# MONASH University

GROUP OF EIGHT

Education

# Final Report: Baseline Evaluation of the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR)

December 2011

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Education

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# 1 Executive Summary

## 1.1   Background

The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) is part of the Council of Australian Government's (COAG) reform agenda for early childhood education and care and is a key component of the Australian Government's National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care. The EYLF underpins universal access to early childhood education and has been incorporated in the National Quality Standard in order to ensure delivery of nationally consistent and quality early childhood education across sectors and jurisdictions.

The EYLF describes the principles, practice and outcomes essential to support and enhance young children's learning from birth to five years of age, as well as their transition to school.  It has a strong emphasis on play-based learning as play is the best vehicle for young children's learning providing the most appropriate stimulus for brain development. The EYLF also recognises the importance of communication and language (including early literacy and numeracy) and social and emotional development. It was developed collaboratively by the Australian and state and territory governments with substantial input from the early childhood sector and early childhood academics.

COAG endorsed the EYLF on 2 July 2009. The Australian Government has subsequently provided copies of the EYLF and *Families' Guide* to early childhood services across Australia. An *Educators' Guide to the Early Years Learning Framework*, to support implementation of the EYLF, was released on 6 December 2010. Hard copies of the *Educators' Guide*, along with a CD of resources, were delivered to early childhood services in February 2011. It is expected that, following a period of familiarisation, each early childhood service will develop their own strategy to implement the Framework, taking their own unique context into consideration.

## 1.2   Project Purpose and Objectives

To support both the EYLF and the wider National Quality Framework, the baseline evaluation project was commissioned by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) in January 2010.

The purpose of the project is to establish a baseline for assessing the effectiveness of the EYLF in raising quality in early childhood education. The EYLF is in its early stages of implementation, and this is the initial phase of the evaluation, which will involve a later evaluation, or series of evaluations, against this established baseline.

The project has two distinct elements:

- A qualitative study to establish a baseline of existing practice in early childhood education*, where the EYLF is yet to be or is in the very early stages of being adopted*.
- A quantitative study that gains a picture of the overall adoption of the EYLF across relevant early childhood education and care settings, from a representative sample of educators involved in the planning and delivery of early childhood education.

This report outlines the findings from the qualitative element. The study focuses on 20 selected sites across relevant early childhood settings (Preschool, Long Day Care and Family Day Care settings) in all states and territories (see **Appendix 2** for sampling matrix). The research observed the practice of educators responsible for children ranging in age from 0-5 years,

focusing broadly on the EYLF's three inter-related elements – *Principle*s, *Practice* and *Learning Outcomes* (see **Appendix 3**).

## 1.3    Method

The qualitative design for gathering base line data on the evaluation of the EYLF included the following:

- Sites were identified through sampling of services within each state and territory to ensure that there was minimal or no current engagement with and/or use of the EYLF by educators at each site.
- A Concerns-Based Adoption Model (C-BAM) was administered in order to create a short list of potential sites which met the criterion of minimal or no current active engagement with or use of the EYLF by any educator on site.
- *Field visits* to each site. One full day of data gathering occurred in each service.
- *Surveys* were sent to each site prior to the field visit. Survey results formed the basis of interviews with staff. Surveys administered were:
  a. *Self Assessment Tool* to determine knowledge of child development, curriculum and pedagogy (aligned to principles, practice and outcomes) (**Appendix 5**)
  b. *Service, Staff and Child characteristics survey* (**Appendix 6**)
  c. *Belonging, Being and Becoming response sheet* to determine understandings of these interrelated concepts (**Appendix 4**)
  d. *Educator beliefs* about the principles, practice and outcomes in the national EYLF (framed in relation to the above tools) (**Appendix 7**)
  e. *C-BAM* for each individual educator in the service to determine knowledge and willingness for change in relation to the national EYLF (in order to develop a site profile) (**Appendix 8**)
- *Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale* was administered through observations and interviews at each site.
- *Educator interviews* in relation to the principles practice and outcomes in the national EYLF (framed in relation to the above tools) took place at each site.

The Concerns-Based Adoption Model (C-BAM) offered an independent evidence-base to corroborate the qualitative data derived from site visits and interviews. These two sources of data were synthesised and analysed in order to determine the findings.

## 1.4    Findings

Five questions inform the synthesis of the main findings. An overview of these findings, clustered around these key questions, is given below.

*What kinds of child development theories are educators drawing upon to inform their work with children?*

- The dominant theory of child development seen in the field is maturational, with staff expectations of children largely limited to matching expected milestones. This view of child development gives a narrower reading of child expectations than what is presented in the EYLF, as milestones or ages and stages tend to downplay the role of the educator.

- Few conceptualised child development and learning theories beyond Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) and were generally unaware of other theories detailed in the EYLF.

- Levels of understanding of pedagogical principles varied according to abilities and experience of educators within the sector.

*What existing discourses does the profession use to name their principles, practice, and the outcomes that they work towards?*

- Child development discourse relies on both maturational/biological and sociological accounts. Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) was clearly in evidence. With respect to children's identity, there was a strong emphasis on promoting cultural diversity and inclusion, however case studies suggested that this positive engagement was not necessarily owing to a theoretical or programmatic structure as such.

- A variety of observed practices demonstrated sensitivity towards children's needs and interests, and employed strategies aimed at developing autonomous learning.

- However at many sites there was a disjunction between the meaning of "holistic" that reflects the disparity between approaches to pedagogy and curriculum within the sector.

*What are the existing documents, resources or professional learning activities that educators draw upon to inform their work (including evidence of reflective practice and involvement of families in planning)?*

- There is evidence of a wide range of resources and planning tools that professional staff systematically deliver in the course of their daily routine.

- Some professionals in the sector have clearly taken up the invitation for reflective practice represented within the EYLF as a valued opportunity within their professional practice to improve and be more accountable to the community.

- In addition, the existence of effective relationships between staff and families in early childhood services in different contexts was in evidence, although there were a range of meanings attached to the relationship with parents and the degree to which families enjoyed freedom to contribute to decision making was inconsistent.

- Overall, it was found that reflective practice was embedded within the practices of the sites visited but difficult to implement regularly due to overwhelming time constraints and resources needed to bring all the staff together. Professional reflection was mostly related to a specific activity, rather than a systemic and holistic practice.

*What level of knowledge do educators have of the EYLF?*

- varied degrees of understanding and a range of theoretical interpretations (mainly generated at an intuitive level) were evident, influencing both educator beliefs about their interactions, as well as the speed and quality of framework implementation

- at the settings in question staff were lacking in necessary professional development with respect to the EYLF, although many were attempting to improve their understanding and a good number were reasonably well-versed in administration and implementation of the framework

*How do educators conceptualise and enact quality early childhood education and development in practice?*

- The study paints a very positive image of the attitudes that child care/education professionals in the sector bring to their interactions with children. Overwhelmingly, the

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staff in each setting were dedicated and highly committed to their service delivery with special attention being paid to the quality of educator-child relationships.

- Consistent with the emphasis on DAP, "quality" was usually conceptualised as preparing the child for a school context by ensuring that autonomy, resilience and independence are cultivated among children, and that a safe and healthy environment is provided to augment this form of development in each individual.

