

Appendices

Analysis of Curriculum/Learning Frameworks for the Early Years (Birth to Age 8)

April 2008



Department of Education and
Early Childhood Development

VICTORIAN CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT AUTHORITY



Appendices

**Analysis of Curriculum/Learning Frameworks
for the Early Years (Birth to Age 8)**

April 2008

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Appendices

A summary and discussion of the curriculum/learning frameworks for children from 5 to 8 years within eight states and territories of Australia and nine international provisions.

Australia

- Australian Capital Territory
- New South Wales
- Northern Territory
- Queensland
- South Australia
- Tasmania
- Victoria
- Western Australia

International

- Canada
- Finland
- Italy
- New Zealand
- Republic of Korea
- Singapore
- Sweden
- United Kingdom
- United States

Each jurisdiction has been analysed in relation to the following items:

- The conceptual basis for the development of the early learning curriculum documents
- The structures of the framework
- Related support materials
- Implementation strategies and processes
- Links between early childhood frameworks and frameworks for older children
- The suitability of the curriculum framework to a wide range of audiences
- Identification of the key components of an effective curriculum
- The principles underpinning and guiding the curriculum
- The opportunities for linking teaching and learning in the curriculum with monitoring, assessment and reporting, planning and reflection
- The opportunities for continuity of provision for children from birth to age eight
- Identification of the expectations explicit and implicit in the curriculum document
- How well the curriculum document caters for the inclusion of families and children from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds and with different learning needs.

National and international curriculum/learning frameworks matrices

The following two tables provide an overview of curriculum/learning frameworks for the early years in the identified 15 jurisdictions.

Australia

Age Range	Documentation types	Date published	Government departments involved
ACT			
Birth–8 years	<i>Every Chance to Learn Curriculum Framework</i>	2006	Department of Education and Training
New South Wales			
Birth–5 years	Two systems NSW Curriculum Framework, <i>The practice of relationships</i> (prior to Kindergarten)	2005	Department of Community Services: Office of Childcare
5–12 years (Primary)	<i>NSW Primary Curriculum Foundation Statements</i>	2005	New South Wales Board of Studies
Northern Territory			
Birth–8 years	<i>Early Years Framework</i>	2004	Department of Health and Community Services
Queensland			
5 years (preparatory year)	<i>Early Years Curriculum Guidelines</i>	2006	Queensland State Authority
Prep–6	(Years 1 to 10) key learning area syllabuses		Queensland State Authority
South Australia			
Birth–12 years (birth–3 years–first time this cohort is recognised in Australia)	<i>South Australian Curriculum, Standards and Accountability Framework (SACSA)</i> Outcomes based curriculum	2001	Department of Education, Training and Employment (DETE)
Tasmania			
Birth–5 years	Essential Connections– sits within <i>Essential Learnings Curriculum</i>	2004	Department of Education
5–16 years			
Birth–16 years	<i>Tasmanian Curriculum</i>	2008	
Victoria			
3–5 years	<i>Early childhood curriculum guidelines for 3–5 year olds</i> (not in use)	1991	Office of Preschool and Childcare
5–16 years	<i>Victorian Essential Learning Standards Prep–Year 10</i>	2005	Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority
Western Australia			
K-Year 12	<i>Curriculum Framework For Kindergarten to Year 12</i> Education in Western Australia	2007	Curriculum Council
Kindergarten and Pre-primary	<i>Supplementary documents</i> Kindergarten and Pre-primary Profile Early Childhood (K–3) Syllabus ESL/ESD Progress Map Literacy and Numeracy Nets (K & P) First Steps English and Mathematics Education Support Package	1998	Department of Education and Training

International

Age Range	Documentation types	Date published	Government departments involved
Canada			
Province or territory determined	Province or territory determined with overlay of federal National Electronic Data Interchange		
Finland			
Birth–6 years	<i>National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education and Care</i>	2003	Ministry of Social Affairs and Health
6 years	<i>Core Curriculum for Preschool</i>	2000	
7+ years	<i>Core Curriculum for Primary Education</i>	2003	National Board of Education
Italy – Reggio approach			
Birth–6 years	An approach developed in the 1970s with international recognition	1970 1991	
Korea			
3–5 years	<i>Early Childhood Education Act</i>		Ministry of Education
6–14 years	<i>National Curriculum for elementary school</i>	2004	Korean Institute of Curriculum and Evaluation (KICE)
New Zealand			
Birth–5 years	<i>Te Whāriki. He Whāriki Matauranga mo nga Mokopuna o Aotearoa Early Childhood Curriculum</i>	1996	Ministry of Education
5–18 years	New Zealand Curriculum Framework for Schools	1993	
Singapore			
Birth–8 years	Preschool – New curriculum		
Birth–3 years	Child care Centres 2 months–6 years	2003	Ministry of Education
3–8 years	3–6 years curriculum		
Sweden			
Preschool	Curriculum for the preschool Lpo 98	1998 amended 2006	Skolveret – Swedish National Agency for Education
Preschool class 7 years + School	Curriculum for the compulsory school system, the preschool class and the leisure-time centre Lpo 94	1994 amended 2006	
United Kingdom			
Birth–5 years	<i>Statutory Framework for Early Years</i> This will merge with the national curriculum in 2008 as a compulsory document	2006	
5–11 years 11–16 years	National Curriculum		
United States – NAEYC (peak national early childhood body) and High/Scope Educational Research Foundation			
State determined, significant diversity			
Birth to 8 years	Curriculum guidelines – Early Childhood Curriculum, Assessment and Program Evaluation	2003	Professional association not government
Infant/ toddler, preschool, elementary, youth	<i>High/Scope Curriculum</i>	1995	Commercial company and product

Australia

Australian Capital Territory

At the centre of the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) curriculum renewal was the recognition that quality teaching is the key to student achievement. In other words, teachers are given the responsibility of interpreting curriculum documents and designing pedagogy. There are few stated guidelines. From 2008 all ACT government schools will base their school curriculum plans on *Every Chance to Learn Curriculum Framework*. Also in 2008, all preschools were amalgamated with schools. Appropriate pedagogical choices based in current thinking and research will form the basis for implementing the Framework in the Early Years. From 2009 four Early Childhood Schools providing services and supports for children and their families will become a hub for children in the years birth-8. In the *Every Chance to Learn* (ACT Government, 2007) curriculum statement “curriculum” is broadly defined as being all encompassing under the three areas of learning that are ‘planned, guided and implemented’ in any ACT school, with all areas of development described.

The *Contours of Learning* Department of Education and Training (2001) is an additional curriculum framework designed for use for children birth to eight.

As part of its commitment to early childhood education, in 2005, the ACT Government increased the number of preschool education hours to 12 per week, for all four year old children and they are flexibly delivered in either long day or short day programs Department of Education and Training (2001).

The conceptual basis for the development of the curriculum/early learning documents

In the purpose statement, the emphasis appears to be mostly on a school based approach to curriculum design. Through the implementation of the curriculum, the focus is on quality, evidenced based pedagogies. The *Best Start in Life* (2007) policy paper sets out the principles that guide the ACT Government’s approach to early childhood education. The purpose statement is described as a guide for schools when making curriculum decisions.

It aims to provide a common goal and common language for all stakeholders in ACT schools by describing the purpose of curriculum. These broad descriptors define the purpose of curriculum as a framework within which learners are developed in all areas, to become valuable community members and contributors to society, both local and global.

The structures of the framework

A four year curriculum renewal process has resulted in *Every Chance To Learn* (2007) the Curriculum Framework Preschool – Year 10.

The structure of this framework is:

- 10 curriculum principles
- 25 Essential Learning Achievements
- 4 Bands of development:
 - Early Childhood (Preschool – year 2)
 - Later Childhood (3–5 years)
 - Early Adolescence
 - Later Adolescence

The ACT curriculum framework is discipline-based with eight key learning areas of the arts, English, health and physical education, languages, mathematics, science, the social sciences and technology. The interdisciplinary knowledge is a focus to reflect key elements of importance in programs for children from birth to eight years.

Related support materials

A general view expressed that high quality teachers would capably drive the curriculum and pedagogy.

Implementation strategies and processes

The interests of children form the basis for curriculum and planning. Links are then made with the Essential Learning Achievements to see the areas that have been covered.

Schools are asked to maximise students' learning through decisions about pedagogy and assessment in a way that focuses on participation by all students. A broad list of statements about pedagogical practices is made and intended as a support for teachers.

Links between early childhood frameworks and frameworks for older children

Every Chance to Learn (2007) clearly links the early childhood years with later childhood through to early adolescence and later adolescence. Primary schools are intended to become the centre of all early childhood services in local communities. From 2008 all government primary schools in ACT will offer 2 years of non-compulsory education. The government plans to establish early childhood schools as regional centres providing access to integrated services for children from birth to 8 years *Best Start in Life* (2007).

The suitability of the curriculum framework to a wide range of audiences

This framework has been written for Early Childhood Education teachers through to teachers of Year 10 students. Its strength is in its focus on the capabilities of teachers to design curriculum and pedagogy. However, from an early childhood perspective, more understanding of the philosophies and pedagogies appropriate to these early years is required. It is understood that an early childhood *Every Chance to Learn* (2007) birth to eight compendium is proposed to assist with implementation and support children before four.

Identification of the key components of an effective curriculum

Effective curriculum is planned on the basis of individual students needs with an emphasis on documentation of these plans. Individual schools need to plan a guided curriculum with consideration to classroom and school environments. Positive relationships and interactions should be modelled. Teaching practice is described and the prior knowledge of students is acknowledged as important in broad terms *Every Chance to Learn* (2007).

The Principles underpinning and guiding the curriculum

In *The Best Start in Life* (2007) policy document it is stated that early childhood programs must be of the highest quality and based on current research. However this broad statement is not reflected in the curriculum document. It also describes empowering learners as important so they will develop as active learners. Current brain research is detailed as forming a critical foundation for policy. Staff qualifications and experience in early childhood and child-staff ratios are described as important factors with a maximum class size of 21 students from kindergarten to year 3 as desirable.

The importance of early childhood teachers building strong partnerships with parents and families is described.

An integrated approach is desirable where a holistic approach for every child is promoted.

Early interventions that improve children's life chances are described as important and that this will be achieved by incorporating early childhood services. Also described as important is access to additional and culturally appropriate preschool programs for indigenous children and their families but what this actually means is not detailed *Best Start in Life* (2007).

Also viewed as important, is the planning of pathways for individual students in order to assist children to make smooth transitions into school.

The opportunities for linking teaching and learning in the curriculum with monitoring, assessment and reporting, planning and reflection

Markers of progress describe the typical achievement expected of students in each Essential Learning Achievement by the end of each band of development.

The opportunities for continuity of provision for children from birth to age eight

From the beginning of 2008 all government preschools in the ACT were amalgamated with their primary school to provide for continuity of learning.

Stronger transitional pathways for preschool into kindergarten and the early years of learning will be built.

Staff will have opportunities to move and work within the Early Years of school, to strengthen and support early childhood pedagogy and practice.

Identification of the expectations explicit and implicit in the curriculum document

There is an explicit outcomes based approach, fitting into a primary schools model. The importance of early childhood pedagogy and practice are detailed in supporting documentation and staff professional learning.

How well the curriculum document caters for the inclusion of families and children from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds and with different learning needs

Specialised early childhood programs are currently available, including five Koori preschools and a range of early intervention programs for children with a disability or developmental delay. There is also provision for early entry to preschool for children from non English speaking backgrounds and children with a hearing or vision impairment and children of parents with a hearing or vision impairment.

New South Wales

New South Wales (NSW) caters for children from birth to 8 years old under two different documents and systems. Firstly, the New South Wales Department of Community Services, Office of Childcare produced the NSW Curriculum Framework for Children's Services. *The Practice of Relationships: Essential Provisions for Children's Services* (2005). This document provides a framework for children birth to 5 years in all children's services prior to school.

The second document produced by the New South Wales Government. Board of Studies NSW (2005) *NSW Primary Curriculum Foundation Statements* provides a framework for children in school from K-6. The Early Stage 1, Stage 1 and Stage 2 provide examples for children from 5-8 years, while the later stages cater for older children in the primary school.

The conceptual basis for the development of the curriculum/early learning documents

The NSW Curriculum Framework: *The Practice of Relationships* was developed in the interests of children (NSW Department of Community Services, Office of Childcare, 2005). The document is a resource to support the work of all early childhood professionals and provides a rationale for practice.

The document validates excellent practice where it already exists, clarifies common elements of good practice across all program types and provides a strong statement about the importance of the early years and the types of experiences that support children's learning and development appropriately.

The core concepts are:

- About children's services: Children's services are communities of learners that exist in the interest of children's well being and learning
- About the professionals: The decisions, judgements and choices made by professionals are the major contributors to children's experience
- About curriculum: Curriculum is the intentional provisions made by professionals to support children's learning and well being.
- About frameworks: A framework both provides definition and supports uniqueness.

The Framework is intended to open up new possibilities for thinking and action rather than being prescriptive.

NSW Primary Curriculum Foundation Statements are the state wide common curriculum requirements for children in the school years K-6 (Board of Studies, 2005). The *Foundation Statements* set out a clear picture of the knowledge, skills and understanding that each student should develop at each stage of the primary school. They provide emphasis on what must be taught, particularly in the areas of literacy and numeracy and freedom to focus on the diverse learning needs of students. The statements provide guidance in planning to meet the needs of students with varying ability levels and learning needs and a basis for assessing, reporting and discussing student progress.

The structures of the framework

The two frameworks outlined below demonstrate the different focus taken in the documents, one produced by the Department of Human Services and the other by the NSW Board of Studies.

1. The *NSW Curriculum Framework for Children's Services: The Practice of Relationships* has four sections including information about the framework, the framework itself, the application and implementation of the framework and a rationale paper (NSW Department of Community Services, Office of Childcare, 2005).

The Framework consists of four core concepts:

- Communities of learners that exist in the interest of children's well being and learning
- Curriculum is the intentional provisions made by professionals to support children's learning and well being
- Decisions, judgements and choices made by professionals are the major contributors to children's experience
- A framework both defines and supports uniqueness.

Four major obligations for professionals are also outlined;

- Promote and support respectful life enhancing relationships
- Practise in ways that acknowledge the child as capable and resourceful
- Honour diversity
- Strive for meaning and connections.

Also, four essential qualities that professionals must bring to their practice include: empathy, respect, perseverance and resilience, and a passion for learning leading to growth.

The framework document is 165 pages long and provides many examples to support teachers in understanding the framework and putting it into practice.

2. *Foundation Statements* (Board of Studies, 2005) in the K-6 primary document have been written to help manage the curriculum more effectively by describing clearly the state wide common curriculum requirements and prioritising what needs to be taught in all primary schools. The six key learning areas (KLAs) and the Board's syllabuses remain at the core of planning and programming. The six key learning areas are: Mathematics, English, Science and Technology, Human Society and its Environment, Creative Arts and Personal Development, and Health and Physical Education.

Related support materials

A selected list of resources appears at the end of the framework document.

Also, there are questions for reflection within the document and examples of practices to be challenged.

