



December 2008

KPV Submission in response to the draft Early Years Learning Framework

General comments

The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) will become an important document to guide practice in early childhood education and care (ECEC). In its current form, it is sufficiently broad to allow educators flexibility while also providing a context in which to ground their educational practice. The EYLF will assist the sector to move towards broadly consistent practice across a variety of settings. It provides a common language for early childhood professionals.

The draft EYLF can still be improved upon, particularly in strengthening the importance the EYLF places on developing partnerships between services and parents. In addition, implementing the EYLF will require timely investment in supporting information resources and training for early childhood educators. Additional information resources educating parents about the EYLF will assist teachers and parents to understand how they can share information and engage in a partnering approach to early childhood education.

Information resources and training will be important in promoting the uptake of the EYLF. It is presently unclear however what new or existing policy or regulatory mechanisms will be drawn upon to ensure the uptake of the EYLF.

Notwithstanding the potential improvements outlined in this submission, the draft EYLF represents an important contribution to the emerging base of high level policy promoting quality and consistency in ECEC.

Content and purpose of the draft framework

- *What are the strengths and weaknesses of the Framework?*

Promoting the role and importance of educators with specialised early childhood teaching qualifications as pedagogical leaders is one of the stated purposes of the draft Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF). We acknowledge and congratulate the authors on this key inclusion. A higher profile for early childhood teachers as pedagogical leaders is helpful for parents. It should reassure parents, when they are placing their child into an ECEC setting,

that these settings are underpinned by evidence-driven theory and can support positive outcomes across all developmental domains for their child.

The draft EYLF can be strengthened by being more explicitly evidence based. The draft EYLF has been developed with reference to the research literature. However, the range of stakeholders working with and accessing the framework should benefit from seeing examples of the research that have influenced key points. Highlighting the evidence supports the early childhood reform agenda's emphasis on continuing professionalism in ECEC. It will help reassure parents that early childhood education and care settings are underpinned by what the evidence says about good practice. Highlighting the research evidence might usefully be presented as case studies in boxes separate to the main text, as in-text citation or in a glossary.

The draft EYLF is not consistent in its terminology around qualifications. It should be clear whether the term 'educators' refers to those with specialist early childhood education and care qualifications. The section 'pedagogical leadership' refers to 'qualified educators', elsewhere 'educators' is used. The scope of the EYLF with respect to qualified/unqualified educators needs to be clarified in the final document.

- *Would this Framework assist you to engage in critical conversations about children's learning with:*
 - *All early childhood education and care staff*
 - *Other professionals and*
 - *Families*

Collaboration among the various partners involved in early childhood education and care must be deepened. This collaboration needs to be based upon an understanding of what early childhood education and care is attempting to achieve. The draft EYLF will support this process, but more needs to be done. Early childhood educators need to have the ability to articulate to families and to others outside the profession the purpose and value of early childhood education and the pedagogies employed. The profession can do more to communicate what outcomes for children are desired, and how the activities in ECEC settings contribute to achieving those outcomes. Implementing the final EYLF will require training for teachers, and a range of supporting documents for teachers. Training for teachers can be harnessed to promote the elements of the EYLF that promote collaboration and communication between all the partners in ECEC, including parents. Resources to assist parents to understand the EYLF will support them in seeking involvement with various aspects of their child's education and with the service sector itself.

- *How does this Framework facilitate and strengthen consistency of practice between educators across early childhood education and care settings?*

In the section entitled 'Background', the draft EYLF points out the importance of strengthening the ability of the sector to support successful transitions to school. The draft EYLF should place similar emphasis on the many 'horizontal transitions' that children may experience in early childhood. For example children may frequently transition between settings such as family environments, kindergarten programs, long day care and/or family day care settings, maternal and child health appointments and playgroups¹. While the draft EYLF implicitly supports improved communication and a common language to describe

learning in early childhood, a more explicit emphasis on horizontal transitions would directly contribute to improved practice across the range of early childhood settings.

- *How else would you improve the Framework?*

The final EYLF should be a useful document for parents and families as well as for educators. Evidence suggests that a partnering approach between parents and early childhood educators and workers supports coherence in the service system for parents and childrenⁱⁱ. Early childhood educators and workers can work to promote parents' understanding of approaches and help continuity of expectations of ECEC services among parents. This continuity, as the draft EYLF correctly points out, does not imply a one size fits all approach, but rather reflects the diversity of parent and family contexts. The draft EYLF in its present form will be of interest to some parents, however, alternative presentations of the EYLF or resources underpinning the EYLF might be useful for parents and families.

The draft EYLF can be improved by emphasising the importance of relationships to outcomes for children in ECEC settings, and more explicitly linking these relationships to family, ECEC services and the wider community. While the draft EYLF places importance on building relationships, it stops short of explicitly recognising that these relationships underpin the engagement of children and their families with their local communities. The draft EYLF does not mention the potential benefits of positive role-modelling for children through parents and families actively participating in their education, through a partnership with teachers, in influencing program delivery at the local level and in the governance of ECEC services.

Vision, motifs and guiding principles

- *What are your views on the three motifs: Belonging, Being and Becoming*

The three motifs effectively frame a range of underlying objectives and values. The motifs support child-centred and strengths-based approaches to early childhood education appropriate for meeting the diverse needs of children and families. These motifs are evidence based and derive from the OECD's review of good practice in ECEC in developed countriesⁱⁱⁱ.