- Currently, the opportunity for effective transitions between child care and home environments and between child care and school environments each pose separate challenges and structures for the sector.

In summary, the generalised picture of practice and educator knowledge that was evident in most of the settings could be described as free play programs, with a focus on providing a rich set of materials and equipment, with child expectations that meet ages and stages as set down in maturational theory, with the role of the adult to plan and assess against the developmental domains, and for family involvement to focus on clear and rich communications of what is happening in the centre. Mostly, educators drew upon DAP, assuming this as *the* theoretical approach to guide early childhood education, demonstrating a lack of knowledge of other theories that could inform their work. Play based pedagogies were evident in all sites, but how play was defined varied, with no consensus across the data set reached. Planning and assessment was found to be ritualised around individual domains of development, and matched against expected milestones.

This baseline study provides evidence however, that the implementation of the new curriculum is progressing steadily, and will offer a dynamic stimulus to the early childhood sector in coming years. There are several key indices of progress, and the policy implications for projected outcomes and planning are summarised in Table 1 (below). Emphasis must be placed on the fact that the study focused predominantly on non-users of the EYLF in the initial phase. Accordingly, these findings cannot be taken as reflective of current mainstream professional service delivery in the early childhood sector. Separately, the research team is undertaking a quantitative study which will provide a broader baseline on the current rate of EYLF adoption across the ECEC sector. A fuller evaluation of the EYLF is planned for 2014 to coincide with an evaluation of the National Quality Framework.

Table 1 (below) condenses the analysis of the data. The detailed report of findings contained in the Appendices additionally provides detailed case studies, summarises the methodologies in each case and the context in which data was gathered in each instance. Findings are presented for each site evaluated.

**Table 1: Summary of findings**

| Focus Area | Reported evidence | Implication |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Pedagogy | There was strong evidence of play-based pedagogies being practised | The EYLF accommodates a range of new and existing practices |
| 2. Planning | Most practitioners matched child development to expected milestones | The EYLF represents alternative planning models |
| 3. Inclusion | There was strong evidence that professionals had awareness of diversity and some evidence of systemic planning for inclusivity | Potential for improvement in this area is closely related to the delivery of outcomes in Focus Areas 4, 6 and 7 |

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|---|---|---|
| 4. Families | Family involvement in services were usually directed by the professional | Opportunities to improve involvement of families would entail differential forms of access and inclusion in decision-making; as well as broader access for parents to knowledge of the sector more generally |
| 5. Transitions | Preparedness for school provided the focus for transition planning | This area can be addressed effectively at a local level with continued leadership and supervision for staff seeking to build qualifications and theoretical knowledge |
| 6. Support Documents | Provisions for programming of curriculum overwhelmingly used state-based resources | Further provision of collaboration between Commonwealth and state authorities will improve availability of relevant EYLF resources |
| 7. Skill-base | Theoretical knowledge among many professionals was still growing | Professional Development provisions may also be addressed through Commonwealth-state collaborations |

**Recommendations:**

Bearing in mind the key findings above, actions to address these issues may entail:

1. Embedding efforts to develop the field professionally in respect to theoretical approaches in the delivery of early childhood education and care and the practical applications of these, in order to improve quality under the EYLF, possibly with the assistance of Professional Support Co-ordinators.

2. Developing pedagogical leadership within and among services to increase quality early childhood practice in line with the principles and practices promoted in the EYLF.

3. Adopting a more systemic approach to reflective practice to embed it in everyday operations.

4. Ensuring preparation of the child for school is managed within the context of the EYLF's themes of Belonging, Being and Becoming, as discussed throughout the paper.

5. Investigating and implementing a national best practice approach to facilitating an effective early childhood transition between different service settings as well as to school.

## 1.5   Evaluation Team

Monash University was selected as the successful tender for this project. Members of that team included:

Professor Marilyn Fleer (Project Director)

Jasmine Evans (Project Manager)

Dr Joseph Agbenyega (Evaluator for Queensland and the Northern Territory)

Dr Jane Bone (Evaluator for South Australia)

Professor Fleer (Evaluator for Tasmania)

Marie Hammer (Evaluator for New South Wales)

Dr Chris Peers (Research Compilation)

Dr Kerith Power (Evaluator for South Australia and Victoria)

Dr Avis Ridgway (Evaluator for Western Australia)

Dr Corine Rivalland (Evaluator for the ACT)

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# 2 Introduction

Early childhood education has received a great deal of international attention due to better understanding worldwide about the impact a quality early education can have on the life chances of children. Research evidence has shown policy imperatives framing quality provision needs to pay attention to:

- An orientation of quality (i.e. policy and regulations concentrate on quality factors)
- Structural quality (e.g. ratio, qualifications of staff)
- Educational focus (i.e. having a curriculum)
- Interaction between staff and children
- Operational quality (i.e. management that is locally responsive)
- Child-outcome quality or performance standards
- Standards pertaining to parent/community outreach and involvement (OECD, 2006).

In line with these international findings, Australia has developed a National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care (2009). The agreed indicators of quality identified include:

- the qualifications and training of staff
- the quality of interactions and relationships between children and ECEC professionals
- group size and child-to-staff ratios
- the physical environment
- the programs or curricula that support children's learning and development
- connections with family and community
- leadership and management
- health and safety requirements (p.26).

It is now well understood that the curricula that early childhood educators draw upon to support program development has a huge impact on the quality of provision experienced by young children (Zill et al 2001; Siraj-Blatchford et al 2003; Elliot 2006; National Quality Framework For Early Childhood Education And Care, 2009). In addition, the findings of the study of the trial sites (Charles Sturt University EYLF Consortium, 2009) found that a national framework provides additional benefits to the profession through the establishment of a common language for supporting educators across states and territories, for providing consistency across the variety of settings that make up the early childhood education, for supporting increased professionalism and professional status, and importantly the framework can also act as a tool for educator self-reflection and readiness for more widespread adoption of contemporary approaches to early childhood learning and teaching.

Whilst it is understood that these interdependent factors contribute to the overall quality provision for young children and their families, there has been an urgent need to progress some areas more quickly due to the absence of a nationally agreed approach for curriculum planning. Up until 2009, Australia has not had a common early childhood curriculum to support children's learning and development. It is recognised internationally that the curricula that early childhood educators draw upon to support their work has a huge impact on the quality of provision experienced by young children (National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care, 2009). Consequently, the Commonwealth Government sought to undertake an international curriculum analysis (Wilks, Nyland, Chancellor, & Elliott, 2008), the preparation of a research report to inform curriculum development (Fleer et al, 2008), the trial of a draft Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) across 28 early childhood settings (Charles Sturt University EYLF Consortium, 2009), and the publication of the final EYLF in 2009.

The EYLF is currently being implemented across all states and territories. Under the Joint Commonwealth-State Implementation Plan for the EYLF, the Commonwealth is responsible for

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the establishment of an evaluation process for the EYLF.  Importantly, the EYLF has strong links to the Commonwealth's universal access commitment, and under the National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education (NP ECE), funding was endorsed by Australian Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs Senior Officials Committee (AEEYSOC) and the Early Childhood Development Working Group (ECDWG) to conduct a qualitative study to assess the effectiveness of the EYLF in raising quality in early childhood education.

