

# The Early Years Learning Framework in Practice

A HANDBOOK FOR EDUCATORS AND PARENTS

Bridie Raban

Kay Margetts

Amelia Church

Jan Deans

*Sample pages*

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# About this book

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This book provides early childhood professionals with a practical guide for interpreting and implementing *Belonging, Being and Becoming – The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (EYLF). The book is clear and easy to use, and brings together theoretical foundations and practical applications related to the principles, practices and outcomes of the EYLF.

The information should be of interest to anyone – educators, managers, tertiary students, parents – who is concerned about early childhood education and learning.

To help readers understand the EYLF, the first section of this book provides background information about early childhood services and government imperatives for the early childhood profession in Australia, of which the EYLF is a key feature. This is followed by a comprehensive overview of the **pedagogy**, **principles** and **practices** underpinning the EYLF, and ideas for confidently implementing these. There is a strong focus on social and physical environments, transitions, play-based intentional learning, and observation, evaluation and planning.

Five chapters then provide practical advice and strategies for supporting each of the learning outcomes: Identity, Community, Wellbeing, Learning, and Communication. This includes ideas for implementing the outcomes with different age groups.

In helping educators make informed decisions about children's learning and progress towards the five learning outcomes, this book addresses:

- the nature of learning environments which focus on the spaces provided for babies and children to play
- respectful relationships within settings and the role of the primary caregiver

- assessment for learning which includes taking observations and using these in effective planning
- the learning outcomes, which give practical advice and support for educators in implementing the EYLF

Effective practice guides educators towards forming a view of where each child is in their learning, their future learning and development, and the most effective practices to support children in getting there. The guidance on effective practice to support children's development is based on the EYLF principles and the examples given later in this book illustrate just some of the possibilities.

Examples and questions throughout the book encourage educators and managers to reflect on their own practice and consider new ideas.

## Ideas for using this book

This book has been designed for use as a personal resource, and also for use by staff teams as part of a professional development program. Early childhood professionals in leadership and management positions play a critical part in implementing the EYLF and exploring with early childhood educators how effective they and the setting are in meeting the EYLF requirements. The questions for reflection at the end of each chapter are ideal for this purpose.

Each member of staff should be provided with a copy of the EYLF so that everyone can appreciate the work they are already doing within the framework. Then, using different sections of this book, the principles, practices and learning outcomes can be more carefully explored. Staff should be encouraged to discuss and reflect on:

- how effective they believe they are in meeting the needs of children and implementing the principles and

practices of the EYLF, and how this can be strengthened

- how effective the setting is in helping children learn and develop and implementing the principles and practices of the EYLF, and how this can be strengthened

As a key starting point it is important to remember:

- every child is a competent learner from birth who can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured
- children learn to be strong and independent from a base of loving and secure relationships with parents and/or a primary caregiver
- the environment plays a key role in supporting and extending children's development and learning
- Children learn and develop in different ways and at different rates and all areas of learning and development are equally important and inter-connected.



# Early childhood education and care

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## What is early childhood education and care (ECEC) in Australia?

The ECEC sector in Australia delivers a diverse range of services for children from birth to 12 years of age (COAG 2009a, p.2). While models of service delivery and terminology used to describe ECEC services differ across the states and territories, the main ECEC service types are described below.

**Long Day Care (LDC)** is a centre-based service in receipt of Commonwealth Government Child Care Benefit (CCB). LDC services provide all day or part-time care for children aged from birth to 6 years who attend the centre on a regular basis. Care is generally provided in a building, or part of a building, that has been created or re-developed specifically for use as a child-care centre, and children are usually grouped together in rooms according to age. In most cases, settings operate between 7:30 am and 6:00 pm on normal working days for 48 to 52 weeks per year so that parents can manage both the care of their children and the demands of their employment.

