



**October 2009**

**KPV Response to the draft *Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework***

KPV congratulates the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) and the Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority (VCAA) on the development of the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (the 'Victorian Framework'). We look forward to further contributing to the refinement of the Victorian Framework and to the development of implementation guides and supporting training and resources.

Notwithstanding the issues raised in this submission, the various aspects of the Victorian Framework reflect welcome reforms in the sector and will enhance quality and consistency in the provision of a wide range of early childhood services. Reforms in early childhood services recognise the critical importance of quality early childhood education in promoting good outcomes for children.

*Strengths of the Framework*

- Both the national Early Years Learning Framework (the 'National Framework') and the Victorian Framework will enhance understanding of early childhood education and pedagogy among a broad range of service types and the wider community. Both frameworks offer a common language for professionals to draw upon.
- The Victorian Framework will complement other aspects of the reform agenda in early childhood in enhancing service quality and participation across a range of services.
- The Victorian Framework takes an appropriately broad and holistic view of children's learning and development.
- The tables illustrating how the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS) for primary school integrate with the Early Years Learning Outcomes will serve as a useful reference for the early childhood and school sectors. The tables will also give increased clarity to parents and the wider community regarding the education of children.
- Transitions into the early years of formal learning will be enhanced by the integration of the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS) along with the National Framework in the draft Victorian Framework. The inclusions addressing transition will underpin strengthened support for children commencing school and their families. In addition, continuing aspects of the play-based curriculum into the early years of primary school will enhance children's transition to school.

### *Weaknesses of the Framework*

- The Victorian Framework attempts to integrate a number of complex documents. However, many of the concepts relating to early childhood pedagogy are not as developed in the Victorian Framework as they are in the National Framework. For example, the Victorian Framework refers to 'Belonging, Being, Becoming' as a description of children in the early years. It is more accurately a series of concepts encompassing the intentions and outcomes of early year's pedagogy. In the National Framework it essentially provides the curriculum framework.
- The Victorian Framework would benefit from an increased Victorian-specific context. This may be provided by more illustrations, practice guidance or case studies to assist professionals in Victorian early childhood services and schools. Some common themes in the Victorian context include multicultural diversity in communities; the importance of effectively meeting the needs of indigenous families; the diverse needs of metropolitan and rural services; some significant variation in service sizes and governance types; and, the challenges of operating small rural services. How services may work reflectively with early childhood practices of other cultures, for example indigenous cultures, is not addressed in the Victorian Framework.
- The Victorian Framework would benefit the use of examples and case studies to illustrate points and equip early childhood educators with tools to work with the Practice Principles and promote the Early Years Learning Outcomes. KPV looks forward to the development of the implementation guides for addressing specific strategies for how educators and early childhood services can work to achieve the learning outcomes.
- The clarity and expression of the Victorian Framework can be further improved through the drafting process.
- Parts of the Victorian Framework suggest limitations on the learning styles and abilities of children, especially very young children. For example Figure 2.2 shows a learning continuum for children aged birth to 8 years. However, children at any age from birth to 8 years can learn in all the styles shown.
- Children's safety is critical to their health, wellbeing and subsequently, their ability to learn. Including a brief safety statement in the Framework is important. This theme could be further developed in implementation documentation and linked to children's safety and the safety of all employees, volunteers, families and others present at a children's service premise.
- The Transition section of the Victorian Framework is primarily concerned with the process of transition to school. The Framework correctly identifies the other transitions children make between home(s) and potentially a number of early years services from birth to 8 years. Additional content addressing these transitions will assist early year's professionals to support children as they make transitions.

*Please comment on the way the Practice Principles for Learning and Development will influence services, schools and the community*

- Principle: Reflective practice

Reflective practice is a critical skill and ethos for achieving the Early Years Learning Outcomes, and supports many of the Practice Principles. The detail underlying this principle can be further developed. For example, reflective practice is important for how educators facilitate learning. The Framework must comprehensively address how teachers facilitate children's learning, in addition to what children learn. Additional detail and strategies will assist early childhood professionals to build on reflective practice.

- Principle: Family-centred practice  
This principle recognises the central importance of parents and families in the learning and development of children. Services need to be inclusive of families and communities needs and be responsive to changing needs. Individual and community needs can change relatively quickly while services may take time to adapt service provision accordingly.
- Principle: Partnerships with other professionals  
Ensuring optimum outcomes for children requires early childhood services to network and potentially partner with a range of early childhood professionals. Collaboration can help ensure children and families receive the services and supports they need. This principle may benefit from a greater emphasis on the importance of early childhood professionals networking across service types in order to promote more integrated service delivery. For example, the role of specialist and targeted services that work with kindergartens to provide additional supports might be explicitly acknowledged here.

*Please comment on the way the Victorian Early Years Learning Outcomes will influence services, schools and the community*

- The Early Years Learning Outcomes are the key point of integration with the National Framework. The Early Years Learning Outcomes in the Victorian Framework give clear instruction on the goals for early childhood services.
- The Early Years Learning Outcomes represent the ideal outcomes of early learning for children. While the outcomes are sound in themselves, individual children's ability to achieve some or all of the outcomes will vary for a wide range of reasons. Similar to 'Being, Belonging, Becoming' the outcomes are most usefully considered as an expressions of early childhood education philosophy or pedagogy. The connection between pedagogy and the Early Years Learning Outcomes can be more explicit in the Victorian Framework.

*Please identify any issues for implementation of the Framework in 2010.*

- Resources, training and professional development for educators will be essential to meeting the objectives of the Victorian Framework, in order to ensure all early childhood professionals are equipped with the skills required to achieve the Practice Principles for Learning and Development (the 'Practice Principles') and promote the Early Years Learning Outcomes.
- Early childhood educators and services will need clear guidance regarding any requirements for demonstrating good practice under the Practice Principles.
- How the Victorian Framework links to the implementation of the National Framework under the National Quality Ratings Framework requires further consideration and explanation.

- Early childhood services will require support to implement two similar frameworks (the Victorian and National Frameworks). While much of the intention and underlying detail is broadly similar, the practice principles in the Victorian and National Frameworks are presented differently. This may undermine ease of implementation.
- Transition
  - Some services are seeking further clarity relating to processes for administering Transition and Learning Statements. Guidance on whether early years services or families are intended to directly provide statements to schools would be useful.
  - Within the school system, developing a ‘champion’ in each school for transition to school activities would assist schools to realise the full benefit of the Transition: A Positive Start to School initiative. It may be appropriate for school Early Years Coordinators to coordinate transition activities and networking with early childhood professionals, as well as promoting Transition and Learning Statements in schools.
  - Printer friendly versions of Transition and Learning Statements have been requested by some services due to technological constraints in some services and environmental concerns.

*Further comments*

- Comments on the definitions section:
  - Definition: *Kindergarten*  
Suggest clarifying that for families with a health care card, kindergarten is free for 10 hours per week (rather than free) as practice around management of fees and hours beyond the 10 funded hours varies.  
  
KPV believes the term ‘independent kindergartens’ is a more accurate and neutral term rather than ‘stand-alone kindergartens’.
  - Definition: *Kindergarten Inclusion Support Services and Preschool Field Officers*  
The relationship of the Preschool Field Officer Program (PSFO) and the broader Kindergarten Inclusion Support Services (KISS) program might be defined more closely. KPV understands both PSFOs and packages of support to be components of the overarching KISS program, however KISS is commonly understood in the community as packages of support only. Clarification in the Victorian Framework would be helpful to the sector in understanding the inclusion supports available.

KPV thanks DEECD and the VCAA for the opportunity to comment and looks forward to having further input into the development of the Victorian Framework.