An evaluation was viewed as critical for establishing a baseline of existing practice in early childhood education, so that a distinct 'before and after' picture could be established to measure improvement due to the introduction of the EYLF. The qualitative research comprises an initial evaluation of settings, with subsequent future evaluations to take place against an established baseline. A fuller evaluation of the EYLF is planned for 2014 to coincide with an evaluation of the National Quality Framework.

# 3 Overview of Qualitative Evaluation Method

## 3.1 Study overview and aims

The study was a qualitative assessment based on observations and supporting interviews conducted across a limited number of individual ECEC provider sites and had the following aim:

- To appraise the approach, content and practice of early childhood teaching and learning in relation to quality as defined in the EYLF at each selected site.

This phase of the evaluation was designed to form a baseline with regard to quality of practice, and to influence the design of further phases that will seek to establish whether any changes are due to the implementation of the EYLF. The study was an appraisal based around the three inter-related elements – *Principle*s, *Practice* and *Learning Outcomes* – outlined in the EYLF (see http://www.deewr.gov.au/Earlychildhood/Policy_Agenda/Quality/Pages/EarlyYearsLearningFram ework.aspx).

## 3.2 Selection of Sites

Selection of sites across relevant early childhood (Preschool, Long Day Care, Integrated and Family Day Care) settings in all or most states and territories, including major cities and regional/remote areas used a matrix approach (see **Appendix 2**). Sites were selected where it was known that there had been minimal or no current active engagement with, or use of, the EYLF by any educators at the site[1]. As the study was seen to be qualitative in nature, the agreed number of sites to participate was 20; data collection occurred over June to September 2011.

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[1] With the later aim of observing how changes in practice and approach may link to the implementation of the EYLF.

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DEEWR was involved and assisted with the selection of sites, in consultation with relevant state/territory departments and other stakeholders. Initially, up to 97 sites Australia-wide were randomly selected from which a final twenty sites participated in the entire study based on their Concerns-Based Adoption Model (C-BAM) results. The initial 97 sites were administered an initial C-BAM to determine educators' level of engagement with the EYLF (see below for details of instrument).

An explanatory letter from the research team together with a C-BAM questionnaire and stamped return envelope, was mailed to each of the selected settings on the researchers' behalf by DEEWR. The completion of the questionnaire was voluntary, however the designated state and territory contacts were asked to contact settings and encourage them to complete the questionnaire.

Completed questionnaires were scored to determine which settings would be visited. Twenty settings in total were to be visited, as determined by a matrix approved by the Department.

The communication strategy was strengthened with the support of states to ensure optimal number of questionnaires were completed and returned (see appendix 2 for more information). Sites selected for visits were approved on a rolling basis by the Department. Most of the sites approached for a visit were open to this; however there were a couple of site directors/coordinators who stated that they weren't available to be visited for various reasons. In these instances, an alternative site from the group of returned questionnaires was selected and approved. In two instances, a site from the selection was unable to be visited as the site, in a remote location, had indicated that they would check with their Director, however, no word was consequently received. These centres did not contact the research team further, nor return any messages left. The other site that the team had hoped to visit did not respond to any phone calls. The time spent trying to arrange visits with these settings, plus the logistics involved for travel to these locations, one of them very remote, meant that the opportunity to visit an alternative setting was lost.

The final sample details are shown in Table 1 below, which also gives the average C-BAM scores for each of the final selected services.

## 3.3 Table 1: Overview of Sample

**Key for C-BAM scores:** Stage 0: Awareness; Stage 1: Information; Stage 2: Personal; Stage 3: Management; Stage 4: Consequence; Stage 5: Collaboration; Stage 6: Refocusing*

| State | Early Childhood Setting | Number of staff | Number of children | C-BAM scores (average) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ACT | Long Day Care | 18 | Registered for 90 children | Stage 0: 94 | Stage 4:8 |
| | | | | Stage 1: 48 | Stage 5:14 |
| | | | | Stage 2: 21 | Stage 6: 65 |
| | | | | Stage 3: 39 | |
| | Integrated Setting | 17 (including 1 cook and 1 administrative assistant) | Registered for 90 children from enrolment of 109 | Stage 0: 22 | Stage 4:3 |
| | | | | Stage 1: 37 | Stage 5:22 |
| | | | | Stage 2: 39 | Stage 6: 5 |
| | | | | Stage 3: 27 | |
| NT | Long Day Care | 6 | 43 | Stage 0:40 | Stage 4: 7 |
| | | | | Stage 1: 57 | Stage 5: 44 |
| | | | | Stage 2: 63 | Stage 6: 42 |
| | | | | Stage 3: 56 | |
| | Long Day Care | 20 educators and 3 disability inclusive support workers | Licensed for 85 \n\n Current enrolment is 79 | This centre was not in the shortlist of sites, but was instead visited as an addition due to the inability to be able to visit an Integrated Setting in the Territory. A C-BAM was not completed for this site. | |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **NSW** | Preschool | 9 | Registered for up to 50 children | Stage 0: 1 | Stage 4: 5 |
| | | | | Stage 1: 16 | Stage 5: 22 |
| | | | | Stage 2: 14 | Stage 6: 22 |
| | | | | Stage 3: 7 | |
| | Preschool | 4 educators | Current enrolment of 23 families | Stage 0: 58 | Stage 4: 21 |
| | | | | Stage 1: 43 | Stage 5: 76 |
| | | | | Stage 2: 48 | Stage 6: 52 |
| | | | | Stage 3: 92 | |
| | Long Day Care | 11 educators | Registered for 30 families | Stage 0: 61 | Stage 4: 11 |
| | | | | Stage 1: 51 | Stage 5: 72 |
| | | | | Stage 2: 70 | Stage 6: 26 |
| | | | | Stage 3: 47 | |
| **QLD** | Preschool and Kindergarten | 3 | 48 | Stage 0: 62 | Stage 4: 8 |
| | | | | Stage 1: 48 | Stage 5: 11 |
| | | | | Stage 2: 46 | Stage 6: 18 |
| | | | | Stage 3: 12 | |
| | Preschool and Kindergarten attached to independent school | 4 | 80 | Stage 0: 59 | Stage 4: 10 |
| | | | | Stage 1: 39 | Stage 5: 34 |
| | | | | Stage 2: 52 | Stage 6: 26 |
| | | | | Stage 3: 27 | |

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| South Australia | Integrated Setting | 25 | Registered for 104 children daily from enrolment of 170 | Stage 0: 31 | Stage 4: 3 |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | | | | Stage 1: 16 | Stage 5: 55 |
| | | | | Stage 2: 5 | Stage 6: 3 |
| | | | | Stage 3: 2 | |
| | Preschool | 15 | Registered for 60 from enrolment of 74 | Stage 0: 59 | Stage 4: 15 |
| | | | | Stage 1: 54 | Stage 5: 53 |
| | | | | Stage 2: 63 | Stage 6: 35 |
| | | | | Stage 3: 43 | |
| Tasmania | Family Day Care | 1 | 5 | Stage 0: 50 | Stage 4:0 |
| | | | | Stage 1: 90 | Stage 5:0 |
| | | | | Stage 2: 20 | Stage 6: 0 |
| | | | | Stage 3: 10 | |
| | Long Day Care (extended hours) | 11 | 45 | Stage 0: 51 | Stage 4: 12 |
| | | | | Stage 1: 78 | Stage 5: 62 |
| | | | | Stage 2: 77 | Stage 6: 55 |
| | | | | Stage 3: 46 | |
| Victoria | Long Day Care | 19 | 60 | Stage 0: 71 | Stage 4: 20 |
| | | | | Stage 1: 74 | Stage 5: 73 |
| | | | | Stage 2: 76 | Stage 6: 53 |
| | | | | Stage 3: 50 | |