**Family Day Care (FDC)** refers to services in receipt of Child Care Benefit (CCB) where a registered person provides flexible care,

typically in their own home, for other people's children and as part of a coordinated home-based care scheme. Care is predominantly provided for children aged from birth to 6 years who are not yet at school, but may also be provided for school-aged children. Carers can provide care for the whole day, part of the day, or for irregular or casual care. Often children with additional needs are catered for through this service.

**Outside School Hours Care (OSHC)** services provide care for primary school-aged children (typically aged 5 to 12 years) before and after school and can also operate during school holidays (vacation care) and on pupil-free days. OSHC services are usually provided from primary school premises and receive Commonwealth funding through the Child Care Benefit scheme. Services may also be located in child-care centres, community facilities or other settings located near the primary school. OSHC is often provided by parent associations or not-for-profit organisations.

**Preschool** is a service that provides an early childhood education program, delivered by a qualified teacher, often but not necessarily on a sessional basis, in a dedicated service, or within a long day care setting. Alternative terms currently used for preschool in some jurisdictions include 'kindergarten' and 'pre-preparatory'.

**In Home Care (IHC)** is similar to Family Day Care but the professional care is provided in the child's own home. IHC is funded by the Commonwealth government, is not widely available and is usually only an option where other forms of care are not suitable. This usually arises in circumstances where it is difficult for the child to be cared for outside the home, for example if the child has a disability and the home is structured especially for them.



**Occasional Care** is a centre-based child care service that provides care for children aged from birth to 5 years who attend the service on an hourly or sessional basis for short periods or at irregular intervals.

**Non-mainstream services** are provided by not-for-profit organisations and are delivered mainly in rural, remote or indigenous communities, providing access to ECEC where the market would otherwise fail to deliver. These services are generally subject to relevant children's services state and territory regulations. Types of non-mainstream services include:

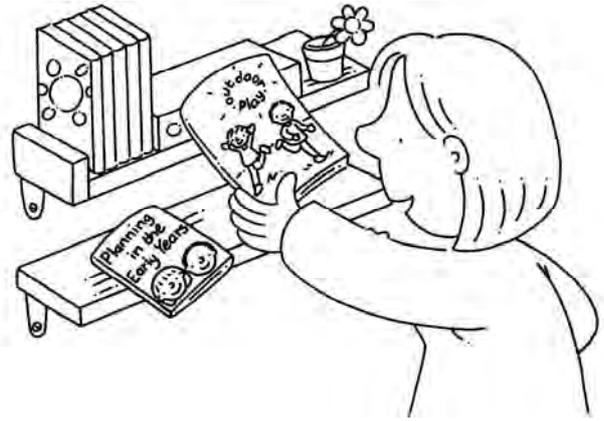
- flexible/innovative services
- mobile ECEC services
- multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services
- indigenous playgroups
- indigenous OSHC and enrichment programs
- Jobs, Education and Training (JET) child care
- neighbourhood models of occasional care
- rural care services

These services can also provide a mix of service or program types listed above.

The new National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and School Age Care (COAG 2009b) will eventually encompass all service types. However, given the range and diversity of services in the Australian ECEC sector, an all-encompassing national quality system will take several years to achieve. A more practical approach has been adopted which will incrementally incorporate service types starting with the largest (in numbers of children) and most regulated.

**Children learn best when they are healthy, safe and secure, when their individual needs are met and when they have positive relationships with the adults caring for them.**

Commonwealth, state and territory government departments are involved in the operation, funding and regulation of



children's services throughout Australia and each has a separate and vital role to play in ensuring that children are provided with safe and secure environments in which to interact and explore rich and diverse learning and development opportunities.

## What is the Australian government aiming for?

The Australian government is committed to the delivery of high quality care and education for all children and as such aims to ensure that:

- child-care is an *affordable* option for all low-to-middle income families
- adequate *supply* of services and places are available to meet the needs of diverse families
- *quality* outcomes are achieved for all children including those with additional needs

In order to meet these objectives, all services that provide long day care and education for children aged from birth to 5 years are required to meet state and territory legislation and licensing requirements, provide for a minimum of 8 hours a day over a minimum of 48 weeks per year, and provide priority of access to those children who are at risk and whose parents require work-related care.