Further materials include:

- NSW Primary Curriculum Foundation Statements
- K-6 linkages
- Primary Matters
- K-6 outcomes for KLAs
- Parents' guide to the NSW primary syllabuses

Implementation strategies and processes

Implementation of the framework requires leadership from a skilled and knowledgeable professional. It is intended that the document be used collaboratively and it is useful for collaborative discussion and critical reflection.

In the *Foundation Statements* document each strand specifies the knowledge and understandings students develop when learning about the KLAs (Board of Studies, 2005). For example, English has the strands of Talking and Listening, Reading and Writing. The ages 5-8 years are catered for in Early Stage 1 - kindergarten (prep grade in Victoria) and Stage 1 – School Years 1 and 2.

Links between early childhood frameworks and frameworks for older children

There are no links from the NSW *Curriculum Framework for Children's Services: The Practice of Relationships to the Foundation Statements* for K-6. Also, there is no mention in the Foundation Statements document of the learning that has taken place prior to school.

The suitability of the curriculum framework to a wide range of audiences

The Framework values differences and acknowledges that the implementation in each service type should be unique. The Framework states that it is not appropriate for children's learning to be according to key learning areas. Young children learn in a holistic way, so their experience must reflect the breadth of possible learning.

In contrast in the *Foundation Statements* the language of the document is very school focused with subjects or KLAs at the centre of the curriculum document/syllabuses (Board of Studies, 2005). This terminology does not transfer to the early childhood sectors where the focus is on children themselves and their learning rather than on subjects. The focus is on 'what' is to be learned here whereas in the early childhood sector the focus would be on 'how' the learning is to take place.

Identification of the key components of an effective curriculum

The Framework is grounded in research, practically based on theoretical literature.

The Principles underpinning and guiding the curriculum

The views of children themselves as learners, the practices of professionals, their obligations and qualities are the underpinning values.

The opportunities for linking teaching and learning in the curriculum with monitoring, assessment and reporting, planning and reflection.

In the Framework teaching and learning is linked by supporting the child's sense of self. This is seen as an integral part of the document.

In the *Foundation Statements* document, each KLA has a section 'General principles for planning, programming, Assessing, Reporting and Evaluating'. There are specific guidelines with a rationale for these to link teaching and learning.

The opportunities for continuity of provision for children from birth to age eight

The *Foundation Statements* (Board of Studies, 2005) provide continuity of provision for children from kindergarten (approximately age 5 years and the first year of school in NSW) through to age eight years and beyond. There are no links in the document to learning in early childhood services prior to school.

Identification of the expectations explicit and implicit in the curriculum document

The Framework is not a complete manual for practice. There is an assumption that the professional brings substantial knowledge, skills, values and perspectives to the framework.

There are certain philosophical beliefs implicit in the framework:

- Children's services are critical institutions in the community
- Parents and community share responsibility for all children
- The child is a citizen with rights and responsibilities
- Care and education are interwoven
- The roles of professionals working with children and their families are complex and require depth and breadth of skills, knowledge and attitudes.

How well the curriculum document caters for the inclusion of families and children from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds and with different learning needs

In the Framework children with disabilities and their families, children and their families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families are acknowledged where there are specific issues related to these groups.

Northern Territory

The *Early Years Framework (Northern Territory* Department of Education, 2004) encourages families, community and government to share responsibility for supporting young children in the Northern Territory. Both Department of Health and Community Services (DHCS) and the Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) are asked to work in a more integrated way with a holistic approach to provide services for children from birth to 8 years. Currently services can vary between regions. There is increased demand for child care services particularly in Darwin.

A unique feature of the Northern Territory (NT) is that the majority of schools are located outside of the major centres. Preschool and Transition classes exist in both government and non-government schools and child care centres are generally privately operated. As it is described, many early childhood education and care services may not have appropriately qualified staff or purpose built infrastructure. A strong focus of the Northern Territory government is to promote quality practice and professional learning in all early childhood contexts.

The conceptual basis for the development of the curriculum/early learning documents

The *Early Years Framework (0-8 years)* (*Northern Territory* Department of Education, 2004) identifies this age range as being the period of maximum impact for supporting children to reach their full potential in life. A basic belief underpinning this curriculum framework is that it is more cost effective to meet children's needs earlier rather than later.

The Northern Territory Curriculum Framework (NTCF) (*Northern Territory* Department of Education, 2002) is based on three underlying foci: a developmental approach, the learning of life skills and building partnerships. The Framework is the mandated curriculum standard for children from preschool entry to Year 10. The NTCF is a curriculum map of exit outcomes and key learning areas. It provides developmental indicators for Preschool Entry Point to Year 10 or end of compulsory schooling. It also includes an entry point for students with "special needs".

In the Northern Territory, the 2004 OECD report, *Starting Strong: Five Curriculum Outlines*, and other international research, were used to develop a report sponsored by the Education Advisory Council in 2003-04. This report, *All Children Have the Best Possible Start: A Framework for Action*, was signed off by the Ministers for Health, Community Services and Employment, Education and Training in June 2004 (Department of Employment, Education and Training, 2004). This report informs and guides action plans for early years across a number of agencies.

The major emphases of current priorities under the Framework for Action are for access and equity. In small communities this may include alternative service delivery models such as integrated child care and Preschool, or mobile services (Department of Employment, Education and Training, 2004).

The structures of the framework

The *NTCF* published in 2002 identifies learning outcomes for students from Transition to Year 10 (*Northern Territory* Department of Education, 2002).

The *Early Years Framework (0-8 years)* is described as a guide for policy and action with a focus on both children and their families. It also refers to children up to 12 years of age as they are included in the Outside School Hours Care (*Northern Territory* Department of Education, 2004). There are six key areas that focus on:

- the importance of families and community in early childhood education and service provision
- the quality of the services and programs
- a systematic and coordinated approach to provide a higher quality and holistic approach to provision
- a workforce with appropriate qualifications
- sufficient resourcing and infrastructure to support early childhood programs
- research and evaluation of early childhood programs in the Northern Territory.

Related support materials

Strong Beginnings (2007) is an explicit guide to quality practice in the Early Years (3-5 years) – generally preschool and transitions (*Northern Territory* Department of Education, 2007). To describe it as an extensive resource for teachers based on a range of learning theories is an understatement. It is an enormous document and although it contains a comprehensive range of theory and links to pedagogy, it is difficult to know where to begin and what approach to take. It has the possibility of confusing teachers rather than supporting them. It is designed to address the “quality workforce and programs” element of the framework. It was developed through the Department of Employment, Education and Training (Teaching Learning and Standards Division) in collaboration with officers from the Department of Health and Community Services (Children’s Services) over two years from 2004-2006. A more focused document may provide a more practical resource. It is easy to see that over 50 early childhood practitioners contributed to the document, but the claim that this then represents the diverse NT contexts in which children engage in early learning and care programs doesn’t hold as the theory described in *Strong Beginnings* is not linked with specific Northern Territory contexts, but is rather, broad educational theory.

The *Strong Beginnings* document links to both the *NTCF* and the National Childcare Accreditation Council’s *Quality Improvement and Accreditation System*, supporting the continuity of care in early learning environments for children aged from three to five (National Childcare Accreditation Council, 2006).

Implementation strategies and processes

Strong Beginnings (2007) describes in great detail a wide range of pedagogical practices that teachers could use in the 3-5 age group that are sound overarching principles of early childhood pedagogy such as play based practice (*Northern Territory* Department of Education, 2007).

Links between early childhood frameworks and frameworks for older children

Although it is explained that the early years (*Northern Territory* Department of Education, 2007) is widely recognised as Birth – 8 years, the Birth – 3 years component is not included. Links are however made with *NTCF* which is the framework for Transition to year 10.

The suitability of the curriculum framework to a wide range of audiences

The *NTCF* is written for a professional audience as is *Strong Beginnings*.

Identification of the key components of an effective curriculum

The key components are identified as catering for diversity, both for individual children and also diversity of context, and linking early childhood services with families through building of partnerships.

The Principles underpinning and guiding the curriculum

Through an integrated approach to service provision, it is more likely that the needs of children will be met. Critically, families are the most important educators of their children and must be supported through early childhood services. The early years are viewed as critical in establishing life skills and a person's self worth. This has implications for the broader community where levels of employment, crime and health will impact on the development of young children.

The values and beliefs that underpin *Strong Beginnings* (2007) are based on sound early childhood education principles. In line with current research findings they believe that the early years is when lifelong learning skills are acquired.

The early years are when:

- children need to feel secure and supported
- education must be based on the individual needs of children
- learning should be based on sensory experiences
- play is the essential method of learning
- quality environments are vital and
- teachers need a high level of qualification and commitment to the field.

A move away from widely held early childhood teaching beliefs is the view that explicit teaching is required for language skills and higher order thinking. In the early childhood field it is widely recognised that children acquire language skills through a range of different interactions and experiences.

The opportunities for linking teaching and learning in the curriculum with monitoring, assessment and reporting, planning and reflection

A cyclical learning/teaching process is clearly explained in *Strong Beginnings* with examples of this process in practice at both preschool and school levels. Examples of daily timetables and teaching plans are given and these would be very useful for beginning early childhood teachers.

The opportunities for continuity of provision for children from birth to age eight

Strong Beginnings: An Explicit Guide to Quality Practice in the Early Years is a support and resource document directly linked to the *NTCF* and with many of the same beliefs, principles and approaches. It is a resource document.

The NTCF is the main curriculum document for all learners from Preschool to Year 10 in the NT (3–15 years). *Strong Beginnings: An Explicit Guide to Quality*.

Practice in the Early Years is aligned to the *NTCF*, making more explicit those outcomes critical for foundation skill development and the distinct teaching approaches that support this important stage of growth.

Identification of the expectations explicit and implicit in the curriculum document

Strong Beginnings is a document that explicitly states and explains desired pedagogies and methods of planning and assessing. A holistic approach to young children's education and care is strongly encouraged, beginning at the top with DEET and DHCS linking to write The Early Years Framework (0-8 years).

Practice in the Early Years (Northern Territory Department of Education, 2007) is aligned to the *NTCF*, making more explicit those outcomes viewed as critical for skill development. Distinct teaching approaches are also outlined.

How well the curriculum document caters for the inclusion of families and children from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds and with different learning needs

Student Diversity Policies and Guidelines that influence each of the Northern Territory early childhood curriculum documents are titled:

- *Indigenous Languages Policy*
- *Education of Gifted and Talented Children*
- *English as a Second Language Policy*
- *Revised Special Education Policy*

Strong Beginnings (2007, pages 12-13) states that children of the Northern Territory can speak one, two, three or more dialects or languages, which may or may not include English.

- There are 104 different Indigenous languages and dialects in the Northern Territory. Twenty-nine per cent of all enrolled children in the Northern Territory speak Indigenous languages
- Thirty-nine per cent of enrolled children in the Northern Territory are from a background where English is the second language
- The diversity (*Northern Territory Curriculum Framework*, Northern Territory Government, 2002, English as a Second Language, p 35-36) of children with English as their Second Language (ESL), dialect (ESD) or as a foreign language (EFL) also includes:
 - Aboriginal English speaking children
 - Kriol speaking children
 - Indigenous language speaking children who may speak one or more Indigenous languages
 - New arrivals from other countries, including refugee children
 - Children of migrant parents.

In many urban schools, ESL children comprise a proportion of school enrolment, and instruction is in Standard Australian English (SAE). However, in rural and remote schools, where English may be a second, third, or further language, instruction may be both Standard Australian English (SAE) and Indigenous languages. Two-Way Learning schools such as Yuendumu, Papunya, Areyonga, Willowra and Yipirinya are examples of collaboration in education.

There are extensive guidelines for working with multicultural families such as:

In keeping with all good relationship-building it is important to find out as much as possible about family culture, language background and experiences. What may be culturally acceptable and good manners to you may be peculiar or offensive to people from another background.

Some things to consider:

- Some community customs, attitudes and practices may be very different and challenging. Similarly, some of the early childhood educator's customs, attitudes and practices may be very different and challenging to the community
- Create an inclusive learning environment that scaffolds language and concept development, according to each child's needs
- Tone of voice, eye contact, body language, religious beliefs and personal space are factors to consider in communication
- Some children have backgrounds where English is not the first, second or even third language spoken. An awareness and appreciation of the diversity of this language background is important in structuring a program to cater for these children's unique needs
- Celebrating the diversity of the children will help to develop tolerance and understanding for children and staff alike.

A list of considerations when working with children with special needs is also included in *Strong Beginnings (2007)* and discusses the need for planned pathways for individual children. The role of families and community is also discussed as is the need for an integrated approach to early childhood education.

Queensland

The conceptual basis for the development of the curriculum/ early learning documents

In 2007 a preparatory year was introduced into Queensland schools for the first time. The *Early Years Curriculum Guidelines (EYCG) (2006)* provides a framework for interacting with children in their preparatory year at school (Queensland Studies Authority, 2006). The curriculum recognises how significant high quality early childhood education programs can be in children's lives. Also the curriculum recognises the diversity of experiences and relationships that shape children's lives.

Queensland is a highly decentralised state where children may experience life as members of urban, rural, remote and/or mobile local communities. By the time children enter their preparatory year at school children's development will have already been influenced by many complex and interacting factors.

An aim of the preparatory year is to provide continuity between children's prior early childhood service experiences and their future learning in schools.

The contexts for learning and development were identified as:

- Play
- Real life situations
- Investigations
- Routines and transitions
- Focused teaching and learning.

The characteristics of each of these areas are outlined in the Guidelines. Learning and development takes place both indoors and outdoors and children are actively engaged as partners in learning, co constructing their learning with others. ‘Teachable moments’ are used to make learning explicit.

The structures of the framework

The framework lists six factors for success:

- Social and personal learning
- Health and physical learning
- Language learning and communication
- Early mathematical understanding
- Active learning processes
- Positive dispositions to learn.

The curriculum facilitates integration across the six learning areas and each learning area is supported by learning statements. It also provides suggestions for planning, interacting, monitoring and assessment and reflection.

Children’s learning is described in relation to phases of learning and development:

- Becoming aware
- Exploring
- Making connections
- Applying.

Related support materials

Early Years Curriculum Guidelines (EYCG) (2006) is 105 pages long and provides many examples for planning, interacting and reflecting as well as monitoring and assessing. There are references, but no additional support documents.

Samples are provided of early learning record templates and there is a list of theorists that informed the guideline development for further study.

Implementation strategies and processes

The final EYCG were based on a draft version of the document which was trialed in 66 schools in 2003 and 2004 and evaluated externally and internally. The document has a section on exploring decision making processes in relation to planning, interacting, monitoring and assessing and reflecting. Also there are examples of early learning record templates. These describe actions rather than outcomes.

Links between early childhood frameworks and frameworks for older children

Early Years Curriculum Guidelines (EYCG) (2006) links the six learning areas of the EYCG with the eight key learning areas of the primary curriculum. The EYCG are very suitable for other preparatory year provisions, but not suitable for children from birth to four years. The characteristics of learners described in the document are not inclusive of this age group. The EYCG does build continuity between children’s prior experiences and their future learning in school and acknowledges the many factors influencing children’s learning and development prior to school.