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|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Family Day Care | 1 | Up to 9 children part time | Stage 0: 22 | Stage 4: 27 |
| | | | | Stage 1: 63 | Stage 5: 76 |
| | | | | Stage 2: 67 | Stage 6: 42 |
| | | | | Stage 3: 60 | |
| | Family Day Care | 1 | Licensed for 5 children | Stage 0: 31 | Stage 4: 30 |
| | | | | Stage 1: 51 | Stage 5: 84 |
| | | | | Stage 2: 99 | Stage 6: 34 |
| | | | | Stage 3: 30 | |
| WA | Long Day Care | 21 (including cook and administrative assistant) | Licensed for 56 daily from enrolment of 90 | Stage 0: 14 | Stage 4: 2 |
| | | | | Stage 1: 23 | Stage 5: 55 |
| | | | | Stage 2: 45 | Stage 6: 22 |
| | | | | Stage 3: 15 | |
| | Preschool "Kindy" attached to Pre Primary and Primary School | 2 | 40 | Stage 0: 31 | Stage 4: 8 |
| | | | | Stage 1: 66 | Stage 5: 36 |
| | | | | Stage 2: 70 | Stage 6: 26 |
| | | | | Stage 3: 30 | |
| | Family Day Care Central Coordination Unit for Family Day Care services in large area including rural care | 5 Coordination Unit staff<br><br>35 Family Educators | Licensed for up to 7 children per educator. The FDC home visited had one staff member for 3 children. | Stage 0: 53 | Stage 4: 7 |
| | | | | Stage 1: 49 | Stage 5: 20 |
| | | | | Stage 2: 59 | Stage 6: 26 |
| | | | | Stage 3: 47 | |

* See Section 3.5 for a full explanation of assessment of services using the C-BAM tool

## 3.4    Population of Interest

The study aimed to collect information about educators responsible for children ranging in age from 0-5 years who came from all the states and territories. Educators were defined as early childhood practitioners who worked directly with children in early childhood settings.

## 3.5    Tools Used for Gathering Data in the Field

A series of 6 tools were used to gather data. They are described in this section.

**1. Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale**

Observations of centres were standardized around the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS). ECERS is an instrument for ascertaining the overall quality of the program in a centre without focusing on individual educators or children. Observers rate the preschool setting on seven subscales - space and furnishings, personal care routines, language-reasoning, activities, interaction, program structure, and parents and staff.

In this evaluation it was important to specifically gather evidence on space and furnishings, interactions (e.g. discipline, staff-child interactions, interaction among children), program structure (e.g. schedule, free play, group time), and relations between parents and staff (e.g. provisions for parents).

Observers used a modified version of the ECERS; the design of this tool was based on reducing those criteria included in the assessment, so as to measure the quality of the interactions between staff and children. This allowed the research to focus on (1) interactions in group settings (2) interactions during transitions (e.g., arriving in the morning) (3) interactions at times associated with behaviour management. These three areas was deemed more important as keys to measuring quality, as measures of leadership, health and well being, and overall structural quality (staff-child ratios) are better evaluated through other instruments. A seven point Likert scale was applied to the three quality criteria, used in combination with observational comments. This modified ECERS was used as a tool to interview educators and the centre directors in relation to each of these indicators in order to establish the social context of quality, and also to discuss the EYLF principles, practice and outcomes. Aspects of the principles, practice and outcomes were generally embedded in the indicators of quality within the ECERS, but interviews were critical to make links directly with these categories.

**2.  Self Assessment Tool (SAT)**

The national EYLF identifies a range of theoretical approaches to supporting practices within early childhood education.  Consequently, it was important to document what understandings educators had about child development theories in relation to their practices.

In order to develop base-line information of staff knowledge of child development, pedagogy, and curriculum, educators were asked to complete a self assessment tool (SAT) (see Appendix 5). Each member of staff was asked to complete the SAT prior to the researcher visiting their centre. However, for some contexts, moderation of the tool was undertaken in order to take account of the background of the educator (i.e. studying Certificate III). The SAT tool was developed based on research found in the Self-Assessment Manual (SAM) which is a theoretically based framework, designed to address issues of service quality (Raban, Waniganayake, Nolan, Deans, Brown, and Ure, 2007).

SAT is based on self-assessment of educators to explore and identify the theoretical underpinnings supporting their practices. This tool also empowers educators to actively participate in their own professional development thus increasing the opportunities for meaningful change in practice. This means the tool is also useful for ongoing assessment of quality within a particular service (see (Fullen, 1993; Joyce & Showers, 1983; Nolan, Raban & Waniganayake, 2005; Winton, 1990; Gusky, 1996).

The SAT specifically investigated educator understandings about child development theories informing their philosophy of teaching and learning. The evaluator also asked the Director/Coordinator responsible for the service visited, about their theoretical beliefs and practices in relation to early childhood education.

### 3. Belonging, Being and Becoming response sheet

The EYLF espouses a philosophy based on three guiding principles – Belonging, Being, and Becoming - that flow from theories about the development of consciousness in human beings.

*Applying Belonging, Being, and Becoming to professional practice:* The significance of *belonging, being* and *becoming* as logical principles is not limited to children's learning experiences. These principles are ways of describing the building blocks of rational consciousness as it proceeds throughout life, and apply just as consistently to the professional development of educators as in any other knowledge discipline. The Monash team developed an instrument that sought to identify educators' understandings about Belonging Being and Becoming. As foundational concepts within the national EYLF, it was important to note how educators were currently thinking (or not) about these terms and so that over time it is possible to evaluate how their understandings change and deepen.

Please see **Appendix 7** survey and interview response used.

### 4.  Service, staff and child characteristics relating to each site - Document Analysis and staff interviews

In the field the evaluators gathered information on service and staff characteristics. A proforma of characteristics was developed which was sent out as a survey for the leader of each service to complete or it was used as a basis for the commencement of interviews (e.g. as an orientation to setting). Generally, this proforma was gathered by the evaluator when they undertook their field visit. However, the evaluator also went through the survey with the service leader in order to ensure information gathered was accurate and questions had been understood (not ambiguous). Administrative documents were also examined (e.g. Educator programs, observations, evaluations, etc) and verified in relation to responses on the child, service and staff characteristics. See **Appendix 6** for a copy of service characteristics proforma.

### 5. Interviews with educators on principles, practice and outcomes

In addition to the ECERS, the Service Characteristics survey, Belonging, Being and Becoming proforma, and the SAT, the educators were interviewed in relation to Principles, Practice and Outcomes. See **Appendix 7** for the kinds of questions asked during the interview. In addition to the interviews, the educators were also asked to complete a self-assessment of their understandings and beliefs about the Principles, Practice and Outcomes. Educators completed the survey by responding on a five point Likert scale of strongly agree; agree; unsure; disagree, strongly disagree.