## Roles and responsibilities

### The role of the Commonwealth

The Department of Families, Housing and Community Services and Indigenous Affairs manages the Commonwealth Child Care program and:

- administers Child Care Benefit payments to families
- administers financial support to approved community centres in need maintaining statistical data on the supply and demand of childcare places
- assists in a range of matters associated with the planning and development of children's services

### The role of states and territories

State and territory governments have the prime responsibility for family support, child welfare and regulation, particularly the setting and implementation of regulations made under the Children's Services Act 1996 and all requirements relating to the licensing of children's services operations.

### Ensuring quality

The Commonwealth government requirements are designed to support providers in creating welcoming, safe and stimulating settings where children are able to enjoy learning through play, to grow in confidence and to fulfil their potential.

The Australian government is committed to the delivery of high quality care and education for all children and has introduced the Quality and Improvement Accreditation System (QIAS) which is administered by the National Childcare Accreditation Council (NCAC) and linked to Commonwealth government funding in the form of Child Care



Benefit. All long day early childhood services throughout Australia are required to register with NCAC and implement a systematic process that ensures continuing quality improvement. While each service can decide for themselves how best quality will be achieved, NCAC requires that services demonstrate that they have a designated improvement plan that is implemented on a daily basis and that quality improvement processes are informed by regular self study undertaken by all staff against standards outlined in the QIAS Quality Practices Guide and Handbook.

### What are the quality areas?

The 7 identified quality areas are:

1. Staff relationships with children
2. Partnerships with families
3. Programming and evaluation
4. Children's experiences and learning
5. Protective care and safety
6. Health, nutrition and wellbeing
7. Managing to support quality

Each quality area is expanded to include a total of 33 principles which detail expectations for high quality practice.

In order to achieve and maintain the standards required for formal accreditation, all services undertake a 5-step process which includes:

- **Registration** – all services are required to pay an annual registration fee to participate in QIAS
- **Self-study and continuous improvement** – staff and families are involved in a continuous cycle of self-study which involves rating practices against standards outlined in the QIAS Quality Practices Guide
- **Validation** – services are visited by a trained QIAS validator whose job it is to complete a validation report based on observations of practice against the standards outlined in the QIAS Quality Practices Guide

- **Moderation** – Moderators undertake a process of assessing the quality of practice guided by information provided by the service in its Self Study Report, Validation Surveys and the Validation Report
- **Accreditation Decision** – NCAC makes a final decision based on the preceding four steps. To be accredited, the service is required to achieve a composite rating of Satisfactory or higher in all seven Quality Areas with this process being undertaken every 2½years

It is important to note that three standards of practice are identified for each principle: Satisfactory, Good Quality and High Quality. However, staff and families are required to rate each Principle from a range of four standards which include Unsatisfactory, Satisfactory, Good Quality and High Quality.

QIAS and its supporting resources provide information and advice designed to help educators achieve high quality service delivery in a way that reflects the needs of the individual children in their care and is appropriate to their setting.

## Where are we now?

In December 2007, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed to a partnership between the Commonwealth, and state and territory governments to pursue substantial reform in the areas of early childhood development. The National Quality Framework (COAG 2009b) reflected its aspiration that children are born healthy and have access to the support, care and education throughout early childhood that will equip them for life and learning.

*Investing in the Early Years: A National Early Childhood Development Strategy* (Commonwealth of Australia 2009a) was developed under COAG and announced in July 2009. The strategy provides a comprehensive approach to building an effective early childhood development system in Australia that will contribute to the nation's human capital and productivity. The strategy's vision for 2020 is that 'all children

have the best start in life to create a better future for themselves and for the nation'.