Identification of the key components of an effective curriculum

- Children are capable and competent
- Children build deep understandings when they learn through senses and are offered choices
- Children learn best through interactions
- Children learn through active exploration and representing learning in a variety of modes
- Children's positive disposition to learn and to themselves as learners are essential for success
- Children learn best when they are in environments where there are supportive relationships
- Early childhood programs are most effective when they recognise, value and build upon cultural and social experiences of children
- Building on continuity between prior, current and future learning is essential
- Assessment is an integral part of the learning and teaching process and not separate.

The Principles underpinning and guiding the curriculum

The principles form the learning areas and approaches outlined in *EYCG*:

- Social and personal learning
- Health and physical learning
- Language learning and communication
- Early mathematical understanding
- Active learning processes
- Positive dispositions to learn is supported by children's phases of learning in relation the factors identified as successful i.e. 'Becoming aware', 'Exploring', 'Making connections' and 'Applying'.

The opportunities for linking teaching and learning in the curriculum with monitoring, assessment and reporting, planning and reflection

The *EYCG* provides a framework for interacting with children and planning, assessing and reflecting on an effective Preparatory Year curriculum (Queensland Studies Authority, 2006). Teachers are supported to integrate learning, teaching and assessment and promote continuity in children's learning by:

- Emphasising the contributions of early childhood education to lifelong learning
- Describing children as initiators who engage in learning experiences in a range of contexts
- Illustrating how partnerships among children, parents and colleagues enhance continuity in children's learning
- Guiding teachers in making links between prior, current and future learning
- Illustrating developmentally, socially and culturally responsive learning opportunities that acknowledge equity and diversity
- Establishing essential connections between the early years curriculum and the years 1-10 key learning areas
- Providing a mechanism for passing on information about each child's learning and development
- Providing children with a foundation for successful learning.

The opportunities for continuity of provision for children from birth to age eight

EYCG have been designed for a specific Preparatory Year rather than for all children from birth to eight years.

Identification of the expectations explicit and implicit in the curriculum document

The document has identified the importance of understanding the phases of learning, the importance of partnerships and the need for flexible learning environments.

An understanding of the importance of high quality environments in terms of: spaces and furniture, characteristics of resources and aesthetic and sensory characteristics are outlined with responsive learning and teaching strategies to support these characteristics.

The characteristics of high quality social environments in terms of partnerships, transitions, diversity and expectations are outlined along with characteristics of temporal learning environments including routines, learning and planning times.

How well the curriculum document caters for the inclusion of families and children from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds and with different learning needs

Teachers can help establish continuities between children's diverse prior learning experiences and future learning by building continuities through curriculum and practices, establishing positive relationships, valuing and expanding children's diverse social and cultural understandings and managing transition processes between settings.

South Australia

The *South Australian Curriculum, Standards and Accountability Framework* (SACSA) was developed by the South Australian Department of Education, Training and Employment (DETE) as part of a state wide single, cohesive birth to year 12 curriculum initiative. The curriculum framework builds on the Foundation areas of Learning, which covered the preschool years and the curriculum statements and profiles for Australian schools, which covered the compulsory years. A curriculum framework for children birth to three was unique in Australia when it was introduced in 2001.

The conceptual basis for the development of the curriculum/early learning documents

The theoretical basis for the conception of learning in the SACSA Framework is provided by the family of theories of learning that are grouped under the title 'constructivism'. While theoretical distinctions exist between particular versions of constructivism, such as personal, social and radical, it is this family of theories which have guided the preparation of the Framework. (*General introduction to SACSA, 2001a: 10*).

Theorists associated with constructivism are Piaget, Vygotsky and Bruner. Malaguzzi is quoted throughout the 3–5 years document and the *Scottish Curriculum* framework for children 3 to 5 years, cited in SACSA (2001b). The central thesis of constructivism is the image of the learner as actively constructing a world view through interaction with the physical and social world and this experience is then internalised. The importance of social context is emphasised and the role of culture in learning and development acknowledged. The Framework is seen as a set of parameters, rather than a prescribed body of knowledge, and it has been conceived as knowledge across fields. The curriculum is a vehicle to encourage continuity in learning and seamless transitions. For the learner, concepts of understandings, capabilities and dispositions are paramount.

There is also an aspect of the curriculum that embraces ‘futures’. The impact of globalisation has made education even more important in today’s knowledge-based economy. SACSA has been designed to meet the challenge of rapidly changing demands and this has implications for children’s future engagement with the society.

The structures of the framework

This is a single connected framework from birth to year 12. The elements of the framework are the *Curriculum Band*: early years, primary years, middle years and senior years. This in turn encompasses the *Curriculum Scope* which is organised around learning areas. These are interwoven with Essential Learnings, Equity Cross-curriculum Perspectives and Enterprise and Vocational Education and Standards. These encompass Developmental Learning Outcomes Curriculum Standards which include outcomes.

The early years band covers Birth to the end of year 2 of school (comprising three phases: Birth – three, three to five and reception to year 2). Note five year-olds may be represented in the three – five band and the reception to year 2 band (SACSA, 2001c).

Learning across the Bands

The curriculum is differentiated to reflect changes in purpose, context and processes.

Curriculum Scope

Curriculum Scope describes the knowledge, skills and dispositions of learning from birth – year 12. Knowledge is introduced through the Learning Areas which are interwoven with the Essential Learnings.

Learning areas for children from birth – three are:

- The psychosocial self
- The physical self
- The thinking and communicating self.

Learning areas for children from 3–5 are:

- Self and social development
- Arts and creativity
- Communication and language
- Design and technology
- Diversity
- Health and physical development
- Understanding our world.

Learning areas for children from reception to year 12

- Arts
- Design and technology
- English
- Health and physical education
- Languages
- Mathematics

- Science
- Society and environment
- Religious education is a ninth Learning Area for some non-government schools.

Key ideas

Key ideas comprise the fundamental concepts of a Key Learning Area.

Standards

Educators monitor learners' progress, identify their strengths and areas for improvement.

Developmental Learning Outcomes: In the birth – three and three- five phases of the early years band, Developmental Learning Outcome describe the dimensions of learning and development towards which children make progress.

Related support materials

This curriculum has been implemented for many years and was built on previous curriculum projects.

There are many support materials to support the curriculum including:

- Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS) Teachers' Resource Manual
- Office of Early Childhood Services (OECS) provides services, materials and processes to underpin the success of sites and districts
- The SACSA website has a comprehensive collection of documents and is linked to Education Network Australia (Edna)
- DECS produces a newsletter for teacher working with children birth – 8 years
- *Curriculum Leadership Journal* is a dedicated journal
- Multicultural resource centre
- Special needs resource centre
- Statewide recycling education centre
- Online teacher forums moderated by DECS
- Funded research projects in specific areas eg. *The Southern Numeracy Initiative*.

The *Moving forward with SACSA* strategy was introduced in 2006.

Implementation strategies and processes

- Built on previous initiatives and therefore much was familiar
- Designed by stakeholders through comprehensive consultation, therefore not imposed
- Projects like the *Learning to Learn Project: Beyond reform to redesign* (2001) were used to inform the curriculum reform project
- *Early assistance action research project* (2002)
- Introduction of SACSA to the child care sector was carefully researched and evaluated. *The SACSA Child Care Training Project* (Winter, 2003, 2004).
- Five year implementation plan introduced in 2006
- Funding for improvement co-ordinators to support changes
- In schools the introduction of new assistant principals.

Links between early childhood frameworks and frameworks for older children

SACSA has been designed as a single cohesive Birth to Year 12 curriculum for all learners within children's services and schools (South Australian Curriculum Standards and Accountability Framework, 2001). It breaks down artificial barriers like care and education ideas, fragmentation of learning across different sites; it has breadth and ensures continuity. Based on the relationship between the learner and the educator it provides flexibility for the individual learner. Collaboration of educators within and across the various phases of education is encouraged and knowledge of the Learning Areas assists educators to be aware of what is happening elsewhere in the system.

The suitability of the curriculum framework to a wide range of audiences

The SACSA *Framework* seeks to resolve the tension between commitment to common curriculum entitlement and has the flexibility for educators to construct their own approaches to working with diverse learners. This is done by a number of key concepts introduced to integrate the framework and provide coherence. These include:

- A concept of learning drawn from constructivist theories
- The five essential learnings
- Equity cross-curriculum perspectives, inclusive of all learners, especially those previously marginalised
- High expectations for all learners and ongoing monitoring against outcomes identified in the standards.

Identification of the key components of an effective curriculum

- Strong theoretical base that allows for flexibility
- Breaking down barriers between sites/institutions
- On-going assessment
- Acknowledgement of prior knowledge and diversity
- Emphasis on dispositions, understandings and capabilities. This is done through the essential learnings of:
 - Futures
 - Identity
 - Interdependence
 - Thinking
 - Communication.

The Principles underpinning and guiding the curriculum

As noted above.

The opportunities for linking teaching and learning in the curriculum with monitoring, assessment and reporting, planning and reflection

Learner assessment is built into SACSA across all phases and is seen as a common aspect of the curriculum. The *Foundation Areas of Learning* are based on the tradition of outcomes-based education and SACSA has continued this trend. In SACSA, outcomes are expressed in three forms. In the birth to five age range, the outcomes are broad developmental learning outcomes which describe a child's learning and development over time. In the reception to Year 10 curriculum standards describe explicit outcomes

expected, the curriculum content, processes, structures and resources. These outcomes provide a reference point for monitoring, judging and reporting and this provides the opportunity to extend or expand the learner's achievements.

The opportunities for continuity of provision for children from birth to age eight

A birth to year 2 curriculum should have the potential to encourage continuity and this is a stated aim of SACSA. However, the fact the five year olds can fall into two bands that are very differently treated is an issue here. The phases before school and at school do not seem to flow. Breaking down the care and education divide is to be applauded.

Identification of the expectations explicit and implicit in the curriculum document

Explicit in the curriculum is a belief in equity and there is a strongly stated socio-cultural approach with an emphasis of flexibility at the local area. This is an extremely complicated document with many supporting documents and projects. Much is said about the individual learner whilst at the same time the traditional outcomes-based curriculum is robustly supported. The economic value of a highly educated citizenry, underpins the curriculum document.

Implicit in SACSA is the idea that the previous curriculum documents of the South Australian government were adequate but needed improving. The area that received the most systemic attention was therefore the birth - 3 years area that had previously been seen as outside the jurisdiction of the state government. The same underlying concepts have been used. This implies a confidence in past practice.

How well the curriculum document caters for the inclusion of families and children from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds and with different learning needs

The SACSA Framework has been constructed with particular attention being paid to the educational entitlements of the following groups of learners:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners
- Learners from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds
- Learners who have English as a second language
- Learners with disabilities or learning difficulties
- Learners from low socio/economic backgrounds
- Particular groups of girls and boys
- Learners from an isolated or rural background.
- Families – SACSA ‘encourages the active involvement of parents and caregivers in their children’s education as they see the connections between where children and students have come from and where they are going in their education’.

Tasmania

Tasmania's Early Years Curriculum has a number of features that make it a valuable resource when considering how to design a developmentally appropriate and contextually relevant early childhood curriculum. As from the beginning of Term 1 2008, the *Essential Learnings Curriculum* (Department of Education Tasmania, 2002) has been fully replaced by the Tasmanian Curriculum. Importantly, *Essential Connections* has been designed in a consultative manner with genuine and valued input from all stakeholders. It has built on the *Essential Learnings Framework* already operational in schools. Tasmania has also found a way of supporting all early childhood settings in a community, from parent run playgroups, formal child care, sessional kindergartens, to the early years of school by making primary schools the hub for early learning. Within this model the school principal has been supported to provide leadership in early childhood education. Another important achievement in Tasmania has been the use of the same language in assessment of learning in all early childhood settings and in schools, so from birth to 16 years, all students will be assessed under the same five curriculum areas.

' hub'

The conceptual basis for the development of the curriculum early learning documents

- Moving away from a model of service provision towards a whole-of-government approach
- Based on core beliefs relating to Partnerships, Learning, Education and Diversity
- Programming based on the individual needs of children.

The structures of the framework

The following timeline includes the structure:

- 2000-2003 Regional Early Years Coordinators (DOE) established to promote collaboration between teachers, child care practitioners, other professional and parents.
- 2004 *Essential Connections* launched birth to 5 years, endorsed by Early Childhood Australia Inc. (ECA Tasmanian Branch) and fits within the Essential Learning Curriculum written for schools and uses same framework.
- 2005 The government's Early Years Office audited programs in schools.
- 2006-2007 *Launching into Learning Birth to 4 years* designed to: support school principals, parents, partnerships with other services, school readiness, intervention and prevention and teachers designing programs.
- 2008 All primary schools have kindergarten classes (4 years) with trained early childhood teachers (class size 25) with 97% of 4 year old enrolled with funding for 10 hours per week. Some schools have developed as community centres offering playgroups and parent groups too and many schools have organised pre-kindergarten groups.

Related support materials

An extensive list is available:

- *Making Connections* document
- *Explore the Possibilities (2005)* Early Years Programs, Projects and Initiative operating in Tasmania (focuses on building community projects/partnerships).
- *Whole of Government Policy Framework for Early Years (2005)* which has six strategic priorities for child health, development and well-being.

- *Starting Kindergarten* Information Kit for parents promotes ‘play’ (DOE website).
- *Developmental Indicators Birth-18 months* (DOE Website).
- *Essential Learnings* in practice document.
- *Launching Into Learning Online newsletters* with links to ECA, a DVD (Shonkoff, 2006), and other useful information.
- *Early Learning Tasmania for children with disabilities birth to 5 years.*

Implementation strategies and processes

Learning through play is promoted in all preschool programs within the *Essential Connections* (Department of Education Tasmania, 2004). Extensive details are given for teachers, but not a prescriptive content. Many stories of teachers putting *Essential Connections* into practice in their own early childhood contexts are given.

Links between early childhood frameworks and frameworks for older children

Child care services are linking the *Essential Connections* to their programs and the *Launching Into Learning* (2006-7) brings the principles of early childhood education into schools and school communities. A Whole of Government Policy Framework establishes schools as community centres with specific sustained funding for this role in the early years (Department of Education Tasmania, 2008).

The suitability of the curriculum framework to a wide range of audiences

The *Launching into Learning* document speaks to principals, parents, community and teachers.

HUB schools tell their stories about implementing the *Essential Connections* via an online newsletter and the Whole of Government Policy provides information for parents, teachers and support staff through pre-kinder and school.

Identification of the key components of an effective curriculum

Early childhood teachers are in the best position to decide on program content, therefore the *Essential Connections* is a guide for teachers of children birth to 5 years who will plan programs for individual children (Department of Education Tasmania, 2004). The Early Childhood Australia (ECA) *Code of Ethics* also guides teachers towards an effective curriculum (Early Childhood Australia, 2006).

The Principles underpinning and guiding the curriculum

There are five broad curriculum areas: Thinking, Communicating, Personal futures, Social responsibility and World futures.

