 – 4.6

Belonging, Being and Becoming

'Fundamental to the EYLF is a view of children's lives as characterised by belonging, being and becoming'

Consider discussing belonging, being and becoming from your own perspective as adults:

- Where is it that you feel you belong?
- How do you make the most of each day and enjoy the present?
- How do you continue to gain increased knowledge and skills as educators?

Follow this discussion by reflecting on what these themes mean for children in your service:

- How do you help children to belong when they start at your service?
- Can they see their interests and the people who are important to them reflected in the environment?
- Do you step in when children are excluded from play?

'Being' recognises the importance of giving children opportunities to explore and learn at their own pace.

The following questions may help you to identify how you currently support children's 'being':

- How much uninterrupted time do children have to play? Is the flow of the day driven by a timetable or by the children's interests?
- Are the children involved in program decision making?
- Does the program focus on children's current interests and skills?

'Becoming' acknowledges the growth and development that happens in the first five years of life and the importance of nurturing each child's

Special Feature

wellbeing and learning. Consider the following:

- Do you use the children's interests and strengths to guide planning for further learning?
- Is the learning environment stimulating, challenging and supportive?

Early Childhood Pedagogy

This section reminds us of the aspects of professional judgement that we use in facilitating children's learning. Many of us have studied different theories of early childhood, but it is easy to forget why we do what we do. Reflecting on theories and the choices we make in our work helps us to gain new insights and make continuous improvements to practice and learning environments.

- Are you able to see the influence of different theories in your work?
- When did you last review your knowledge of theories of early childhood development?

Principles

The EYLF *Principles* encompass contemporary theories and research evidence and underpin the high quality practice that many services are already implementing:

1. Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships
2. Partnerships
3. High expectations and equity
4. Respect for diversity
5. Ongoing learning and reflective practice.

Use the questions on page 13 of the EYLF to help you consider how these *Principles* may be present in your current practice and to help to you identify areas for further inquiry.

Practice

Become familiar with the range of pedagogical practice that educators use to promote children's learning. Explore each of the following and consider how you are already incorporating these perspectives in your program:

- Holistic approaches
- Responsiveness to children
- Learning through play
- Intentional teaching
- Learning environments
- Cultural competence
- Continuity of learning and transitions
- Assessment for learning.

Learning Outcomes

The five *Learning Outcomes* of the EYLF are:

- *Children have a strong sense of identity*
- *Children are connected with and contribute to their world*
- *Children have a strong sense of wellbeing*
- *Children are confident and involved learners*
- *Children are effective communicators* (EYLF, p.19).

It is essential to read the introduction to the *Learning Outcomes* as well as the introduction to each of the *Outcomes*, so that the intent and content are fully understood.

The points within each *Outcome* are relevant to children of all ages and acknowledge that every child's learning progresses at their own rate. It is therefore important that educators and families realise that the *Outcomes* are not a checklist that needs to be ticked off for every child. The EYLF is very focused on what children can do, rather than on their deficits.

Become familiar with the key components of learning within each *Outcome* as well as the examples of evidence so that you will readily recognise the learning when it is observed. It is also helpful to become familiar with all the examples of how educators can promote learning.

Linking the EYLF to everyday practice

- Display information in the service about the EYLF to keep everyone focused on the journey
- Use the language of the document in discussions with each other, families and other professionals
- Consider revising the philosophy of your service in relation to the EYLF *Principles* and *Practice*
- Look for ways your service is already promoting belonging, being and becoming in children's lives
- Identify current practice that matches the *Principles* and *Practice*
- Record examples of how educators promote learning for each of the *Learning Outcomes*
- Review how children's learning is planned for and documented. Do the current methods used match the pedagogical practices in the *Framework*?
- Identify any areas that require improvement

Special Feature

or change and create an improvement plan.

When developing your plan, think about:

- What needs to be done to introduce change
- Whether research will be required
- The tasks and timelines involved
- How you will implement and document the change
- How you will review and evaluate the change as a team as well as with children and families.

There is no prescribed way that the EYLF has to be used and each service will use it in ways that work best for them. However, it challenges educators to be purposeful in the implementation of curriculum rather than just continuing to deliver programs in the same way as they have always done.

How smoothly it is adopted will depend on the educators' willingness to embrace change. Recognise that it will take time to absorb and reflect on the content, discuss ideas with colleagues and actively listen to children's ideas and suggestions.