- *What are the strengths and weaknesses of the values and guiding principles outlined in the Framework?*

The section outlining the benefits of play for learning is a major strength of the draft EYLF. Play based learning enhances children's development across all domains^{iv}, and has been recognised as a fundamental right of children by the United Nations^v. The value of child-initiated (i.e. play-based) learning can be maximised where teachers guide the play and support children to explore and take their learning beyond what they might discover for themselves^{vi}. The draft EYLF describes educators using their professional judgement to guide learning and teach intentionally in this way. This is an important inclusion. The draft EYLF also recognises the important role of educators in guiding play that can build children's social skills and promote the important values of equity, fairness and justice.

There is a lack of emphasis in the draft EYLF on the importance of stable and secure relationships throughout for all children in early childhood. Long term care relationships

underpin quality early childhood education and care^{vii}. Good outcomes for children in ECEC settings are underpinned by strong relationships among:

- Staff and parents, the community and government;
- Service providers and families, and
- The children themselves.

Relationships for children are a recurring theme in the draft EYLF, with links to learning and the overall vision of the document. However, the importance of these relationships being stable or long term is not addressed.

The section on 'participation and agency' requires clarification. The concept of participation and agency may be extended beyond the children to also include educators, to encourage educators to increasingly think of themselves as advocates for themselves, for their services and the ECEC sector. In addition, greater clarity of expression may be required, for example, the term 'agency' can be confusing and has multiple meanings.

- *Should changes be made to the values and guiding principles outlined in the Framework? If so, what?*

The draft EYLF is intended to operate as an overlay for a range of curricula. The section 'Multiple Perspectives' can be developed to prompt increasingly reflective practice in early childhood education. Regardless of the pedagogical approaches used, early childhood educators must be able to articulate the purpose and reasoning behind their approaches, and to defend the philosophical basis of their work. This section of the draft EYLF would be a good place to expand on this idea. This section should be retitled 'Early Childhood Educators and Critical Reflection' or similar.

This section of the draft EYLF also needs to be more explicit in its coverage of the range of models of education that are used in Australian communities. An outline of how the draft EYLF can accommodate alternative pedagogies and philosophies such as Steiner and Montessori would significantly improve this section of the draft EYLF.

Learning outcomes and assessment

- *Do the learning outcomes described in the Framework appropriately describe the learning and development priorities of individual children, birth to 5 years in your community?*

The focus on engaging parents in assessment is a welcome inclusion, and sets the scene for a positive approach to assessment for early childhood. This approach also creates opportunities for conversations between educators, other ECEC settings, and parents and families. This approach should also support transitions at all levels.

The learning outcomes do not pay sufficient attention to the physical development of children, according to the needs and abilities of individual children. A new subheading should be created for physical development at the same level as 'languages, literacies and creative expression'. Priorities around children developing fitness and healthy lifestyles might be appropriate in this section. Outdoor spaces should be highlighted as presenting special

opportunities for learning and development, rather than as a means of children being allowed 'to let off steam'. Outdoor play promotes the development of gross and fine motor skills, which are necessary for later developing the physical skills required to manage writing and drawing. Like other developmental domains, physical development should be considered on an individual basis for all children. Each child's physical skills are on a continuum of development and learning. The role of the teacher is to document the child's journey on the continuum and to extend the child's development in the context of the child's abilities.

Supporting children to experience and value the natural world should be addressed within a section on physical development. This inclusion would provide a practical dimension to complement high level statements in the principles that address the natural world.

Some of the learning outcomes may not be well suited to children with disability or additional needs. It may be necessary to reconsider some of the wording around some specific point in order to accommodate children with disability. For example, one learning outcome refers to children becoming competent speakers. Some children with disability will not be able to aspire to this goal in the same way as children without disability. Such outcomes need to be reconsidered with the range of children's needs in mind.

Similarly, a new subheading at the same level as 'language, literacies and creative expression' is required to address children's health and wellbeing. This section should address how ECEC settings can support children's health and wellbeing in a holistic sense, bringing in elements of mental health and social competencies alongside more conventional conceptions of physical health. This direction would support ECEC settings to enhance their ability to work with the spectrum of children's needs in mind and embed this practice in the formal structures supporting the ECEC sector.

ⁱ Docket, S. & Perry, B. (2006) *Starting School: A handbook for early childhood educators*, Pademelon Press, p. 15

ⁱⁱ OECD (2006) *Starting Strong: Early Childhood Education and Care*, p. 53

ⁱⁱⁱ OECD (2006) *Starting Strong: Early Childhood Education and Care*

^{iv} Ginsburgh, K.R. et al. (2006) *The importance of play in promoting healthy child development and maintaining strong parent-child bonds*, American Academy of Pediatrics clinical report

^v United Nations (1990) *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, Article 31

^{vi} Siraj-Blatchford, I., Sylva, K., Muttock, S., Gilden, R. & Bell, D. (2002) *Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years*, University of Oxford, Research Report RR356, p. 54

^{vii} Academy of Social Sciences in Australia (2006) *Ten Policy Principles for a National System of Early Childhood Education and Care*, proceedings of workshop 'Childcare: A Better Policy Framework for Australia'