Assessment via learning markers in the *Essential Connections* describes interim steps in children’s progress leading up to outcomes at Standard 1 (approximately 4 years of age).

The opportunities for linking teaching and learning in the curriculum with monitoring, assessment and reporting, planning and reflection

Whole of Government Policy states that all services will be linked and co-located where possible with schools as a HUB. *Essential Connections* precedes the *Essential Learnings Framework* and uses the *Essential Learnings Framework* and ‘learning markers’ towards Standard 1 (approximately 4 years of age). Individual reflective learning stories are used by teachers for assessment purposes.

The opportunities for continuity of provision for children from birth to age eight

Essential Connections for birth to 4 years used in child care services and kindergartens.

Essential Learnings Framework birth to 16 years is the umbrella document and is used in schools.

Five curriculum organisers are consistently used – Thinking, Communicating, Personal Futures, Social responsibility, World Futures. The curriculum meets federal Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS) requirements in those settings where they apply.

Identification of the expectations explicit and implicit in the curriculum document

Implicit that teachers report under the five broad curriculum areas but in a manner reflecting early childhood pedagogy. The linking across services and stakeholders is explicit, it is about making connections for effective learning.

How well the curriculum document caters for the inclusion of families and children from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds and with different learning needs

Diversity is a key focus in all policies. All children's needs must be planned for and staff must avoid bias and counteract discrimination.

Victoria

Background

The Victorian Government developed two curriculum documents in the nineties for kindergarten and childcare services and professionals: *Babies, Toddlers and Two year olds: A curriculum resource for developing child-centred programs for children under three* (Office of Preschool and Childcare Branch, 1996) and *Early Childhood Curriculum Guidelines 3-5 year olds* (Office of Preschool and Childcare, 1991).

In 2003 the Department of Human Services provided funding to Early Childhood Australia (ECA) to produce, disseminate and facilitate consultation of an early childhood learning framework. A discussion paper: *Beliefs and Understandings a conversation about an Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* was developed and forums were undertaken around Victoria between October and November 2003.

ECA advised that early childhood practitioners were keen to develop an integrated early learning framework for all children's services shaped by their views and consistent with their professional beliefs.

In March 2007 the State Government released a response to the Council of Australian Governments Reform Agenda for early childhood development. The Council of Australian Governments' (2007) *Victoria's Plan to Improve Outcomes in Early Childhood* recommended that "the introduction of an early learning framework for early childhood education and care services in consultation with early childhood educators and experts, to be used in early learning settings to bridge the gap between early childhood education and care." (p 39)

The Victorian Early Learning and Development Framework

The Victorian Early Learning and Development Framework 0-8 (ELDF) is being developed in partnership with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, the Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority and the Victorian Children's Council. The ELDF will build on the universal service platform from birth to 8 years and the *BluePrint for Early Childhood Development and School Reform* (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2008). It will be linked to the *Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS)* in the early years of school Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA) (2005). An additional initiative includes the development of Transition Statements for all children in the year prior to school.

The conceptual basis for the development of the Victorian Essential Learning Standards

The *Victorian Essential Learning Standards* (VELS) provides a framework for schools to deliver teaching and learning programs that support students to develop capacities to confidently manage themselves and their relationships with others, make sense of the world in which they live and effectively participate in the world (VCAA, 2005, p1).

VELS is used for developing whole school curriculum planning and for monitoring student achievement and reporting to parents and the community.

The VELS propose that students need to develop a set of knowledge, skills and behaviours which will prepare them for success in a world which is complex, rapidly changing, rich in information and communications technology, demanding higher order knowledge and understanding and increasingly global in its outlook and influences (VCAA, 2005, p4).

The structures of the framework

The Learning Standards identify what is important for students to achieve at different stages of their schooling.

There are three components of the curriculum

- The process of physical, personal and social development and growth (this incorporates the domains of health and physical education, interpersonal development, personal learning and civics and citizenship)
- The branches of learning reflected in the traditional disciplines (this includes the Arts, English, languages other than English, Humanities {economics geography and history}, mathematics and science)
- The interdisciplinary capacities needed for effective functioning within and beyond school (incorporating communication, design and creativity and technology, information and communication technology and thinking).

The domains have interrelated elements of learning focus statements and standards.

Formal statements in each domain only apply at some levels.

These components become the three core strands of physical, personal and social learning, discipline based learning and interdisciplinary learning.

Students typically progress through three stages. The first stage covers the early years for children from approximately five to 8 years of age. Prep to Year 4 is the foundation stage where the curriculum focuses on developing the fundamental knowledge skills and behaviours in literacy and numeracy and basic physical and social capacities which underpin all future learning (VCAA, 2005, p2). The other two stages are Years 5 to 8 and Years 9 and 10.

At Levels 1 and 2 (preparatory year and Years 1 and 2) the focus is on foundational literacy and numeracy skills and the development of physical, personal and social capacities.

Related support materials

The Learning Standards are supported by Department of Education and Training materials developed as part of the student learning strategy. These include the *Curriculum Planning Guidelines, Assessment and reporting advice* and the Knowledge Bank. In addition VCAA provides ongoing support for schools. Support materials such as sample programs, units, assessment tasks and annotated work samples are provided to schools on CD-ROM.

The State of Victoria (2004) also provide *Principles of Learning and Teaching P-12* which support teachers' classroom practice and provide tools for self assessment and improvement.

Implementation strategies and processes

The Standards are not a total curriculum for schools but rather essentials. Schools will construct programs that make sure the essential outcomes are achieved in ways which reflect the expertise, resources and needs and interests of the school community.

Identification of the key components of an effective curriculum

The VELS document acknowledges the integrated nature of learning which is a key feature of effective early childhood curriculum. VELS also draws attention to the importance of contextualised learning and understandings which are also key features of effective early childhood curriculum. There is little reference to the 'how' of learning in the VELS document, whereas an effective early childhood curriculum would stress the importance of a play based approach, the importance of learning occurring in an engaged manner both indoors and outdoors, the importance of building on prior knowledge and scaffolding children's learning around their play and interests. An effective curriculum would also acknowledge children's backgrounds, and value what the child and his or her family bring to any curriculum.

The Principles underpinning and guiding the curriculum

The educational principles underpinning VELS are learning for all, pursuit of excellence, engagement and effort, respect for evidence and openness of mind.

The opportunities for linking teaching and learning in the curriculum with monitoring, assessment and reporting, planning and reflection

The VCAA and the Department of Education and Training have developed a set of assessment principles which are published on the VELS and Student Learning websites.

The assessment approach is characterised by assessing a range of appropriate standards, focusing on complex, contextualised understandings, inviting students to use knowledge and skills in new contexts, ensuring adequate time to complete work, and having assessment that is varied, interesting and valued.

Annotated work samples support teachers to make reliable judgments of student achievement.

Assessment requires sharing, reflection and collaboration.

Identification of the expectations explicit and implicit in the curriculum document

VELS specifies what is valued in curriculum and describes standards at key points of learning.

It has broad assessment processes against which defined standards of learning at the key points can be measured. The Curriculum planning guidelines are designed to promote greater consistency in the development of the curriculum, learning and teaching programs in schools.

How well the curriculum document caters for the inclusion of families and children from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds and with different learning needs

Individual programs should be tailored to individual circumstances within the VELS curriculum both for children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and for children with different learning needs.

Western Australia

Western Australia has gone through a process of review and reform which has fundamentally transformed preschool education in that state. (Australian Education Union Campaign Fact Sheet, 2001). In 1995 the Minister for Education announced the *Good Start Program* with both pre-primary programs for 5 year olds and kindergarten programs for 4 year olds transferred into the public education system and all children guaranteed access. Since 1999 almost all community preschools have moved into schools and now have a kindergarten program for 4 year olds. In 2007 *The Early Childhood (K-3) Syllabus Working Version* detailed content to be taught across the early childhood phase of development. Kindergarten and pre-primary teachers are required to issue a formal report on each student at the end of each semester around social and emotional development, physical development and literacy/numeracy development. The language used in the early childhood syllabus is oriented towards teachers and is not friendly to a broader audience, the use of the word 'syllabus' in the title alludes to this. Western Australia has not yet found a way of bringing all early childhood settings together and they still remain fragmented.

The conceptual basis for the development of the curriculum/early learning documents

Learning is through a play based environment and play is seen as fundamental to children's learning. United Nations documents and the Early Childhood Australia (ECA) *Code of Ethics* are referred to. There is no set curriculum for preschool years and teachers are encouraged to design play based programs. Partnerships between parents and teachers are encouraged through educating parents about the value of play.

The structures of the framework

There are two pre-compulsory years of schooling, kindergarten for 4 year olds and pre-primary for 5 year olds while formal schooling begins at 6 years.

The *Early Childhood (K-3) Syllabus* was written after the Curriculum Framework document and sits within it.

Related support materials

- 1995 *Good Start Programs*-kinder (4 years)
- *Learning Begins at Home*: a resource for parents/carers online was developed in 2001 and revised in 2007.
- 2003 *Early Years Strategy*
- 2004 *Children First* - Whole of government approach
- 2007 *The Early Childhood (K-3) Syllabus*
- *Online Early Childhood Education update*
- *Home Based Parent Support Project* (visits to first time parents who are disadvantaged)
- *Curriculum and Reporting policy* (CAR).

Implementation strategies and processes

The *Early Childhood K-3 Syllabus* (*Department of Education and Training, 2007*) is designed to support early childhood teachers as they meet the learning needs of each child in developmentally and contextually appropriate ways. It provides advice on content to support development of learning in the early years of schooling. It is the teacher, in partnership with children and parents/caregivers, who will continue to make decisions about appropriate learning experiences for each child.

Links between early childhood frameworks and frameworks for older children

In September 2007 the inaugural *Early Childhood Education Leading from the Front* (2007) strategy started with the Early Childhood Directorate and the Western Australian Primary Principals Association working together to develop leadership programs designed to focus on building whole-school environments that promote high quality early childhood practice. The *Early Childhood (K-3) Syllabus* spans pre-school and primary and provides scope and sequence statements about content that links to the outcomes in the Curriculum Framework.

Early childhood teachers can use the *Early Childhood (K-3) Syllabus* in conjunction with the *Curriculum Framework* document that incorporates guides. The guides provide a wide range of content related to outcomes in the Curriculum Framework.

The suitability of the curriculum framework to a wide range of audiences

The *Early Childhood (K-3) Syllabus* appears to be written for teachers and uses professional language and may not engage child care staff.

Identification of the key components of an effective curriculum

The purpose of the *Curriculum Framework* and the *Early Childhood (K-3) Syllabus* is to provide a structure around which schools can build educational programs that ensure students achieve agreed outcomes. There is a strongly stated outcomes based focus.

The Principles underpinning and guiding the curriculum

The intention of the *Early Childhood (K-3) Syllabus* is that teachers will use it as a framework and not as a prescriptive list of content. Teachers will contextualise programs and aim to meet developmental needs of individual children.

In the *Curriculum Framework* from K-Year 12, four phases of development are described. The early childhood phase is K-3 describes a typical inquisitive, experimenting approach to learning, but only uses the word ‘play’ once. It suggests teacher initiated programming rather than child directed. Learning in the outdoor environment is mentioned once also.

The opportunities for linking teaching and learning in the curriculum with monitoring, assessment and reporting, planning and reflection

Early childhood teachers use progress maps (*Curriculum Framework Progress Maps/Outcomes and Standards Framework*) to monitor children’s progressive achievement of learning outcomes and may use other tools. Use of progress maps will inform early childhood teacher’s planning and assist with decisions about when and what knowledge, understandings, skills and values are appropriate for children with whom they are working. Early childhood teachers will continue to use their professional judgment in making these decisions.

Reporting practices are based on strong partnerships between schools and parents.

Formal reports for each student each semester have no standard format for kindergarten or pre-primary with the style determined through consultation with parents. The foci for reporting are: social and emotional development, physical development and literacy/numeracy development.

Teachers of Years 1-3 use the Department of Education’s reporting template with grades A-E, personalised comments for English and Mathematics and an overall comment.

The opportunities for continuity of provision for children from birth to age eight

Early childhood education is set within the school system and is part of the school. Early childhood programming is within the *Early Childhood (K-3) Syllabus* which sits within the *Curriculum Framework*. The same reporting to parents system is used throughout.

Identification of the expectations explicit and implicit in the curriculum document

Implicit expectations are that the preschool is viewed as a preparation for school and reporting processes are important.

How well the curriculum document caters for the inclusion of families and children from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds and with different learning needs

The *Early Childhood (K-3) Syllabus* and the *Curriculum Framework* provide an inclusive framework for all students in Western Australia; that is all groups of students are included and valued.

ESL/ESD students in the kindergarten and preschool years have their progress monitored and formally reported each semester to parents. Children in the early years of schooling with disabilities are monitored and assessed with diagnostic intervention when required. Identified Aboriginal kindergartens and remote community schools may enrol 3 year old Aboriginal children if there are places available.

Schools Plus provides supplementary resources children with disabilities enrolling.

Post cards in five community languages have been published to inform non-English speaking parents about kindergarten and pre-primary enrolment processes and an ESL/ESD progress map was trialled in 2007. Progress plans for students with disabilities are also prepared.

International

Canada

Like Australia, Canada is a socio-geographically diverse country with provincial autonomy. It has been difficult obtaining data from some provinces, a problem faced by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) also (OECD, 2004). Immigrants continue to play a major role in shaping Canada's pluralist society as they do in Australia. There are significant rates of child poverty in Canada so this is a concern when looking for ways of providing high quality early childhood education for all children. In Canada education is a provincial/territorial responsibility with Federal overarching policies. Most governments recognise that the lack of coherent Early Childhood Education policies across the country is problematic. About 80% of child care is usually privately operated and is not-for-profit, regulated by provinces/territories. In the sector there is generalised under funding and an inefficient subsidy system. Some aspects of regulation vary between provinces/territories around group size and staff ratios.

Care and Education are currently treated separately and a *National and Provincial Policy for Early Education and Care* is in initial stages. In 2004 the two predominant approaches in Canada (Bennett, 2003) were:

- 1) Social Pedagogy and
- 2) Pre-primary reflecting two completely different philosophies.

The conceptual basis for the development of the curriculum/early learning documents

This varies according to the jurisdiction, some have developed early childhood frameworks: *Ontario-Best Start Early Learning Framework; New Brunswick-Curriculum Frameworks for Early Learning and Child care; Quebec-Jour C'est Magique*.

The conceptual basis for the development of the early curriculum documents is:

- 1) All children should be as physically, emotionally and spiritually healthy as they can be, with strong self-esteem, coping skills and enthusiasm
- 2) All children will have their basic needs for food, shelter, clothing and transport met and will be protected from abuse, neglect, discrimination, exploitation and danger
- 3) All children should have opportunities to reach their potential for good physical and social development, language skills, numeracy and general knowledge
- 4) All children should be helped to engage with others, to respect themselves and others, and to develop an understanding of their rights and responsibilities of belonging to a wider society.

The structures of the framework

There is no one structure or framework as all the provinces and territories have different approaches. Conceptually education and care are separated in the early childhood services. Canada has no national Department of Education. In almost all provinces, Ministries of Education have responsibility for kindergarten. Most kindergarten teachers have the same qualifications as primary teachers.