Many services that have been using the EYLF have reported that the more they read the *Framework*, the more they reflect on what they do, why they do it and whether further improvements can be made to promote children's learning. Many believe that the *Framework* will help to lift the image of child care professionals and will help to demonstrate the importance of the early years and define the significance of the work they do within the community.

Why has the Early Years Learning Framework been introduced?

The EYLF is one of the key components of the Australian Government's National Quality Framework for the early childhood education and care sector and was endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in July 2009. It provides a national curriculum framework which will help to ensure quality and consistency in learning opportunities for children no matter where they live in Australia or the type of child care service they attend.

The Framework recognises the importance of play-based learning and it is designed to inspire conversations, improve communication and provide a common language about young children's learning. It is also intended to engage child care professionals in reflection, inquiry and culturally competent practice.

Support for services

Further resources, including an *Educators' Guide*, are being developed to support the implementation of the EYLF. The *Guide* will assist services to explore the *Principles and Practice* in further detail.

The Professional Support Coordinators in each state and territory will be supporting services to understand and implement the *Framework* throughout 2010 ■

References and further reading

- Council of Australian Governments. (2009). *Belonging, Being & Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*. ACT: Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. [this publication may also be downloaded from http://www.deewr.gov.au/EarlyChildhood/Policy_Agenda/Quality/Pages/EarlyYearsLearningFramework.aspx]
- Goodfellow, J. (2009). *The Early Years Learning Framework: Getting Started*. ECA Research in Practice Series. Watson, ACT: Early Childhood Australia.
- Gowrie Australia. (2009). *Reflections*, Summer edition, 37.
- Adamson, P. (2008). *The Child Care Transition*, Innocenti Report Card 8, 2008. Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.

Useful website

- DEEWR: www.deewr.gov.au/earlychildhood/earlyyearslearningframework

Special Feature – Case studies

The Early Years Learning Framework in real settings

Two services shared how they have linked the Early Years Learning Framework to their daily practice.

The University of Melbourne Queensberry Children's Centre

The University of Melbourne Queensberry Children's Centre decided to 'seize the day' by beginning their familiarisation of the *Early Years Learning Framework* (EYLF) as soon it was available. A professional development day for all staff introduced the EYLF and the *Principles, Practice and Learning Outcomes* were discussed. All staff have been encouraged to read the *Framework* and to begin using the language of the document throughout the centre. A review of the centre philosophy was then undertaken to ensure that it matched the *Principles and Practice* of the EYLF.

Staff are supported to document children's learning in ways that are appropriate for their team and the age group with whom they work, but all are encouraged to ensure that the programs reflect children's interests. The centre has started to link the *Learning Outcomes* to their analysis of reflections on children's learning in their journals. At each staff meeting one of the *Learning Outcomes* is explored and staff are encouraged to examine how they are supporting children to achieve learning. Discussion is collated afterwards and sent out to families for feedback.

The Director, Cathy Simpson, said that after some initial trepidation, the team has embraced the philosophy of the EYLF as it meshes well with the way the centre has operated in the past. They feel that the document assists their reflections and their conversations with families. They are enthusiastic about continuing to review their practice and to challenge themselves to further support children's learning.

The City of Boroondara Family Day Care scheme

The City of Boroondara Family Day Care scheme decided to hand-deliver the EYLF to all carers so that field workers could have individual conversations with them about it. Carers' reactions varied, with some reporting that they felt comfortable with using it as they could see that it aligned with the way they currently work, while others felt overwhelmed.

The scheme followed up with a newsletter that reassured carers that many of the key learning areas are already part of their every day practice in family day care, and that the EYLF reinforced the commitment they have already made to play-based learning and the

importance of establishing and maintaining close relationships with families and children. Carers were encouraged to use the *Framework* to guide their interactions with children and promote learning. Over the next few months they used the *Carer Update* (newsletter) and meetings to highlight particular parts of the EYLF and the ways that carers could document examples of their everyday practice.

Louise Dorrat, Manager of Children's Services at Boroondara, used a small suitcase to visually 'unpack' some of the aspects of each of the *Learning Outcomes*.

For *Outcome 1, Children have a strong sense of identity*, she included a photograph of a child to encourage discussion about the importance of children having photos of themselves in their family day care home to promote a sense of belonging. Louise also had picture books depicting different family structures/cultures and photos of children displaying different feelings. These were used to promote discussion of the importance of recognising feelings of fear and discomfort and taking time to acknowledge these feelings, supporting children to express ideas and emotions through art, play, conversation and story telling and helping children to belong within the setting ■