## 3.6    Concerns Based Adoption Model

C-BAM is an effective educator survey that has been used in early childhood education in the past (cf. Fleer 1989) to determine how educators are thinking about innovations, particularly in relation to curriculum. Through a survey of early childhood educators, it is possible to note what level of awareness there is about the national EYLF, but it is also useful tool for future assessments of educator knowledge and expertise as they are introduced (or not) to the national EYLF (i.e. the level of change can be measured). This is a most effective tool for determining what kinds of concerns early childhood educators have about EYLF, before, during and after being introduced to the national EYLF. Previous piloting of C-BAM was undertaken in Victoria on 250 educators across the areas of policy, program support (i.e. advisors), educators in the field (FDC, Playgroups, Kindergartens, Early Years of School) and those in positions of leadership responsibility (e.g. School Principal, Centre Director). C-BAM was administered prior to a professional development program designed specifically to support educators to learn about the EYLF, Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF) and contemporary theories of child development. It was re-administered after five days of professional development and a span of approximately three weeks of project work with the VEYLDF. The tool was found to be effective for gaining insights into educator concerns about the VEYLDF and for determining self-perceived qualitative changes as a result of their use of the VEYLDF.

**What does C-BAM measure?**

Typically, the levels of engagement with the EYLF are likely to move from a simple awareness of the document right through to feeling confident about its use, even making suggestions for better approaches or developments of the EYLF to specific cohorts of children and theories. The levels of engagement are shown in Table 2.

## 3.7    Table 2: C-BAM

| Level | Concern for EYLF | Expressions of concern regarding EYLF and different theories of child development |
|---|---|---|
| Level 0 | Awareness | I am not concerned about it. I don't know anything about EYLF or that there are different theories of child development/practices/principles. I have not used it. |
| Level 1 | Informational | I would like to know more about the EYLF and the theories of child development/practices/principles. |
| Level 2 | Personal | How will using EYLF affect me? What theory of child development am I using? How does this relate to practices/principles in the EYLF? |
| Level 3 | Management | I seem to be spending all my time getting materials ready. |
| Level 4 | Consequence | How is my use of EYLF affecting learners? How can I refine my program in relation to EYLF to have more impact? |
| Level 5 | Collaboration | How can I relate what I am doing to what others are doing? Does the EYLF give us a common language? What views do others have of child development/practices/principles? |
| Level 6 | Refocusing | I have some ideas about something that would work even better for meeting the outcomes of the VEYLDF. Thinking about EYLF in relation to the different theories of child development/practices/principles. |

C-BAM also gives an indication of educator behaviours, as shown in following table. C-BAM has been validated on over 30,000 educators. The instrument provides directions for professional learning, but also for determining how educator practices may or may not be changing due to the EYLF. The behavioural indicators are shown below in Table 3.

## 3.8    Table 3: C-BAM Indices

| Behavioural Indicators of Level | |
|---|---|
| VI. Renewal | The user is seeking more effective alternatives to the established use of the innovation. |
| V. Integration | The user is making deliberate efforts to coordinate with others in using the innovation. |
| IVB. Refinement | The user is making changes to increase outcomes. |
| IVA. Routine | The user is making few or no changes and has an established pattern of use. |
| III. Mechanical | The user is making changes to better organize use of the innovation. |
| II. Preparation | The user has definite plans to begin using the innovation. |
| 0I. Orientation | The user is taking the initiative to learn more about the innovation. |
| 0. Non-Use | The user has no interest, is taking no action. |

From *Taking Charge of Change* by Shirley M. Hord, William L. Rutherford, Leslie Huling-Austin, and Gene E. Hall, 1987. Published by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (703) 549-9110.

The *C-BAM* survey was given out to each individual educator in the service in order to determine knowledge and willingness for change in relation to the national EYLF (in order to develop a site profile) (see **Appendix 8**).

The second and third tables provide broad values for interpreting the scores reached in administration of the Concerns-based Adoption Model. In general, Table 3.6 gives an overview of the possible ways that respondents can self assess their concern about the introduction and implementation of the EYLF. That is, a score [0] would indicate there is a limited awareness about the EYLF, whilst a score [6] would suggest they have been a user of the EYLF and are now refocusing and considering adding value to, or using something different to guide their program planning. Low scores of [1] or [2] indicate that they are non-users, wanting information about the EYLF [1] or personally have questions or some anxiety about its introduction [2]. Most inexperienced users of the EYLF would score [3] and some non-users might also score [4] if they were in a management role and were concerned about the introduction of the EYLF for their staff. This would signal they were also non-users. Overall, it would be expected that non-users would score highly in the [0] to [3] with some possibly peaking also at [5] if they held a management or leadership role in the service. Users would score high at [4] to [6]. C-BAM is designed to give a profile of scores, rather than an averaged score across the stages.

Overall, the scores confirm certain factors that might have been expected, e.g., that the majority of services included in the study were not already using the EYLF [0]. In other areas, the scores corroborate this factor by disclosing concern about the way in which the EYLF would change

their professional practice [2]. The scores suggest considerable interest in how professionals can take up the EYLF [1] and some scores also reflect the difficulty such professionals would have in determining how the EYLF can be used [4]. The responses to [3] are indicative of the kinds of organisational approaches that prevail amongst professionals whose background reflects older, more labour-intensive and idiosyncratic methods, which would be progressively made redundant through wider implementation of the EYLF. In the majority of cases responses to [5] may be taken as expressing a willingness to adopt more collaborative work practices in alignment with the professionalism intended within the EYLF framework. However the scores for [6] signal that they are considering other curriculum documents, rather than using the EYLF. If they have scored highly in [0] to [3] and peak highly at [6], it is possible that they have never used the EYLF.

# 4 Findings

In this part of the report the findings of those states and territories evaluated are given. The report contains state and territory specific context data and also a synthesis of the findings in terms of:

- What kinds of child development theories are educators drawing upon to inform their work with children?

- What existing discourses does the profession use to name their principles, practice, and the outcomes that they work towards?

- What are the existing documents, resources or professional learning activities that educators draw upon to inform their work?

- What level of knowledge do educators have of the EYLF?

- How do educators conceptualise and enact quality early childhood education and development in practice?