Children start school at 6 years of age. Kindergarten is primarily for 5 year olds and usually part time. Kindergarten curricula are generally described as play based or developmentally appropriate.

The quality of regulated child care is a concern. Child care is primarily a user pays service. Development and maintenance of regulated child care programs is not usually a responsibility of government. No jurisdiction requires all child care staff to have post secondary child care training.

In 2004 there were moves towards a national early learning and child care system based on four principles: quality, universality, accessibility and developmental planning.

Related support materials

National Children's Agenda Policy Frame (1997).

2004 Provincial and Territorial Action Plans (for \$5 billion child care funding) and intended to reflect QUAD (Quality, Universality, Affordability and Developmental programming) (2004) Toronto University.

Childcare resource and research unit.

Implementation strategies and processes

The implementation plan (of QUAD), based on best available evidence, with targets and timetables is just starting to be developed.

The OECD reported that safety issues dominated activities and the environment in many centres. There was a lack of direct access to outside space and little emphasis on the outdoors. Implementation varies between centres and between territories.

Links between early childhood frameworks and frameworks for older children

Each of Canada's ten provinces and seven territories has developed a program of regulated child care and a separate kindergarten program. The OECD (2004) report recommended that Canada builds bridges between child care and kindergartens.

The suitability of the curriculum framework to a wide range of audiences

Like Australia, the Federal government acknowledges multiculturalism and Indigenous culture. There are different perspectives put forward from early childhood professionals, parents and community members.

Identification of the key components of an effective curriculum

Research has shown that Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) Programs have positive effects if they are high quality, while poor quality programs may have a negative effect. There is a lack of clearly articulated Canadian vision on early childhood goals and principles. The OECD (2004), in their review, challenged Canada to conceptualise a long term vision for each province and for the country as a whole based on the best available evidence.

The Principles underpinning and guiding the curriculum

The European Union agreed on critical components of quality programs: safety, good hygiene, good nutrition, appropriate opportunities for rest, promotion of equality, opportunities for play, positive interactions with adults, encouragement and facilitation that supports interactions.

The opportunities for linking teaching and learning in the curriculum with monitoring, assessment and reporting, planning and reflection

Because the territories and provinces work independently, there is a wide diversity of assessment and reporting practices.

The opportunities for continuity of provision for children from birth to age eight

Currently in Canada there is no continuity of provision from birth to age 8 years. The 6 to 8 year olds are under the school system while the majority of children, from birth to 6 years, participate in early childhood programs including child care, nursery schools, kindergartens and family child care.

Identification of the expectations explicit and implicit in the curriculum document

Because the territories and provinces work independently, there is a wide diversity of explicit and implicit expectations.

How well the curriculum document caters for the inclusion of families and children from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds and with different learning needs

The Federal Multiculturalism policy supports Canada's diversity and encourages the preservation of different languages and cultural practices.

The OECD (2004) was surprised at the paucity of data for Aboriginal children. Inclusion of children with disabilities in regular early childhood education and care services (ECEC) is the preferred approach. Financial support is available and is not usually an entitlement. There are seven Federal Government programs associated with the ECEC. Aboriginal child care can be found in all provinces.

Finland

Discussion in Finland in the late 1990s, led to an early childhood education reform guided by a Government Resolution concerning the *National Policy Definition on Early Childhood Education and Care* (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2003).

The following curriculum document resulted from the reform and will be the focus of this report:

National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health (STAKES 2003), *National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland*. Helsinki: Ministry of Social Affairs and Health.

These curriculum guidelines cater for children birth to 6 years in centre or home based care. Children aged 6 years are catered for by the *Core Curriculum for Preschool* (Finland Ministry of Education 2000) which is a half day preschool program often combined with day care. In 2003, 96% of all 6 year olds participated in the preschool program with more than half also attending day care (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2004, p12). Children are required to attend school from 7 years of age and the *Core Curriculum for Primary Education* (Ministry of Education 2003) applies. The latter document was extended in 2004 to include outside school hour's care for Grade 1 and 2 children (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2004).

In Finland almost all children under 1 year of age are cared for at home due to generous parental leave arrangements and every child has the right to attend day care (OECD, 2006).

The conceptual basis for the development of the curriculum/early learning documents

- Early childhood policy in Finland is based on values of ethical responsibility, social justice, rights and responsibilities for all and mutual respect and these values also underpin the early childhood curriculum guidelines (OECD 2006; Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2003).
- Education, care and teaching are viewed as an integrated whole and learning in early childhood is part of a lifelong continuum (STAKES 2003).
- Parents are considered to be the primary carers and educators for their children and the aim of early childhood education is to support parents in their role through partnerships (STAKES 2003).
- “Early childhood education means children’s educational interaction in different settings with the aim of fostering the child’s healthy growth, development and learning” (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2003 p 9).

The structures of the framework

The framework is based on ten underpinning values drawn from the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and Finnish basic rights regulations.

The stated educational goals are:

- Promotion of personal well being

- Reinforcement of considerate behaviours and action towards others
- Gradual build up of autonomy.

A large section of the document is devoted to implementation guidelines (STAKES 2003 pp 15-27) in keeping with the notion that care, education and teaching are integrated. This is a document more about how children should learn than what, although one section (STAKES 2003 pp24-27) outlines six orientations: mathematical, natural sciences, historical-societal, aesthetic, ethical and religious-spiritual. It is these orientations that map to subjects in the preschool and primary curriculum documents (Lindberg and Valimaki 2004). However, it is stated that “the intention is not for children to study the content of different subjects, but to start to acquire tools and capabilities by means of which they are able to gradually increase their ability to examine, understand and experience a wide range of phenomena in the world around them” (STAKES 2003 p 24).

The curriculum framework concludes with sections about promoting partnerships with parents, special support services and implementation considerations at the local and service level. It is clear that local curriculum development is required and that the national document provides guidelines only. “The entire staff should commit themselves to drafting, implementing, monitoring and evaluating them” (STAKES, 2003 p 37).

Related support materials

Two documents convey to parents the intent of the national curriculum guidelines in a reader friendly style.

- National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health (STAKES), *Early Childhood Education and Care Information for Parents of Young Children* (Retrieved on 12-04-08 from <http://varttua.stakes.fi>).
- Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2004, *Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland Brochure* 3rd ed. Helsinki: Ministry of Social Affairs and Health.

Implementation strategies and processes

The development of the curriculum required extensive stakeholder involvement underpinned by “respect for mutuality (the possibilities of all different participants and stakeholders to be involved in the development process in an open dialogue)” (OECD 2006 p 319).

An interesting feature of the development and implementation process was the online availability of the document while in preparation for a wide audience to comment and these comments were fed back to steering groups. Also, the website included expert articles to elaborate on key points in the emerging document (STAKES 2003), encouraging wide readership, discussion and professional engagement.

In addition training provided by STAKES at the municipal level is ongoing to support local curriculum development and evaluation.

Links between early childhood frameworks and frameworks for older children

In part, an objective of the recent reform process has been the creation of an integrated continuum between early childhood, preschool and school programs from the child’s perspective (Eurybase 2006/7). The conference paper by Lindberg and Valimaki (2004) illustrates how links can be drawn from the ‘orientations’ described in the early childhood curriculum guidelines to the subject areas in the preschool and primary curricula. Content links combined with underpinning shared values create a continuum between frameworks for younger and older children.

In summary, “Early childhood education, the preschool education that forms part of it, and basic education in schools together constitute a coherent package which progresses logically from the perspective of children’s development” (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2003 p 9).

The suitability of the curriculum framework to a wide range of audiences

The early childhood curriculum provides broad guidelines with more emphasis on how the curriculum is to be implemented than what content is to be included (STAKES 2003). This is in keeping with Finnish understanding that care, education and teaching/pedagogy are all part of curriculum. Local municipalities and various care services can use the curriculum guidelines as a broad basis from which to develop a curriculum to meet the needs of the local community. As such the national curriculum guideline is a flexible document for a variety of audiences.

Identification of the key components of an effective curriculum

“Professional and vocational knowledge and experience provide a solid foundation for competence” (STAKES 2003 p 16) and educators work as a team best described as ‘multi professional communities’ (Lindberg and Valimaki 2004). Both of these components contribute to an effective curriculum. Also, “in negotiating about the values and modes of action, the educator community is building a common early childhood education and care culture at the local level” (STAKES 2003 p 16). The curriculum is locally developed and evaluated to best meet local needs and contexts, but informed by the national curriculum guidelines.

Mutual co-operation between the various children’s services including schools and interactive partnerships with parents based on shared values are critical to success (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2003).

Effective implementation of a curriculum requires appropriate child staff ratios and group sizes. In Finland current ratios are: 1 trained adult to 4 children in full time care under 3 years, 1 trained adult to 7 children in full time care aged 3–6 years and 1 trained adult to 13 children in preschool programs for children aged 6 years. Also, a group size limit of 20 is set for preschool programs. These figures are low by international standards, but are noted as a topic for debate for reform of the *Child Care Act* by Lindberg and Valimaki (2004).

Research on early childhood education, staff training and quality assessment provides ongoing support for curriculum implementation and evaluation, thus promoting an effective curriculum (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2003).

The Principles underpinning and guiding the curriculum

- Play is fundamental in the curriculum and “the activities take children’s need to learn through imagination and play into account” (Eurybase 2006/7 p6). Reflective and observant educators must acknowledge “all that is visible in the play is meaningful to the child, but not all that is meaningful to the child is visible in the play” (STAKES 2003 p19).
- Integration is a key principle. “Education is composed of themes related to children’s sphere of life on the one hand and to contents expanding and analysing children views of the world on the other” (Eurybase 2006/7 p5). ‘What is meaningful and characteristic for children drives the curriculum’ (Lindberg and Valimaki 2004).
- Children are identified as individuals with specific strengths, learning potentials and needing individual guidance. “The process of caring for, nurturing and educating children should form a seamless whole which flexibly supports the individual development of each child” (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2003 p3).

- Early childhood services work in partnership with parents to develop individual learning programs for each child. “The journey from co-operation to partnership requires mutual, continuous and committed interaction in all matters concerning the child” (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2004 p11).
- The environment or setting is critical (Lindberg and Valimaki 2004). “The child learns together with adults and other children in an environment consciously and purposefully designed to facilitate growth and learning” (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2003 p16). “A rich, flexible early childhood education and care environment enables the use of all senses and the whole body for play, movement, expression, experimentation and insights” (STAKES 2003 p23).
- “The child is an active learner, whose learning is guided by curiosity, the will to explore and joy of realisation. The core of learning is in the interaction between children, adults and the environment” (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2004 p 9). In a responsive and supportive early childhood setting, children can develop a positive disposition to learning (STAKES 2003).
- “Language has a vital role” in children’s learning and the “abilities related to the command of language are the key to the child’s ability to learn” (STAKES 2003 p18). Language is envisaged broadly as self-expression, interactions with others, literature/story telling and as part of routines, play and culture/customs.

The opportunities for linking teaching and learning in the curriculum with monitoring, assessment and reporting, planning and reflection

Assessment is continuous and about progress in growth and learning rather than reaching predetermined goals. Parents are very much partners in evaluation and described as “valued pedagogical partners” (OECD 2006 p324). Also, children are supported to develop self-assessment skills (Eurybase 2006/7).

At the municipal level “evaluation is a precondition of development” of local curricula based on the national guidelines (STAKES 2003 p39).

The opportunities for continuity of provision for children from birth to age eight

The three relevant curricula documents share underpinning values and the subjects can be mapped across from early childhood to preschool to primary. These elements, plus a shared understanding of curricula as care/education and teaching support continuity (STAKES 2003).

Identification of the expectations explicit and implicit in the curriculum document

Explicit in the document are: notions of local curricula development and evaluation, the rights of all concerned, mutual respect and co-operation at all levels, parental engagement and the child’s progress in learning and development.

Implicit are the rights of the parent as primary caregiver and educator to choose the most appropriate care option for their child and to feel supported in their choice by policies and practices.

How well the curriculum document caters for the inclusion of families and children from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds and with different learning needs

The document is based on an early childhood policy of universal access and equal opportunity values. Languages other than Finnish are included: sign language, Romany and Saami. Diverse cultures and abilities are specifically noted and included (Eurybase 2006/7, STAKES 2003). Inclusive practice is a priority in Finland.

Also, early detection and intervention with respect to learning difficulties is identified as part of the pedagogy advocated in the curriculum (Eurybase 2006/7, STAKES 2003). “The primary requirement is to support the development of each child’s positive self concept and health self esteem and to ensure equal membership of the group” (Eurybase 2006/7 p6).

Italy, Reggio Emilia approach

International attention was drawn to the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education when Newsweek identified it as one of the best schools in the world in 1991. Since that time many thousands of early childhood visitors have flocked to the city to see and hear more about their particular approach. Children's exhibitions have also added to the interest as many countries have hosted exhibitions of children's work from Reggio Emilia including documentation of their projects.

The conceptual basis for the development of the curriculum/ early learning documents

The Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education is not a curriculum document, but rather a set of principles and values that underpin practices. It does not provide a model, but rather a provocation to reflect on theories and practices. Malaguzzi (1993) established an educational community-sharing culture through joint exploration where open topics are presented to speculate and discuss.

The approach fosters children's intellectual development through systematic focus on symbolic representation. Children are encouraged to explore their environment and express themselves through their natural languages or modes of expression including: words, movement, drawing, sculpture, shadow play, collage, dramatic play and music. Project work is part of the curriculum where children's own interests, ideas, preferences and choices emerge.

One of the focal points of the philosophy is the image of the child as rich, strong and powerful. The role of education is to; liberate childhood energy and capacities, and promote the development of the child in all areas communicative, social, affective, and with respect to critical and scientific thinking.

The structures of the framework

The Reggio Emilia approach has a distinctive and innovative set of assumptions:

- Children, teachers and families are the central focus
- The approach recognises a community of learners
- The approach recognises social constructivism as a crucial aspect of learning
- Children are viewed as a group of individuals
- The child is viewed as a researcher
- The child is a constructor and co-constructor of knowledge
- Children's strengths and remarkable abilities are made visible by the schools
- Teachers listen to children and collaborate on interpreting observations
- Pedagogical documentation provides the basis for collaboration.

Related support materials

A range of practical localised elements/materials support implementation:

- Recycling and documenting centres
- Atelierista (resource teacher)
- Atelier (studio/workshop)
- Inservice to support teacher development
- The pedagogista links the schools in terms of values, educational objectives and educational practices

- Special education co-ordinator
- Centre for educational research
- Office of educational exchanges
- Puppet and drama laboratory
- Advisory council comprising parents, citizens and educators
- Municipal board.

Implementation strategies and processes

The Reggio Emilia approach has been implemented locally through the municipality and the inspiration of Malaguzzi and others. It is a culturally relevant approach and embraced by all in the local area. Observing and modelling practice have been key strategies in the dissemination of this approach.