The National Quality Framework is a key contribution to the National ECD Strategy. It has three key elements:

1. The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)
2. a National Quality Standard
3. a new national quality rating system

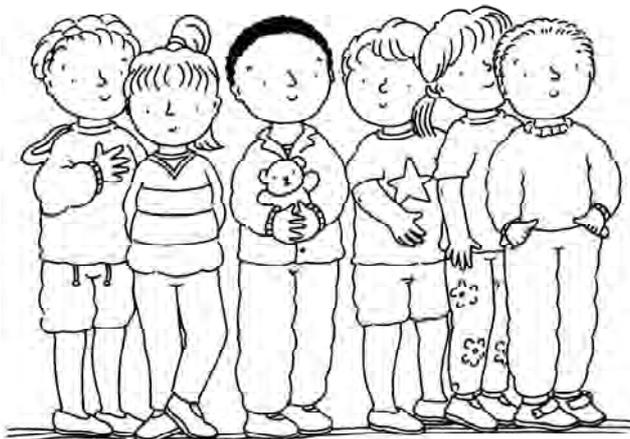
These elements will drive continuous improvement and provide educators and families with robust and relevant information about the quality of care and learning.

The new National Quality Standard and Rating Framework includes 7 quality areas:

1. Educational program and practice
2. Children's wellbeing, health and safety
3. Physical environment
4. Staffing arrangements
5. Relationships – interactions within the service
6. Collaborative partnerships with families and communities
7. Leadership and service management

The *Early Years Learning Framework: Belonging, Being and Becoming*

(Commonwealth of Australia 2009b) was endorsed for implementation by COAG at its July 2009 meeting. A regulation impact statement which outlines the agreed option for the first three elements of the National Quality Framework was then released by COAG in December 2009.



# Belonging, being and becoming – a vision for children’s learning

## The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia

The *EYLF* enables conversations to take place across sectors working with young children, and offers the opportunity for a *shared* vision within and between settings.

The *EYLF* identifies appropriate early childhood **pedagogy**, through **5 principles** that reflect research evidence, **8 practices** and **5 learning outcomes**. This framework enables all early childhood (EC) educators, for the first time in Australia, to speak with the same voice. It identifies learning outcomes that EC educators and the children they work with can achieve. These learning outcomes are both familiar and challenging, and are equally relevant, whatever the early childhood service.

## Pedagogy

The term *pedagogy* refers to the holistic nature of early childhood educators’ professional practice (especially those aspects that involve building and nurturing relationships), curriculum decision-making, teaching and learning. *EYLF* p.11

The term ‘pedagogy’ may be new for some EC educators. Pedagogy includes all the decisions that are made concerning teaching and learning. When selecting experiences to further children’s learning and development, pedagogical decisions will be informed by educators’ knowledge and understandings of children, their families, the local community and the context of their work. There will be theoretical perspectives, cultural norms, training and experience which will bear on curriculum decisions and how each day is spent, and which resources are made available to the children. This includes how the room is organised and how adults plan to



spend their time and plan for the children’s activities. EC educators typically work in teams, and the *EYLF* provides an opportunity to focus talk on their work with children.

At the core of improving learning outcomes is the need to increase the pedagogical capacity of staff to implement high quality interactions, in conjunction with the ability to work sensitively with families and communities. Early childhood provision has mixed purposes at the level of individual services and the *EYLF* brings these purposes together into a national framework characterised by:

- play-based learning and development
- teacher–child interactions that support and challenge
- sensitivity to individual children
- concept development – asking questions How? and Why?
- quality of feedback
- language modelling
- sustained shared thinking
- focused interactive teaching
- continuity of practice: birth to 8 years

Teachers who consistently respond to individual questions, concerns and needs are known to be more effective in growing children’s achievements. These dot points are aspects of pedagogy that, through research, have been shown to enhance children’s learning during the early years.



EYLF pedagogy reflects the following principles and practices.