In order to answer these questions, the evaluation drew together the data gathered by synthesizing the site visit field notes, the surveys, documentation analysis and interviews as shown in Table 4 below:

## 4.1    Table 4: Synthesis

| Synthesis questions | DEEWR Interview questions | Data source |
|---|---|---|
| **What kinds of child development theories are educators drawing upon to inform their work with children?** | *How are high expectations of children's learning promoted?*<br><br>*What pedagogical principles influence practice at each site, and how do educators draw on such principles in their practice?*<br><br>*Do educators ensure that children's learning is transferable to other contexts?* | SAT<br><br>Interviews |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **What existing discourses does the profession use to name their principles, practice, and the outcomes that they work towards?** | *How effectively do educators at each site take a holistic approach to children's well-being, including physical, personal, social, emotional, spiritual and cognitive aspects?*<br><br>*How do educators promote children's learning in order to develop a sense of identity and well-being, and to connect with and contribute to their world?*<br><br>*How are children guided to develop responsibility for their own learning, and to become confident life-long learners?* | Interviews<br><br>Document gathered<br><br>Concept map |
| **What are the existing practices, documents, resources or professional learning activities that educators draw upon to inform their work?** | *What planning do educators do at each site to understand and contribute to children's individual, social and learning outcomes?*<br><br>*Is professional enquiry through reflective practice embedded in the operation of the site?*<br><br>*What, if any, cycle of reflection and review is used by educators at each site (i.e. how well is information about children's learning used to promote their ongoing learning)?*<br><br>*How well and in what ways are children, their families and communities encouraged to be involved in the planning for and decision making about children's learning and other experiences at each site?* | Interviews |
| **What level of knowledge do educators have of the EYLF?** | *What is the nature of educator-child relationships and interactions at each site?*<br><br>*Is learning at each site play-based, intentional and supported by a rich learning environment?*<br><br>*How are the range of elements of communication, problem-solving and decision-making fostered in children's learning?* | Interviews<br><br>Survey: Educator beliefs about principles, practice, and outcomes<br><br>C-BAM<br><br>BBB |
| **How do educators conceptualise quality early childhood education and development?** | *How does each site address and promote principles of social diversity, inclusion and equity?* | Interviews<br><br>Concept map |

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| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | *Do educators demonstrate culturally competent practice? In what ways?* | EECRS |
| | *How do educators seek to prepare children to make successful transitions between the site and other settings?* | |
| | *How attentive and responsive are educators at each site to children's individual strengths, abilities and interests?* | |

This study aimed to appraise the approach, content and practice of early childhood teaching and learning in relation to quality as defined in the EYLF at each selected site of the research sample. The sample specifically targeted centres with no, or limited knowledge of the EYLF, so that a baseline could be determined of 'where the profession might be at in terms of quality practices'. Consequently, the following synthesis of the findings must be viewed in relation to the criterion of limited use and awareness of the EYLF. This does not mean that quality practices could not be observed. But rather, the dominant principles, practice and statement of outcomes observed could be independent of, and not necessarily shaped by, the introduction and use of the EYLF. The synthesis below seeks to make visible quality as determined by the EYLF within the sample set. It also seeks to make transparent where possible, the extent of update of the EYLF in order to contextualise the reported findings. Hence, some contextual statements about the uptake or understandings of the EYLF are also made. The case studies in the next section provide the details.

## 4.1.1 What kinds of child development theories are educators drawing upon to inform their work with children?

It would seem appropriate to point out the depth and complexity of theoretical understandings displayed amongst the professionals whose voices are heard within the evidence collected by this research project. Early childhood professionals across the sector demonstrate an impressive array of theoretical competencies that are variously integrated in their routine practices. In particular, the research team encountered clear choices being made by individual staff in different centres, about types of programmes and curriculum on the basis of theoretical preferences relating to cultural diversity, enhanced approaches to literacy, play pedagogy and notions of child development. The EYLF challenges and emancipates many in the child care sector who have meagre experience of academic and/or theoretically driven policy debate. It challenges those who are accustomed to a less demanding account of child development based on traditional chronological and psychogenetic milestones, and it emancipates those who welcome the opportunity to professionalise and valorise their daily working experience.

Nevertheless, it is of particular concern as one of the researchers in this project notes, that some in the sector remain unconvinced by or confused with the meaning and *intention of the new Commonwealth framework*; in one instance he records a staff member saying " I have never heard about these theories, it is not what we have learnt during our professional development…it is not easy for us to identify which theory connects to which outcome and how we can theorise how we plan, teach and evaluate the children…but using children's maturational levels makes planning and programming straight forward". Another educator noted, "as for the EYLF, we are trying to embrace it, I have not used it in my previous centre and now I am trying to gain a full insight into it…the document is confusing… the way it is explained did not specify criteria for us to determine specific outcomes."

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*Overall, it was found that the staff in the sample predominantly drew upon maturational theories of child development to guide their practice. The concept of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) dominated educator beliefs, and in a minority of cases, no theory of child development was able to be articulated.*

### How are high expectations of children's learning promoted?

The findings of this study were that "high expectations" was usually understood to mean children's readiness for school and that the images and signals of what early childhood professionals should recognise in promoting children's learning were taken from a *developmentally appropriate practice* (DAP) perspective. In the Northern Territory, high expectations were also demonstrated "through setting challenging tasks for children and through ongoing learning of children in different modes and allowing choice for children to develop their skills". In this setting, the tasks were often predicated on developmentally appropriate practice. Generally, researchers found consistent evidence that DAP continues to provide the theoretical basis for most of the professional practice in the early childhood sector in Australia.

A complex combination of theoretical understandings and applications of DAP either in coordination with or in contradiction to the EYLF were noted by the researchers in site visits. For example, in more than one jurisdiction staff were citing Piagetian "milestones"; while in Tasmania some staff expressed concern about whether the EYLF would mean that milestones were no longer being recorded; in South Australia, the researcher noted that the centre declared it's aims for children as " 'fostering a positive self-esteem; encouraging curiosity, encouraging respect for others and the environment; promoting an understanding and appreciation of cultural differences and diversity of family backgrounds; and accepting each child as an individual'." She adds: "This is evidence for an emphasis on social and emotional well-being within a developmental discourse, overlaid with transitional attempts to comply with the new EYLF curriculum". It might have been anticipated that DAP will continue to underpin theoretical understandings held by the early childhood sector, given the historical position it has enjoyed within training and professional development programs throughout the twentieth century; but the research also suggests that some shifting is beginning to occur, and that the "transitional attempts" are both welcome and unstable, requiring a more concerted level of professional development than has been available to date.

*Overall, staff expectations of children tended to 'match expected milestones' and did not generally go beyond these.*

### What pedagogical principles influence practice at each site, and how do educators draw on such principles in their practice?

It should generally be noted that the early childhood sector is undergoing a major transitional period in which a wide range of formalised theories and concepts are being introduced as methods for professional practice. In particular, the EYLF introduces the notion of "intentional teaching" and in this evaluation we distinguish intentional teaching from intuitive practices as a means of highlighting the way in which the transitional effects of the EYLF were observed by the evaluation team in the field. "Intentional" can be taken to refer to a formalized approach to pedagogy in which conscious adherence to particular concepts is in evidence; "intuitive" is referring to a pedagogy in evidence that cannot necessarily be seen to adhere to particular concepts in a conscious and methodical fashion. "Intuitive" teaching is not necessarily viewed as a pejorative, since professionals will often convert methodical practices to a more or less routine approach (in an intuitive sense). However, since the EYLF specifically describes "intentional" teaching, we make the distinction in this report.