Links between early childhood frameworks and frameworks for older children

Malaguzzi (1993) did not see early childhood as a preparation for primary school, or any need to provide continuity of learning with the primary school rather, teachers should respond to the here and now of children's lives and assist them to reach their potentials in the broadest possible way. Therefore, the Reggio Emilia approach sets out to provide the best opportunities for the particular child at their particular level of understanding.

The suitability of the curriculum framework to a wide range of audiences

While the Reggio Emilia approach was never conceptualised to be used with a wide range of audiences, internationally it has been recognised as offering quality programs for children from birth to school age based on excellent principles and assumptions that direct the approach. The principles themselves are suitable for a wide range of audiences. For example, valuing children, recognising children as capable and competent, collaboration between teachers, children, families and the community and documentation of learning could be applied in a variety of settings.

Identification of the key components of an effective curriculum

- Community of inquirers
- Projects help children become readers and writers
- Engagement with curriculum rather than coverage of curriculum
- Constructing and co-constructing understandings
- Teachers are researchers
- Documentation is used for planning as it elicits reactions and support
- Relationships are critical
- Listening, making sense of children's understandings or making connections
- School organisation and the design of environments can be arranged to support highly collaborative problem solving.

The Principles underpinning and guiding the curriculum

The principles emerged from a complex cultural background and include:

- The image of the child
- Collaboration
- Dialogue
- Documentation
- Teacher as researcher
- Child as constructor and co-constructor of their learning.

The opportunities for linking teaching and learning in the curriculum with monitoring, assessment and reporting, planning and reflection

Through an active reciprocal exchange, teaching can strengthen learning and how to learn. The approach is based on social constructivism and collaboration takes place between teachers, children, families and the community to discuss ideas for supporting learning. Rather than planning being a method of work established in advance, it is seen as a method of work in which teachers lay out general educational objectives, but do not specify goals for each project in advance. Planning involves the preparation and organisation of space, materials, thoughts, situations and occasions of learning and dialogue.

In particular, relationships support the linking:

- Teachers know how to listen to children and allow them to take the initiative
- Teachers take children's work and ideas seriously
- Children have special rights
- Children stay with teachers for three years strengthening the relationship with the child and family
- The content of the teacher-child relationship is one of apprenticeship rather than targets of instruction, and rich with problem setting and problem solving.

“Creativity requires that the school of knowing finds connections with the school of expressing” (Millikan 2003 p71).

The opportunities for continuity of provision for children from birth to age eight

There is no curriculum document, therefore there are no guidelines to follow, but rather a philosophy based on theory that has a set of assumptions that can be translated into practice. There are no curriculum units as it is believed that this would focus on teaching without learning. Instead each school delineates a series of projects both short and long term for investigation. “The teachers follow the children, not plans” (Edwards et al 1998 p85). The goals are important, but it is more important to question why and how the children reach them. “Children are the ones that shape the school experience rather than being shaped by them” (Edwards et al 1998 p86).

Malaguzzi warns against the focus being on preparation for elementary school or providing continuity, he believes that this leads to educators being ‘prisoners of a model’ and the education is likened to a funnel.

The principles of the Reggio Emilia approach could easily be extended from birth to 5 years, to accommodate children from birth to 8 years. The view of children as learners would ensure that children in the early years of school have as paramount in their learning, the same engagement and love of learning that is seen in early childhood settings. Children are seen as; inquirers, problem solvers and problem

setters. They develop a love of learning because the learning is contextually based. All these assumptions about children are desirable for children in the early years of school, not just in the early childhood years.

Identification of the expectations explicit and implicit in the curriculum document

- The environment can reflect and influence thinking not just the curriculum
- The environment is viewed as the third teacher
- There is a strong aesthetic dimension in the programs with respect for materials
- Children assume the role in construction of self and knowledge with the help from adults
- The approach helps to problematise the pedagogical practice.

How well the curriculum document caters for the inclusion of families and children from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds and with different learning needs

Children are viewed as unique individuals with rights. The Reggio response to children minimizes many of the effects of disability because the learning environment matches the development and social needs of children.

New Zealand

Te Whāriki is a curriculum statement for the early childhood sector, covering children from birth to school entry age and provides links to learning in school settings. (New Zealand Ministry of Education 1996).

In the document, curriculum is used “to describe the sum total of the experiences, activities, and events whether direct or indirect, which occur within an environment designed to foster children’s learning and development” (p10).

The conceptual basis for the development of the curriculum/early learning documents

Te Whāriki integrates care and education. This curriculum is founded on the following aspirations for children “to grow up as competent and confident learners and communicators, healthy in mind, body and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in the knowledge that they make a valued contribution to society” (p9). *Te Whāriki* defines how to achieve progress towards this vision.

Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological framework has influenced the levels of learning found in *Te Whāriki*. Underpinning concepts include the:

- Learner engaged in the learning environment
- Relationship between the children’s environments home, family educational setting and people
- Professional capacity to care and educate
- Nation’s beliefs and values about children, and early childhood care and education
- Experiences both within and outside the early childhood setting that enrich children’s lives and provide them with knowledge, skills and dispositions to tackle new challenges
- Learner as the starting point and the knowledge, skills and attitudes that the child brings to the experience
- Critical role of socially and culturally mediated learning and of reciprocal and responsive relations for children with people, places and things
- Curriculum building on children’s current needs, strengths and interests and allowing children choice and responsibility for their learning

- Need for specifically planned experiences, and interactions that arise spontaneously
- Understanding that children learn through collaboration with adults and peers with guided participation and observation of others as well as by individual exploration and reflection.

The structures of the framework

Te Whāriki forms the basis for consistent curriculum and programs in early childhood services for all children in all early childhood settings. *Te Whāriki* covers infants from birth to 18 months, toddlers 1 year to 3 years and young children from 2 years to school entry age. There is deliberate overlap in the ages to recognise the differences in children's development. *Te Whāriki* sets out the special characteristics and key curriculum requirements for infants, toddlers and young children.

The principles of *Te Whāriki* are:

- Holistic development
- Empowerment
- Family and community
- Relationships.

The strands (or essential areas of learning and development) are:

- Well being
- Belonging
- Communication
- Contribution
- Exploration.

The strands and goals arise from the four principles and each strand has several goals. The document provides examples of children's development related to each specific goal. Learning outcomes have been developed for each goal in each of the strands. There are suggested experiences to meet the learning outcomes for infants, toddlers and young children.

Related support materials

Te Whāriki: Te Whāriki Matauranga monga Mokopuna o Aotearoa – Early childhood curriculum, Wellington: Learning Media, lists supporting resources for assisting planning, evaluation, assessment and implementation.

Quality in Action is a support document to assist management and educators in early childhood services to implement the statements of 'Desirable Objectives and Practices' (DOPS) in relation to Learning and Development, Communication and Consultation and Operation and Administration.

Ministry of Education (1998) *Quality in Action Te Mahi Whai Hua Implementing the revised statement of desirable objectives and practices in New Zealand Early Childhood Services*. Learning Media, Wellington New Zealand

Carr, M. (2001) *Assessment in early childhood settings: Learning stories*,. Paul Chapman, London.

Implementation strategies and processes

Te Whāriki forms a framework for implementation. The curriculum is implemented based on the principles, and planned and evaluated in terms of the curriculum's strands and goals. Each service develops programs to meet the needs of children and families in their specific setting and community, therefore implementation may vary. The overall implementation of the curriculum document followed extensive consultation with the early childhood field as well as collaborative partnerships with communities.

Links between early childhood frameworks and frameworks for older children

Te Whāriki acknowledges that children from birth through to 8 years have developmental needs and capacities that differ from those in any subsequent time of their lives. Therefore there are different curriculum approaches for older children. *Te Whāriki* demonstrates links of strands with the essential skills and learning of the New Zealand curriculum framework for schools.

The suitability of the curriculum framework to a wide range of audiences

The *Te Whāriki* curriculum:

- Recognises the diverse social contexts within which children are catered for
- Reflects the concept of a life long learning process that begins from the very start of life and provides links to learning in school settings
- Is a bicultural document which meets the needs of a range of specific groups
- Builds on a long history in early childhood services established over the past century to meet the needs of children, families and communities
- Reflects the rapidly changing society, the social and economic changes and the increase in cultural diversity.

Identification of the key components of an effective curriculum

- Recognises that relationships and environments that children experience have a direct impact on their learning and development
- Recognises the different characteristics of infants, toddlers and young children and their specific curriculum requirements
- Identifies the importance of a sound set of principles and strands or essential learning areas from which to build curriculum
- Employs a collaborative consultative process from which to develop curriculum guidelines.

The Principles underpinning and guiding the curriculum

The principles are:

- Holistic development - The early childhood curriculum reflects the holistic way children learn and grow
- Empowerment - The early childhood curriculum empowers the child to learn and grow
- Family and community - The wider world of family and community is an integral part of the early childhood curriculum
- Relationships - Children learn through reciprocal responsive relationships with people, places and things.

The opportunities for linking teaching and learning in the curriculum with monitoring, assessment and reporting, planning and reflection

Te Whāriki includes supporting resources for assisting planning, evaluation, assessment and implementation. However early childhood services develop their own distinctive pattern for planning, assessment and evaluation. Learning, development and experiences provided for children are interconnected.

Each principle is discussed in relation to assessment and there are elaborations for different age levels and flexibility for different settings. The strands and goals are woven with different emphasis. Planning should help adults to understand what young children are learning, how the learning happens and the role of adults and children in the learning.

The purpose of assessment is to give useful information about children's learning and development to the adults providing the program and to the children and their families. The program will be continually modified in light of evaluation to ensure that it meets the needs of the children within the curriculum goals.

Questioning and reflecting on practice are the first steps towards planning and evaluating the program.

Documents and videos have been produced to support teachers to explore the role of Learning Stories in understanding children and how to plan for them.

The opportunities for continuity of provision for children from birth to age eight

Continuity between early childhood and school is provided for in the document by describing characteristics of children related to each strand as they move from early childhood to early years of school. During the early years of school, the principles and strands of the early childhood curriculum continue to apply and can be interwoven with the *New Zealand Curriculum Statements for schools* (New Zealand Ministry of Education 2007).

The early childhood curriculum must be flexible enough to encompass fluctuations in individual behaviour and learning. Repeated familiar experiences are provided to consolidate concepts and reassurance, while challenge is provided as a medium for growth.

Identification of the expectations explicit and implicit in the curriculum document

The principles, strands and goals are common to all early childhood settings. However the ways in which they are put into practice may differ between services. The importance of the social context within which children are catered for and learning takes place, is one of the foundation stones of the curriculum. Each of the goals in *Te Whāriki* reflects the expectations of the curriculum document.

How well the curriculum document caters for the inclusion of families and children from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds and with different learning needs

Te Whāriki recognises the diversity of early childhood education in terms of; cultural perspectives, structural differences, organisational differences, different environments, different philosophical emphases, different resource availability, the range of ways in which the community participates and the age range of children within the program. The program at each centre will incorporate strategies to fully include children with special needs.

Te Whāriki is designed to be inclusive and appropriate for all children. The principles, goals and strands are designed to apply to a wide range of distinctive contexts. The care and education for children who have special needs is encompassed within the principles, goals and strands set out for all children in early childhood settings.

Republic of Korea

The conceptual basis for the development of the curriculum/early learning documents

The Western influence has had a significant influence on the development of early childhood education in Korea. In particular the *Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP)* from the United States of America has become the basis of the *National Early Childhood Guidelines*.

In Korea, “preschool education reflects traditional educational values such as authority of the teacher, the teacher’s strong control, the emphasis on whole group activities and Korean parents’ enthusiasm about their children’s early start on formal learning” (Young-Ihm Kwon, 2003, p 489).

Although child care and kindergartens have followed their own path and development under two different systems, the goals of the two systems are now merging into one. It is suggested that as both systems are interested in care and education they should not be separated from each other for the children’s benefit and development (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), 2007).

The Education Reform committee in 1997 had three directions:

- Three to five year olds should be in a new public preschool system, where education and care services are integrated and provided together
- Priority should be given to children from low income families for the sake of educational equity
- One year free education before formal schooling be provided to all 5 year olds so that every child has an equal start (UNESCO, 2007).

The aim was to achieve one hundred per cent enrolment in preschools of 5 year olds by 2005. Because of the cost of this initiative, a new target has now been set for 2010.

While these initiatives were being put in place for kindergartens, there were development plans for child care. There have been policies for 3 to 5 year olds. However policy for care of infants (birth to 2 years) exists only in name (Jung Na, 2003).

The structures of the framework

The kindergarten is play based and has an integrated curriculum consisting of five life areas: physical, social, expressive, language and inquiry, rather than learning academic skills.

The *Early Childhood Education Promotion Act* (1982) saw the rapid growth of kindergartens. The kindergarten curriculum was set by the *Education Law* in 1992. As of 2005, kindergartens follow the *Early Childhood Education Act* (2004), while child care facilities should comply with the *Child Care Act*.

The kindergarten has four broad aims:

- To instill habits for a healthy and safe life and a balanced physical development
- To develop an ability to understand others and to express ideas using appropriate language
- To have pride in what one does and to develop an ability to express creatively one’s feelings and ideas in music, dance and painting
- To develop the basic habits necessary for daily life and to develop a love of family, peers and neighbours. (UNESCO 2007).

The government developed and disseminated kindergarten curriculum guidelines and teaching/learning materials. The provisional educational authorities determine the structure and operational details.

The child care program on the other hand has a focus on fostering children's physical, cognitive, emotional and social development. It also offers nutrition, health, safety and services for parents, and exchanges with communities.

At the local level, the Metropolitan and Provincial Office of Education (MPOE) provide operating guidelines to support child care facilities to provide quality care. They also conduct research to ensure quality of provision.

There is a national curriculum for elementary school and high school, *Korean Institute of Curriculum and Evaluation (KICE)* developed for children from 6 to 14 years.

The national curriculum has a general framework followed by specific goals for elementary school and high school.

The national curriculum for schools has five broad objectives based on stated ideals of education for a well educated person. This is supported with a six goal framework. These are followed by separate goals for elementary school, middle school and high school.

Related support materials

The MPOE has in service programs for teachers and provides support materials.

Implementation strategies and processes

The MPOE provides support and guidance and advice related to the curriculum.

There is an inspection system by the Ministry of Education. Kindergartens are inspected once a year. This is not related to funding as most kindergartens in Korea are privately operated (Young-Ihm Kwon, 2002).

When research took place examining the implementation of the kindergarten curriculum guidelines, it was found that "teachers used approaches including extrinsic motivation, work sheets and separation of play time from work time, which are considered inappropriate in Western early years education" (Young-Ihm Kwon, 2002 p163).

Links between early childhood frameworks and frameworks for older children

There appears to be no links between the kindergarten curriculum and the national curriculum for schools.

There is no curriculum provision for children from birth to 3 years in child care, and the notion of care and education to connect child care and kindergarten under a care and education provision has not yet been realised.

The suitability of the curriculum framework to a wide range of audiences

The curriculum frameworks were addressed to teachers specifically related to the age they were teaching, rather than to teachers generally or to parents or a wider audience.