## Principles

The five principles in the *EYLF* which have been identified to support and sustain practice to enhance children's development towards achieving the learning outcomes include:

- secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships
- partnerships
- high expectations and equity
- respect for diversity
- ongoing learning and reflective practice

These principles mirror the values of our multicultural country, and this diversity is welcomed through the establishment of collaborative relationships between educators and families. The aim is to improve the lives of all children, and to constantly be re-evaluating practice with respect to what effect it has on others, and ensuring a willingness to learn from personal experience and from the experiences of others. These principles are achieved through openness to difference, inquiry and understanding, and continual review of practices and ideas, giving opportunities for collaboration and cooperation with colleagues and communities for the enhancement of children's learning and development.

These principles:

- view every child as a competent learner from birth who can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured
- recognise that children learn to be strong and independent from a base of loving and secure relationships with parents and/or a primary caregiver
- identify the environments as playing a key role in supporting and extending children's development and learning
- acknowledge that children learn and develop in different ways and at different rates
- recognise that all areas of learning and development are equally important and inter-connected

## Practices

Eight practices are identified in the *EYLF* and these are supported by the principles listed above. These practices illustrate that educators draw on a wide range of strategies to support children's learning, recognising that children learn best when they are healthy, safe and secure, when their individual needs are met, and when they have positive relationships with the adults caring for them. The *EYLF*, therefore, requires educators to:

- adopt holistic practices
- be responsive to children
- plan and implement learning through play
- create many opportunities for intentional teaching
- create physical and social learning environments that have a positive impact on children's learning
- value the cultural and social contexts of children and their families
- provide for continuity in experiences and enabling children to have successful transitions
- assess and monitor children's learning to inform provision and to support children in achieving learning outcomes

Within these requirements, educators can consider how well children learn and develop in diverse settings in relation to their starting points and capabilities, and the extent to which children are active learners, are creative and are able to think in a critical sense. Educators can further consider:

- how to identify whether each child's development is consistently beyond that of any other child or falls below the development of other children
- the development of children's dispositions for learning, their levels of enjoyment, and positive attitudes towards learning, and how to give children opportunities to become independent
- how to encourage children to join in, make friends and feel part of the setting, and for each child, the extent to which they respond to the expectations of those who work with them
- ways in which children are encouraged to make choices and decisions
- how children show development in communicating, levels of literacy, numeracy and ICT
- ways in which children are encouraged to become active, inquisitive and independent learners, developing their skills in being a part of a social group, and how they solve problems.



## Learning outcomes

A learning outcome is defined in the *EYLF* as 'a skill, knowledge or disposition that educators can actively promote in early childhood settings, in collaboration with children and families' (p.46). It might be added that these outcomes are also achieved in collaboration with colleagues, as educators frequently find themselves working in a team.

There are 5 learning outcomes identified in the *EYLF* which guide the decisions that educators make about their planning for children's learning and development. Each outcome has a number of key components, each of which is supported by a range of examples. The outcomes should guide observations and record-keeping and inform transition activities when the children enter an early childhood setting, and move to primary school.

These learning outcomes have been identified to represent the complexity and interrelatedness of children's learning and development. While some educators may well find them challenging, beneath the terminology the essence of excellent early childhood practice is evident. It should be noted that these learning outcomes are the foundation of a civil society.

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### Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity

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Key components:

- Children feel safe, secure and supported.
- Children develop their emerging autonomy, interdependence, resilience and sense of agency.
- Children develop knowledgeable and confident self-identities.
- Children learn to interact in relation to others with care, empathy and respect.

Children find out about themselves, how capable they are, and their place in the world through their experiences with others. Having self-knowledge will enable children to be sensitive to the lives of others and to understand that they have the power to make choices in relation to consequences.

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**Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world**

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**Key components:**

- Children develop a sense of belonging to groups and communities and an understanding of the reciprocal rights and responsibilities necessary for active community participation.
- Children respond to diversity with respect.
- Children become aware of fairness.
- Children become socially responsible and show respect for the environment.

Children are, foremost, members of their own family, but as they grow and develop this frame of reference increases and multiplies. They learn that they have rights along with responsibilities with respect to their social and geographic worlds, and so do other people and other children.