The study found that this transition from less conscious "intuitive" pedagogies to "intentional teaching reflected a broad shifting that was in evidence with respect to theoretical

understandings of children's learning more generally. The effects of this shift are therefore taken as giving rise to the "transitional attempts" that we refer to above, to implement the EYLF. While the new framework clearly legitimates "play-based pedagogies", the "intentional" practices associated with this term were diverse. For example, in Tasmania the researcher found that although much of the theoretical deployment within professional practice was the result of more intuitive engagements with principles of learning, nevertheless "Charlotte's self assessment of EYLF principles, practice and outcomes indicate[d] that Charlotte is still learning about theory, assessment, principles of teaching, equity, diversity, parent involvement in planning, and how the pedagogy of play supports learning". In Western Australia, the researcher found a range of different philosophies and theories/principles were evident: it appeared that the EYLF was helping to promote a common language about the nature of children's learning. In this vein, there was consistent evidence that the EYLF promoted an educative focus for staff who had not previously been accustomed to it. In some of the more remote locations of WA, family-day-care staff were excited and enthusiastic about the framework; many professionals who had never experienced access to professional development impressed the researcher with their willingness to embrace change.

In South Australia, the researcher found that "intentional teaching was delivered by a few child-focused staff but the learning materials set out were basic and seemed not to have been arranged purposefully to stimulate any particular intentional teaching"; in other words, the implementation of pedagogical principles in the sites visited within that jurisdiction were uneven. While staff were aware of the rhetorical value assigned to notions such as *intentional teaching* they were lacking necessary skills to deliver the requisite substance within their professional practice.

*The study suggests that the use of pedagogical principles is in a state of transition and that levels of understanding of such principles fell across a range of abilities and experience.*

**Do educators ensure that children's learning is transferable to other contexts?**

The transferability of children's learning between care settings and the home environment was addressed by talking "to the families about what the children had been doing at home and what they were doing" in the care setting. However this level of dialogue between staff and parents/families was not always evident: the Northern Territory researcher recorded staff exclaiming that the parents in their community "think that we are just baby-sitting here, they are not interested in paintings or drawings, they want to see real school outcomes but we don't know how the EYLF leads to this." This suggests that necessary professional development programming is yet to effectively provide the knowledge and skills required for good professional practice in some contexts, and that outcomes with respect to transferability of children's learning were largely dependent on this factor.

By comparison, in Victoria, the site researcher recorded that "overall there was [a] high level of confidence in [the ability of staff] to plan for and assist children to achieve the learning outcomes of the EYLF". Professional awareness of the quality principles, practice and outcomes as defined in the EYLF was consistently related to levels of formal qualification, in reports of researchers visiting the different sites. Researchers reported that a hierarchy existed within the sector, between well qualified and experienced staff and many whose qualifications were informal or less extensive: in general, researchers concluded that the less well qualified staff demonstrated specific practices which could be correlated with poorer understandings about quality principles, practice and outcomes as defined by the EYLF.

*Overall, the data showed that staff had limited awareness of the ways in which learning could be transferred to other contexts. Despite the importance placed on family and community, it was found that learning was localised to the educator's education site rather than other possible settings in which children learn. A kind of centre-centric perspective was evident in centre based*

*settings, and in home based contexts, transference was mostly associated with preparing for school.*

### 4.1.2 What existing discourses does the profession use to name their principles, practice, and the outcomes that they work towards?

*Piagetian developmental theory continues to make itself visible within the conversations surrounding early childhood principles, practice and outcomes, as well as interpretations of the EYLF and the tasks for its implementation. References to "milestones" were particularly frequent, suggesting that a linear trajectory of change continues to underpin the language through which development and learning are conceptualised.*

***How effectively do educators at each site take a holistic approach to children's well-being, including physical, personal, social, emotional, spiritual and cognitive aspects?***

The correlation of poorer understandings about children's learning with specific kinds of practice could be demonstrated with respect to the question of "holistic" approaches. In general, many early childhood professionals understood "holistic" through the framework of DAP, meaning that rather than analysing children's learning as an amalgam of different kinds of characteristics that are each present within a unique individual, many staff understood "holistic" by breaking each of these characteristics away from each other and describing them independently as an indicator of development. Linear chronologies of change enable a conception of learning to emerge in which each "milestone" is an observable sign that carers and parents can identify; the EYLF provides a more complex range of indices that, in a holistic sense, cannot be reduced to the same traditional markers of development that are closely oriented to physiological maturation.

For example, in the Northern Territory, it appeared that staff arranged activities and tasks that did "not seem to meet children's ability levels and interests as they were designed with the children's biological and maturational levels in mind". DAP tends to contradict a holistic approach insofar as it privileges chronological sequences within specified indices of progress, rather than seeing different characteristics holistically i.e., within an overall sense of the individual, such that one indicator becomes indicative of another.

In another example, the researcher comments on staff in a Victorian setting: "According to Eloisa, Quality Early Childhood Education is to prepare children for kinder, to make them independent, to provide opportunities for play and learning and also to create a warm friendly environment from where children can learn to respect values, show compassion. She thinks that as a teacher she needs to understand children's individual needs and also parents' expectations from her. She also gives importance to children's views of her, and [to] open relationships with children and parents for [the sake of achieving] quality". The inclination of many professionals reported in this study demonstrates generally compassionate and holistic dispositions, without knowing how to systematically integrate this intuitive approach within an accountability process related to the EYLF.

*There is a disjunction between the meaning of "holistic" that reflects the disparity between intuitive and intentional approaches to pedagogy and curriculum within the sector.*

***How do educators promote children's learning in order to develop a sense of identity and well-being, and to connect with and contribute to their world?***

The researcher visiting one of the sites in Western Australia described a highly focused example of inclusive structure within an early childhood setting. This example provides an excellent case study of ways in which early childhood professionals are systematically promoting a sense of identity and children's well-being, in order to help develop strategies for connections between staff and the world of children in their care:

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"Staff from a variety of cultural backgrounds, have been deliberately selected through the director's inclusion policy. Bi-lingualism is the norm. For example, Thai educator Suchara was singing the action song "The Wheels of the Bus" in English with the 3 year olds and then switched to Thai to sing about passing out the bus tickets. Staff language and cultural ties included Thai, Japanese, Italian, Indonesian, Greek, Aboriginal-Australian, Welsh, Irish, South African, English and Anglo-Australian. In addition, the centre employs two full time staff with disabilities."

The opportunities for early childhood professionals to engage with the notions of identity and well-being were clearly embraced in more than one context, demonstrating a strong awareness amongst many professionals for the subtle values at play in this matter. For example, in the Northern Territory the researcher noted the "strong emphasis on cultural diversity and inclusion which were evidence through a combination of Aboriginal paintings and artefacts that displayed side by side with objects and paintings from other European and non-European cultures at the centre", while at the same time this opportunity may be mediated by the lack of cohesion between such awareness of inclusivity and the manner in which the program itself is structured: "Despite the flamboyant nature of the centre, observation of teaching and learning through play is superficial. Program planning, development, implementation and assessment of learning is quite rigidly structured and applied." This suggests that the conceptual goals toward which EYLF principles are aimed continue to be undermined to some extent by adhesion to DAP at certain levels of management and planning. Further professional development in this area would possibly be necessary to mitigate the ongoing effects of traditional approaches that are embedded in standardised methods.