Identification of the key components of an effective curriculum

Given the research which supports that the quality of education can be attributed to a large degree to the qualifications of the teacher, it is significant that there is discrepancy between the qualifications of child care and kindergarten teachers in Korea. Almost all of the kindergarten teachers are college graduates with the four year graduates being employed in public kindergartens. Public kindergarten teachers are more highly qualified than private providers (UNESCO, 2006). The 2-3 year trained graduates are cheaper to employ and are therefore employed by private providers.

Perhaps the findings of Young-Ihm Kwon, (2003) as described above, support the importance of the curriculum reflecting its own cultural context. Another factor which may have led to these more controlling types of practice is the high ratio of children to teachers, which research has shown often results in less appropriate practices.

The Principles underpinning and guiding the curriculum

Education is provided through kindergartens under the supervision of the Ministry of Education, who provide services for children aged 3 to 5 years. Human Resource Development Care is provided through child care facilities under the management of the Ministry of Health and Welfare who provide services for children from birth to 5 years and provide guidelines for child care.

The opportunities for linking teaching and learning in the curriculum with monitoring, assessment and reporting, planning and reflection

There is a section of the National curriculum called *Evaluation and Quality Control of the Curriculum*. This sets out extensive lists of the assessment and evaluation required at both the national and school level.

The opportunities for continuity of provision for children from birth to age eight

The possibilities for continuity of provision for children from birth through to 8 years has not been realised in Korea. There is still division between child care and kindergarten provision and a curriculum for children under 3 years old has not yet become a reality. The school based concept of education has not become flexible enough to include children in their years prior to school.

This has been summed up in the UNESCO Policy Brief by Soo-Hyang Choi:

But now that countries are moving away, though slowly, from the conventional, schooling-based concept of education into the expanded vision of education, early childhood programs with features of both care and education should have a solid place. “It is time for the concept of education to become more flexible and open, rather than for early childhood to distort itself to fit into the old concept” (Soo Hyang Choi UNESCO, 2003 p2).

How well the curriculum document caters for the inclusion of families and children from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds and with different learning needs

The *Early Childhood Education Reform* in 1997 stated that priority should be given to children from low income families for the sake of educational equity. They proposed at least one year free education before formal schooling be provided to all 5 year olds so that every child has an equal start (UNESCO, 2007).

There is a section in the National curriculum entitled *Organisation and implementation of the curriculum in special schools*. This section of the document allows a level of flexibility related to the special nature of the school and the characteristics of the students.

Singapore

Singapore has two main early childhood services. Child care centres that provide education and care for children 2 months to 6 years and are under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS) and Preschools. Preschools cater for children 3 - 6 years and are regulated by the Ministry of Education (MOE). These services are run by the private sector including religious bodies, community groups, business organisations and social organisations.

In 2000 the MOE issued a set of *Desired Outcomes of Pre-school Education*. These were the basis for designing and trialling a new curriculum in pre-schools. These desired outcomes emphasised social skills and attitudes as listed below:

- Know what is right and what is wrong
- Be willing to share and take turns with others
- Be able to relate to others
- Be curious and able to explore
- Be able to listen and speak with understanding
- Be comfortable and happy with themselves
- Have developed physical co-ordination and healthy habits
- Love their families, friends, teachers and schools.

Based on the above trial in January 2003, a new pre-school curriculum was launched. This national framework applies to both child care centres and pre-schools. To support pre-schools and child care centres the MOE published a document: *Nurturing early learners: A framework for a kindergarten curriculum in Singapore*.

The conceptual basis for the development of the curriculum/early learning documents

The need for reform was driven by human capital theory. Singapore is a knowledge based economy and sees education as giving the island nation a competitive advantage.

The new curriculum is conceptually linked to:

- The importance of play
- Best practice
- Image of the child as a natural and active learner
- Theoretical influences
- DAP – Piaget and Erikson
- Dewey
- Vygotsky
- Malaguzzi
- Socrates and Confucius
- Geva Blenkins.

The structures of the framework

The preschool curriculum framework is based on desired outcomes for preschool education, which aim to guide early years teaching in Singapore by encouraging learning processes which focus on the whole child. There are six key principles:

- A holistic approach to development and learning
- Integrative learning
- Children as active learners
- Adults as interested supporters in learning
- Interactive learning
- Play as a medium for learning.

These principles are designed to provide guidelines for developing an educational program which meets the physical, emotional, social and cognitive needs of preschool children and to suggest appropriate teaching practices. Six key learning areas are also identified in the framework:

- Aesthetics and creative expression
- Environmental awareness
- Language and literacy
- Motor skills development
- Numeracy
- Self and social awareness.

Learning experiences should be integrated and structured around meaningful situations.

Related support materials

- Publication – *Nurturing early learners: A framework for a kindergarten curriculum in Singapore* (Pre-school Education Unit, MOE).
- Texts designed for teachers giving examples of teaching materials and learning activities
- Videos designed to raise teachers awareness of different approaches
- Training for primary teachers on changes to pre-school education
- Minimum standards for programs, curriculum and teacher qualifications
- Registration of programs
- All principal teachers to have diploma level training (by 2006, and reviewed by 2008)
- Preschool Qualification Accreditation Committee (MOE and MCYS)
- Positive support for home-school partnerships
- Preschool Education Unit (MOE)
- Family Development Division (MCYS)
- Child Development Unit (KW Women's and Children's Hospital)
- National Library Board
- Child Guidance Clinic

- Research - Nanyang Technological University houses the National Institute of Education which researched and trialled the original outcomes curriculum.

Implementation strategies and processes

The development and subsequent implementation of the curriculum framework was a staged process. In 1999 the MOE planned to improve Preschool education and identified the following activities as suitable for this purpose:

- Identifying desired outcomes for children
- The development of a curriculum framework
- Conducting research on the benefits of high quality Preschool education
- Raising the standards of teacher training and qualifications
- Reviewing the regulatory framework of Preschools.

In 2001 and 2002, a pilot research study was conducted to trial the new curriculum and the impact of higher levels of teacher training on children's language, social and cognitive development.

There was recognition that to ensure a smooth transition from Preschool to school, teachers in primary schools needed to be aware of what was happening in Preschools. The *Pre-school Unit* (PSU) gave training to primary teachers that covered the following areas:

- The kindergarten curriculum framework itself
- Designing learning centres
- Assessing children's learning
- Integrated lesson planning.

Links between early childhood frameworks and frameworks for older children

The desired outcomes for Preschool education closely reflects the MOE desired outcomes for primary and secondary education and this was designed with the intent of ensuring continuity of focus between the different levels of education. Documents emphasise life long learning and the MOE through the PSU carries out training with primary teachers.

The suitability of the curriculum framework to a wide range of audiences

The framework has been designed for child care and Preschool which means the demarcation between the two services is being eroded. There has been a strong emphasis on home-school partnerships which will assist parents to change their attitudes to what is education. Singapore has had a very didactic model of teaching in the early years and there is even a discussion of the educational use of stencils in the *Nurturing Early Learners* document. Preschool teachers and primary teachers are sharing knowledge to make transitions easier.

Identification of the key components of an effective curriculum

- Strong support from a number of government ministries
- The use of *Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)* ideas has changed the approach radically in Singapore, but this is not a radical approach and there is lots of international literature on the efficacy of such an approach
- Implemented after research into the framework itself

- The *Nurturing Early Learners* is sent to all centres. This document is simple, straight forward and provides strong guidelines, but is not prescriptive
- Supported by other reforms like teacher training.

Principles underpinning and guiding the curriculum

As described above.

The opportunities for linking teaching and learning in the curriculum with monitoring, assessment and reporting, planning and reflection

This is strong on paper with services urged to adopt a child studies approach. Services are using common methods of observation, documentation and portfolios that are shared with parents. Teachers are being trained in making focused observational records and using children's work samples and photos to support their interpretations of learning.

The opportunities for continuity of provision for children from birth to age eight

There is a core curriculum for the compulsory years and this is designed to follow on from, for example, primary education and is seen as preparation for high school. The desired outcomes are similar for each stage. The Preschool curriculum has a focus on values, attitudes and skills. Therefore it is concerned with the child as learner, rather than gaining appropriate academic skills for school. There is a structure across the three years where children are seen as progressing from one class to the next. The children under 3 years in child care are under the MCYS and do not have a structured program.

School is seen as being in phases and therefore, the primary years seem to be more formal and exams start quite early. Even in the first year of formal school – the second phase 6/7 – 12, examinations and related school activities might take up four teaching weeks across the year.

Identification of the expectations explicit and implicit in the curriculum document

Explicit are the ideas of the child as a learner in a play based setting, a role for the teacher as a facilitator and the home-school relationship encouraged.

What is implicit is that this was a rigorous process and is seen as being particularly Singaporean. Designed to meet government needs for an educated citizenry and to be compatible with Singaporean history, it still has a pragmatic approach "whereby economic functionality remains a cornerstone of educational policies" (Tan, 2007, p36). Even the home-school relationship is seen as one of shared economic responsibility as the demand for women in the workforce has grown.

How well the curriculum document caters for the inclusion of families and children from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds and with different learning needs

All the documents mention the rich diversity of Singapore's population. Children are expected to be bilingual and be able to speak English and their mother tongue. The two years research when the Framework was trialled deliberately targeted Preschools where there was a diverse demographic to ensure it was not culturally and linguistically centric.

Sweden

Curriculum for the preschool Lpo 98 (Skolverket Lpo 98, 2006) was introduced as the first early childhood curriculum in 1998 when preschools were brought under the education department system and applies to home based and centre based programs for children aged 1-6years. It was introduced with the explicit intention of bridging care and education.

Curriculum for the compulsory school system, the preschool class and the leisure time centre Lpo 94 (Skolverket Lpo94, 2006) applies to the voluntary preschool class for 6-7 year olds which 96% of children attend (UNESCO 2007). Compulsory school which begins at 7 years includes after school care/leisure time centre. The Preschool class was introduced in 1998 amid debate about lowering the school starting age and economic considerations. The aim is to promote continuity, ease of transition for children and to bridge the two pedagogical cultures, preschool and school.

The report below focuses on Lpo98 with additional comment on Lpo94

The conceptual basis for the development of the curriculum/ early learning documents

“The preschool should lay the foundations for life long learning. The preschool should be enjoyable secure and rich in learning for all children. The preschool should provide children with good pedagogical activities, where care, nurturing and learning together for a coherent whole. Children’s development into responsible persons and members of society should be promoted in partnership with the home” (Skolverket Lpo 98, 2006 p 4-5).

The image of “the child as competent learner, active thinker and involved doer” is evident in this curriculum (OECD 2006 p 412).

The child is central to the curriculum. “The needs and interests which children themselves express in different ways should provide the foundation for shaping the environment and planning pedagogical activities” (Skolverket Lpo 98, 2006 p11-12).

A holistic view of development, the uniqueness of each individual and the importance of play are espoused. The focus is on the process not outcomes and partnerships between all stakeholders are an important strength.

“Activities should promote play, creativity and enjoyment of learning as well as focus on and strengthen the child’s interest in learning and mastering new experiences, knowledge and skills” (Skolverket Lpo 98, 2006.p9).

The structures of the framework

It essentially lays down the foundational values and goals then it is up to each municipality and service to interpret, implement and attempt to attain the goals.

The framework is organised around five goals

- Norms and values – democracy, equity and inclusiveness
- Development and learning – holistic, play based, child centred
- Influence of the child – social development, democracy, responsibility, child centred
- Preschool and home – co-operation with parents, involvement
- Co-operation between the preschool class, the school and the leisure time centre – co-operation to support all round child development at all levels and transition support.

Under each heading the goal is elaborated with sub goals and guidelines. It is of interest that the guidelines are divided into two parts, a list for everyone working in the preschool (assume this means parents/non teachers/carers) and another for the work team i.e. teachers.

This list of five goals can be compared to the Lpo 94 that lists eight as follows:

- Norms and values
- Knowledge
- Responsibility and Influence of pupils
- School and home
- Transition and co-operation
- School and surrounding world
- Assessment and grades
- Responsibility of the school head.

The same fundamental values are evident in both curricula including child centred, holistic, and democratic approaches. However greater emphasis is placed on outcomes than process. Play is absent and a developmental focus is not so evident (Lpo 94).

Related support materials

Nothing specific was located and it seems this happens at a local municipal level and the level of resourcing is variable according to the size and wealth of the municipality (Skolverket 2004, p18).

Implementation strategies and processes

Each Preschool is acknowledged as unique and this is demonstrated by staff, parents and children determining how the curriculum goals will be worked toward in each setting (Skolverket 2007).

The Preschool stakeholders may also need to work with the local council who may have specific additional goals.

The importance of teamwork and co-operation across all levels and between all stakeholders is stressed in the curriculum. This is evident in the goals listed above and has been an important element for implementation of the curriculum.

The curriculum was positively received by the early childhood sector and viewed as a way to increase the status of early childhood and affirm early childhood pedagogy. It was also noted that it was not so different pedagogically to what was already happening in early childhood services. According to Skolverket (2004, p32 & 22), the implementation challenges have been around the localised interpretation of goals, the varying levels of support and resourcing from municipalities during the implementation phase and practical centre based constraints such as large group sizes and lack of planning time.

A reform of teacher training in 2001 (UNESCO 2007) was undertaken such that all teachers now undergo a common core training for one year then split into specialist areas. This was to increase the potential for common understandings and teamwork across the services as promoted by the curriculum. However, a recent review shows that school pedagogy does still dominate (UNESCO 2007).

Links between early childhood frameworks and frameworks for older children

The links between Lpo 94 and Lpo 98 are evident in the underpinning values. The preschool class under Lpo94 is about bridging the gap between Preschool and school. The Preschool class offers greater scope for play, creativity, the child's exploration and individual development and therefore is very much linked to Preschool pedagogy and curriculum stated in Lpo98. (Ministry of Education 2006) In creating the preschool class the intention was that early childhood pedagogy would impact on the school pedagogy. In practice a gradual progression occurs: Preschool is about play, preschool class is skills am and play pm and school is about skills (UNESCO 2007).

The suitability of the curriculum framework to a wide range of audiences

The curriculum document is relatively brief (14 pages) easy to read and clearly organised. It could be applied to a range of audiences. A key aim of Lpo 98 was to bring care and education together, hence the document could be easily applied in various settings. Note that Lpo 94 is unusual as a school curriculum document in that it includes the leisure time centre known here as after school care.

Identification of the key components of an effective curriculum

- Co-operation across all levels, teamwork and partnerships between staff, parents, children and the municipality
- Fundamental values linked across different levels ie Lpo 94 and Lpo 98
- Recognition of and respect for individuals
- 'Children work at their own rhythms' not in a prescribed way (UNESCO 2007)
- Play is fundamental
- Adults are role models and not just transmissive teachers
- Adequate resourcing and training to promote effectiveness.