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**Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing**

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**Key components:**

- Children become strong in their social and emotional wellbeing.
- Children take increasing responsibility for their own health and wellbeing.

If children grow up to be healthy, active and confident, they will be better prepared for learning about their world and its potential. They will be more positive about the stresses and challenges of everyday life.

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**Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners**

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**Key components:**

- Children develop dispositions for learning such as curiosity, cooperation, confidence, creativity, commitment, enthusiasm, persistence, imagination and reflexivity.
- Children develop a range of skills and processes such as problem solving, enquiry, experimentation, hypothesising, researching and investigating.

- Children transfer and adapt what they have learned from one context to another.
- Children resource their own learning through connecting with people, place, technologies and natural and processed materials.

Children learn in many different ways and use their learning for a variety of different purposes. The range of activities they experience during their early years will impact on how variously their learning will manifest and provide a resource for them to use in their exploration of their worlds.

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**Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators**

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**Key components:**

- Children interact verbally and non-verbally with others for a range of purposes.
- Children engage with a range of texts and gain meaning from these texts.
- Children express ideas and make meaning using a range of media.
- Children begin to understand how symbols and pattern systems work.
- Children use information and communication technologies to access information, investigate ideas and represent their thinking.

Children learn to communicate in different ways as they increasingly interact with their worlds. Their behaviours become more



complex and diverse as they access the wider range of experiences presented to them. Their knowledge and conceptual development becomes richer and enables them to understand and express themselves more confidently and consistently.

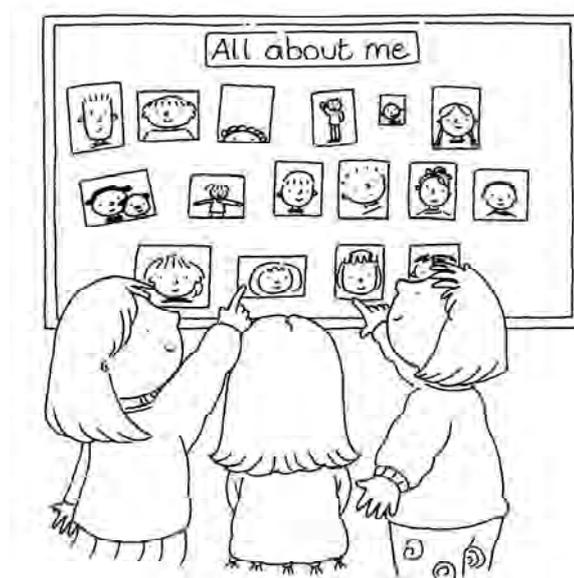
### The inter-relatedness of learning outcomes

A visual representation is provided here to help educators to more easily conceptualise their work with young children. It is used in this book as a way of locating activities within the broader context of the *EYLF*.



Educators can see here that when they document their plans for, or observations of, children’s learning, they will be covering more than one learning outcome during a single activity. For instance, in an activity aimed at a project ‘All About Me’, it will be clear that aspects of all five learning outcomes will be addressed. The child will experience themselves as an individual (Identity), as part of a family and wider community (Community), with needs and aspirations (Wellbeing), using talk and other resources to find things out about themselves (Learning), and finally, telling stories, painting pictures, looking at books, weighing and measuring themselves and each other, and the like (Communication).

In reconceptualising their observations, assessments and planning through these fresh lenses, educators will soon become familiar and confident with the *EYLF*.



### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

A lively culture of professional inquiry is established when early childhood educators and those with whom they work are all involved in an ongoing cycle of review through which current practices are examined, outcomes reviewed and new ideas generated. *EYLF* p.13

1. How are high quality interactions ensured for each child?
2. How best is continuity of practice achieved across the age range 0–5 years?
3. How is diversity acknowledged and respected?
4. How are adult-led and child-led initiatives balanced?
5. How is children’s learning monitored and assessed, particularly in relation to the 5 learning outcomes?