The Principles underpinning and guiding the curriculum

Principles derived from Lpo 98 (Skolverket, 2006, p 5-7)

- Rights of the individual
- Co-operation and social development
- Needs of all children, inclusion and gender equity
- Each child is different, an individual and each child has potential
- Passing on cultural heritage is important
- Cultural diversity 'the preschool is a social and cultural meeting place'
- Security and challenge
- Play as an 'omnipresent activity'
- Communication/language development including mother tongue is important
- Observation and reflection by the child
- Recognition of prior knowledge
- Peer scaffolding
- Different forms of creative expression

- Environmental issues ‘An ecological approach and a positive belief in the future should typify the preschools activities’
- Balanced daily rhythm including rest /care/play and indoor/outdoor opportunities.

The opportunities for linking teaching and learning in the curriculum with monitoring, assessment and reporting, planning and reflection

No formal assessment is promoted in the preschool.

Linking teaching and learning is envisaged through local centre teamwork and not imposed by curriculum document.

Skolverket (2004, p23) notes that documentation is more common post implementation of Lpo98 eg portfolios, observations, but there are practical constraints to this such as large group sizes, lack of time and professional development requirements. The evaluation of the curriculum is variable, sometimes it is imposed by the local municipality or sometimes centre based, but rarely involves children offering reflections or perspectives as suggested in curriculum document (Skolverket 2004, p24).

The opportunities for continuity of provision for children from birth to age eight

Continuity of provision has been publicly politically endorsed (UNESCO 2007).

Continuity is also supported by a shared view of education arising from a common one year teacher training core (Skolverket, 2004, p7).

There is no curriculum for birth to 12 month olds. This reflects comparatively generous maternity and parental leave. Children of this age are at home with a parent/caregiver.

About one third of preschool classes are co-located with schools so that physical continuity is possible. However, the main linking relates to the shared values across Lpo 98 and Lpo 94. This was a key aim of the 1998 curriculum changes.

Identification of the expectations explicit and implicit in the curriculum document

Explicit expectations include:

- Reinforcement of democratic values and passing on of cultural heritage
- Development of the foundations of life long learning
- All round development of children
- Teamwork between stakeholders.

How well the curriculum document caters for the inclusion of families and children from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds and with different learning needs

The curriculum caters for inclusion comprehensively:

- Maintaining a child’s mother tongue is recognised as important
- “All children should be able to experience the satisfaction that comes from making progress, over coming difficulties and experiencing themselves as a valued member of the group” (Skolverket Lpo 98, 2006, p5)
- Also, in Lpo 94 (Skolverket Lpo 94, 2006, p11) there is a significant section under *Goal 2 Knowledge* that has guidelines and expectations for children with various disabilities.

United Kingdom

In 2007 the *Statutory Framework for Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)*, setting the standards for learning, development and care for children from birth to five, was introduced by Department of Education and Skills.

The conceptual basis for the development of the curriculum/early learning documents

The overarching aim of the document was to help children achieve the five *Every Child Matters* outcomes of staying safe, being healthy, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and achieving economic well being (Department of Education and Skills 2007).

The structures of the framework

The Statutory Framework comprises the legal requirements relating to learning and development and the welfare requirements and statutory guidance. It contains the *Practice Guidance for the Early Years Foundation Stage* booklet – including the areas of learning and development, non statutory guidance, additional advice and information. *EYFS* resources for providers and practitioners include a CD ROM poster and Principles into practice cards.

The *EYFS* learning and development requirements comprise the early learning goals, the educational programs and the assessment arrangements.

There are six areas of learning:

- Personal, social and emotional development
- Communication, language and literacy
- Problem solving, reasoning and numeracy
- Knowledge and understanding of the world
- Physical development
- Creative development.

Related support materials

The Practice Guidance for the *EYFS* sets out:

- Detailed formative assessment suggestions
- The *EYFS* profile as well as the arrangements to meet the assessment requirements
- The welfare requirements are in three sections
- The overarching general legal requirements including specific legal requirements and statutory guidance with details
- Employment laws, anti discrimination legislation, health and safety legislation, data collection regulations and duty of care
- National curriculum teacher assessments and key stage tests
- A *Primary Framework* for literacy and numeracy
- Parents' guide to the primary curriculum
- Developing maths skills for five to eleven year olds.

Implementation strategies and processes

The implementation was imposed by the statutory authority, the Department of Education and Skills and includes regulations about welfare and education as well as curriculum. It has legal status.

Links between early childhood frameworks and frameworks for older children

The national curriculum applies to children of compulsory school age. Children in years one and two fit into the Key Stage 1 of the curriculum where children are usually between 5-7 years old.

This is a separate document from the EYFS. The *national curriculum* has a subject focus rather than a focus on a framework for learning and development.

The suitability of the curriculum framework to a wide range of audiences

EYFS framework is designed to be fully inclusive of all children's needs recognising the need to respond to differences of ethnicity, culture, religious belief, home language, family background, disability, gender or ability. It is directed to all providers of care and education for children aged birth to 5 years.

Identification of the key components of an effective curriculum

The Principles underpinning and guiding the curriculum

- A unique child – recognises children as capable and competent
- Positive relationships – including the importance of secure relationships, respect, partnership with parents and supporting learning
- Enabling environments – for supporting and extending children's development and learning
- Learning and development – recognising that children learn in different ways and different rates.

The opportunities for linking teaching and learning in the curriculum with monitoring, assessment and reporting, planning and reflection

In the EYFS profile booklet, the assessment scales provide the early learning goals related to:

- Personal, social and emotional development in terms of dispositions and attitudes as well as indicators for social and emotional development
- Communication, language and literacy comprising language for communication and thinking and linking sounds and letters, reading and writing
- Problem solving, reasoning and numeracy- numbers for labels and for counting, calculating, shape, space and measures
- Knowledge and understanding of the world
- Physical development
- Creative development.

The opportunities for continuity of provision for children from birth to age eight

The EYFS brings together the learning and development and welfare requirements and ends the distinction between care and learning and between birth to three and three to five provision. All settings have essential standards of provision that support continuity.

Identification of the expectations explicit and implicit in the curriculum document

- Positive attitudes to diversity and difference
- Helping overcome barriers for children
- Responding quickly to signs of need
- Stretching and challenging all children
- All children should experience a challenging and enjoyable program of learning and development
- Partnership underpins the successful EYFS
- Practitioners must ensure continuity and coherence by sharing information with each other and parents.

How well the curriculum document caters for the inclusion of families and children from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds and with different learning needs

Providers have a responsibility to: ensure positive attitudes to diversity and difference, focus on children's individual learning, development and care needs, respond to early indicators of need, and provide rich and challenging experiences for all children.

United States of America

High/Scope

High/Scope is a commercially available curriculum from the USA that spans from infants to youth with a focus on hands-on learning. It is described as an open framework model that originated in the 1960s from early intervention programs. Note that only limited overview information is available online without charge.

The conceptual basis for the development of the curriculum/early learning documents

- Focussed on child development and academic domains
- Based on *Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)*
- Supports an active participatory learning approach
- Derived from Piagetian theory.

The structures of the framework

Programs for Infant/toddler/Preschool/Early literacy/Movement and music/Elementary education/Youth education are available and each program consists of teaching practices, curriculum content areas, assessment tools and a training model.

Infants and toddler: active learning, trusting relationships and continuity of care are key elements (1-2 years) while the environment and routines are noted as important in supporting these elements.

Preschool: adults and children as partners in learning is the key element (3-5 years) i.e. teachers scaffold learning in active partnership with child.

Five content areas noted:

- Approaches to learning
- Language literacy and communication
- Social and emotional development

- Physical development, health and well being
- Arts and sciences.

Observable developmental indicators measure a child's progress in all content areas.

Note in the above list there is a mix of development/academic domains/learning theory and again the environment and routines are noted as important in supporting all these areas.

Elementary: active learning approach using projects and interest areas in the classroom

Five subject areas noted:

- Language and literacy
- Mathematics
- Science
- Music
- Rhythmic movement.

Curriculum defines the scope, sequence, concepts and skills in these areas and again the environment and routines are noted as important in supporting these areas. Assessment occurs via anecdotal observations and portfolio documentation – this seems odd when compared to the indicator assessment tools that are used for younger age groups. A strength-based child behaviour management approach in a positive social environment is included here, but not for the younger age groups and this is also somewhat unusual.

Related support materials

Materials are available to purchase and would probably complement the other USA *NAEYC Curriculum Guidelines* reviewed based on *Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)*.

Implementation strategies and processes

Voluntary uptake of this curriculum is prompted by marketing and financial ability to purchase. If a centre purchases the curriculum, then a staff-training model is part of the package to assist in implementation of the curriculum.

Links between early childhood frameworks and frameworks for older children

Strong links are supported across all levels, based on the common approach of hands on learning from toddlers to youth.

The suitability of the curriculum framework to a wide range of audiences

The audience may be limited due to the child assessment and staff training required as a certain base level of professional knowledge and skill is required to engage with the curriculum. The purchase cost may preclude individual carers/centres from implementing this curriculum.

Identification of the key components of an effective curriculum

- A blend of child initiated and teacher guided instruction employing partnerships
- On-going evaluation of children using validated assessment tools (except at elementary level)
- Program assessment in all respects using the program tools available

The Principles underpinning and guiding the curriculum

- The environment and routines support implementation of the curriculum
- Literacy is highly valued
- Children plan-do-review in sequence to build initiative and self-reliance
- A developmental continuum occurs for all children
- A hands-on learning approach is required.

The opportunities for linking teaching and learning in the curriculum with monitoring, assessment and reporting, planning and reflection

Strong linkages between curriculum and assessment are evident in the range of assessment tools offered in the curriculum.

The opportunities for continuity of provision for children from birth to age eight

Continuity is evident in the hands-on approach promoted by the curriculum. This curriculum is stated to be compatible with state based standards and *Head Start* programs in the USA.

Identification of the expectations explicit and implicit in the curriculum document

- Assessment is a critical part of the curriculum, both for children and the overall program
- All children develop in a sequence along a continuum
- Teachers have the skills to be partners with children in learning (This is to be contrasted with the OECD 2006 Report, citing lack of training and qualified staff in the USA).

How well the curriculum document caters for the inclusion of families and children from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds and with different learning needs

Inclusion is not specifically addressed here other than the noting of a developmental continuum, but this curriculum emerged from early intervention programs and has been documented to improve school success.

NAEYC

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) is the peak USA professional early childhood body and it provides national curriculum guidelines for birth to 8 years.

According to the OECD Report (2006) there is an emphasis on individual responsibility for early childhood and limited government intervention in the USA. No Federal department for children exists. Early childhood is a state matter and therefore there is much diversity in what and how services are provided, regulated and accredited. There is no national system for training and relatively low levels of training and certification with many staff untrained and high staff turnover.

Broad curriculum typologies exist in areas, but generally curriculum is eclectic and independent. A need for quality improvement has been identified with standards being one way to achieve this e.g. *NAEYC guidelines*, accreditation. However, some states are now suggesting performance standards, rating systems, school or kindergarten readiness assessment tools as an approach to quality improvement (OECD 2006).

The conceptual basis for the development of the curriculum/early learning documents

- Based on child development and *Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)* (NAEYC 1998)
- All learning is explicitly linked to developmental or academic domains
- Learning is readily measurable – expectations/outcomes/measurement of ages and stages on a developmental continuum.

The structures of the framework

A list of nine guiding principles and values (NAEYC 2003, p5)

- Belief in civic and democratic values
- Commitment to ethical behaviour on behalf of children
- Use of important goals as guides to action
- Coordinated systems
- Support for children as individuals and as members of families, cultures and communities
- Respect for children's abilities and differences
- Partnerships with families
- Respect for evidence
- Shared accountability

The guidelines document identifies three critical elements of an effective system:

- Curriculum
- Assessment of young children
- Program evaluation and accountability.

Each critical element has effectiveness indicators listed and a list of frequently asked questions. Note the emphasis is more on assessment and evaluation than curriculum content and the child as a learner.

Related support materials

Bredekamp, S. and Copple, C. (1997), *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood programs*, Washington DC: NAEYC.

Various NAEYC website resources complement the guidelines www.naeyc.org

Many specific commercial curricula available on other websites e.g. *Creative Curriculum*, *High/Scope* and *Pyramid* are currently prominent, and if based on DAP may be compatible with NAEYC guidelines.

Implementation strategies and processes

The peak professional body NAEYC promotes these guidelines, but uptake is voluntary.

Effective implementation according to the guidelines document requires: Professional development/mentoring; qualified staff who understand the curriculum; and, on going assessment of children (NAEYC, 2003, p9).

Experience suggest teachers may endorse DAP, but struggle to implement it (Dunn and Kontos 1997; NAEYC 1998).

Links between early childhood frameworks and frameworks for older children

Linkages are evident in the appended curriculum chart that includes primary, but up to 8 years only. Linkages with curricula for older children would vary by state.

The suitability of the curriculum framework to a wide range of audiences

The guidelines are a 30-page document well laid out, but not as one would expect a curriculum document. The curriculum is only one aspect of the guidelines and best described by the appended chart on curriculum. The emphasis is clearly on assessment, evaluation and reference to academic domains that seems unsuitable for care focussed services.

Identification of the key components of an effective curriculum

Under the curriculum element (NAEYC, 2003, p7) the indicators of effectiveness are:

- Children are active and engaged
- Goals are clear and shared by all
- Curriculum is evidence based (developmentally, culturally, and linguistically relevant)
- Valued content is learned through investigation, play and focused, intentional teaching
- Curriculum builds on prior learning and experiences
- Curriculum is comprehensive i.e. all developmental and subject areas
- Professional standards validate the curriculum's subject matter content
- The curriculum is likely to benefit children.

Later in the appended Developmental Charts for Infant/toddler, Preschoolers and Kindergarten/Primary Curriculum the headings are different:

- Curriculum that is thoughtfully planned
- Curriculum that is challenging and engaging
- Curriculum that is developmentally appropriate and culturally and linguistically responsive
- Curriculum that is comprehensive
- Curriculum that promotes positive outcomes.

The three layers in the guidelines include; overarching guiding principles and values, indicators of curriculum effectiveness and headings in the appended developmental charts for curriculum. The section for frequently asked questions contains significant elaboration that may be missed in an initial reading of the guidelines.

The Principles underpinning and guiding the curriculum

- Importance of evidence and assessment
- Variety of on going assessment approaches
- Subject areas and developmental domains are critical
- Balance between child directed and adult directed required
- *DAP* based on observation of children and adaptation
- Cultural/linguistic relevance for children
- Children construct knowledge from interactions.

The opportunities for linking teaching and learning in the curriculum with monitoring, assessment and reporting, planning and reflection

Links between teaching and learning are strongly made through on going evaluation processes to the extent that these appear to drive the curriculum.

The opportunities for continuity of provision for children from birth to age eight

The guidelines do provide for continuity on a developmental basis, but voluntary uptake and varied implementation means that actual continuity for the child is unlikely. Also, the variety of commercially available curricula and state-based directives adds to the eclectic mix.

Identification of the expectations explicit and implicit in the curriculum document

Explicit expectations are evident with respect to children's development and knowledge of subject areas. An implicit expectation is that all children should make developmental progress along a continuum.

How well the curriculum document caters for the inclusion of families and children from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds and with different learning needs

There is some mention of inclusion only under the heading of being culturally and linguistically responsive in the appended curriculum chart.

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