### *How are children guided to develop responsibility for their own learning, and to become confident life-long learners?*

Attention to educational strategies aimed at the development of autonomous learning was in evidence in a variety of instances. In the Northern Territory staff provided for children's responsibility for [their] own learning…through role play." He adds that the centre carefully arranged for rooms to be "set up in ways that encourage and challenge children to be active learners. Free choice and group times are used to encourage interpersonal and intrapersonal communication at the centre." Play-based pedagogy was in evidence as a means of attending to the question of children's independent learning.

In Tasmania, professionals at one site demonstrated a genuine sensitivity to the needs of individual children and their opportunities to develop autonomous interests. The researcher describes Charlotte claiming "that each child is unique and her approach to interacting with each child was based on their uniqueness. Her interactions with the children during the site visit showed this sensitivity. For example the 12 month old began to cry after the door to the outdoor area was closed. Charlotte immediately picked him up and softly said 'Oh I know you love going outside. I'm sorry we can't go out it is just so wet'. She then cuddled him until he settled, and then she put him down. After a few minutes again, he began to cry, and she immediately picked him up, cuddled him and kept him on her hip as she cleared up the lunch dishes. She stopped at one point and gently stroked his hair, saying 'We will soon have a nice sleep'. Charlotte told the evaluator that 'His thing is being outside. He just loves it!'. This account gives evidence of the awareness of a child's needs and interests and the willingness to respect those in the process of guiding and nurturing opportunities to enjoy autonomous activity.

In Western Australia, strategies were being employed by professionals to address the needs of individual children within a group setting; these strategies are described in relation to observations of work with a group of "2-3yr old[s] …as they had their lunch". The staff member in question "constantly conversed with the whole group and also individuals (19 present) and named all the food they were eating (English national day) and discussions grew about how food grew and how rice might be served, and the colours of food. She took cues from the

spontaneous responses of children and extended the children's ideas." In this case, the experienced staff member is able to incorporate questions of children's individual confidence by means of a routine meal-activity, in which the discussion is strategically elicited in relation to "spontaneous responses" from each child. Encouragement for autonomy grows directly in relation to this kind of careful planning and responsibility to the detail of a conversation in a group context, as well as to the opportunities children take toward participation and attention to the comprehension of a group activity.

### 4.1.3 What are the existing documents, resources or professional learning activities that educators draw upon to inform their work?

There were a range of documents specified in each jurisdiction, including the Queensland Kindergarten Learning Guideline (QKLG), the Queensland Kindergarten Learning Guideline Companion (QKLGC), Building Waterfalls and Respect, Reflect, Relate but the following comment recorded by the researcher visiting a site in the ACT provides a fairly common experience in this study:

When asked about the curriculum and philosophy behind the curriculum the Director mentioned that the "curriculum was to make the learning fun" and that she did not have a specific theory or theories underpinning her curriculum and that "it was mainly what I see and what I feel". The Director also mentioned that she had a central curriculum provided by the head office but no copies were available at the time and she could not remember any specific of this document.

***What planning do educators do at each site to understand and contribute to children's individual, social and learning outcomes?***

There is considerable evidence of a wide range of planning that professional staff systematically deliver in the course of their daily routine. In Western Australia, one carer is recorded as demonstrating a layered and attentive planning structure: "Her programming (Figure 12) and written reflections for each child that parents had signed, (Figure 13) were detailed, in excellent written English and sustained since starting with the EYLF this year. Her planner related carefully to her stated outcomes and her reflections matched this. She explained, 'we were like just seen as baby sitters but now we are called educators. It's a good idea that children are learning before they go to school and you can look at what this kid needs' ". It may be that the EYLF constitutes a major incentive for carers to intensify the kind of planning and reflectivity that they bring to their practice. In Queensland, there were "intensive" structures in effect to record and plan children's learning,

> utilising generic approaches such as videos, running records, photographs, conceptual descriptions, anecdotes and reflective commentaries. Five thematic areas guide the educators in this service namely; learning about and care for the environment, physical development of children, language and communication, early mathematical experiences, independent and group problem solving skills development and scientific experimentations using active learning processes.

By comparison, in one Victorian setting there was a clear effort to plan effectively that was mediated by the level of professional experience and training that staff could draw upon. The researcher records a staff member saying 'I tried to set up different areas where the kids could choose to go that would interest them, but because the ages are so different from (babies) to 5, it's challenging to think about what to put out'. The researcher reports that the staff demonstrate extensive planning structures including "self assessment of EYLF principles, practice and outcomes [which] indicates that she is still operating from prior knowledge from her eleven years' experience as a parent and family day carer and Certificate III training about theory, assessment, principles of teaching, equity, diversity, parent involvement in planning, and how the pedagogy of play supports learning." The researcher then adds "She expressed a lack of

confidence about the EYLF, saying 'With the new framework and everything…we want it in simple terms…I'm not calling myself a brainy person, but I feel quite stupid when it comes to some of the words they're using'." There does appear to be consistent evidence that professional development programs could better cater for the new concepts and language that the EYLF requires of professionals in the sector. In the Northern territory, some attitudes toward the EYLF as a planning methodology were "not driven by the EYLF.

> There is emphasis on stage and age level-performance. Videos and cameras are not usually used in capturing children's learning moments. Running records and checklists are mostly used for documentation. Planning is mostly informed by Piaget…, Behaviouris[m]…and…maturational perspectives. In relation to planning, one of the educators said, 'I am concerned that I do not have enough time to organise myself each day.' Another educator also indicated: 'I am particularly occupied with other things to have enough time to use the EYLF to do my planning and documentation. Further, another educator said, 'planning and documentation using the EYLF is taking too much of a time to coordinate tasks and people.'"

*Is professional enquiry through reflective practice embedded in the operation of the site?*

Some professionals in the sector have clearly taken up the invitation for reflective practice represented within the EYLF as a valued opportunity within their professional practice to improve and be more accountable to the community. In Western Australia, a staff member is described as including "performance management strategies with a new reflective practice form introduced… 'The practice principles' she said were 'all important to her and the development of the reflection sheet was a response to the new EYLF'. It's looking at the 'why and what' of what we do she commented, and is positioning the staff to see further into their practices'. A centre director noted telling 'her staff' that the 'Reflective Practice Prompt Sheet' is for everything, and they were to be applying reflection everywhere on everyday. In this way the director's high expectations were expressed."

In one of the Tasmanian settings the staff appeared not to have any real sense of reflective practice despite bringing a variety of systematic procedures for documentation and recording of children's outcomes. These systems are developed intuitively rather than on the basis of an analysis of what practice leads to what outcome. Reflectivity was something that would clearly have improved skills in such analysis, but which was not yet occurring: "educators were not going to be told what to do and think but that they had to create their own response to the EYLF. The staff were unsure about 'where to start', and what might be the 'sequence of development' now to be constructed. Concern was expressed about how one could create a profile on a child using learning stories so that there was enough evidence of development."

*Overall, it was found that reflective practice was embedded within the practices of the sites visited but difficult to implement regularly due to overwhelming time constraints and resources needed to bring all the staff together. With the exception of one centre in W.A., professional reflection was mostly related to a specific activity, rather than a systemic and holistic practice.*

*What, if any, cycle of reflection and review is used by educators at each site (i.e., how well is information about children's learning used to promote their ongoing learning)?*

The use of reflective data is clearly demonstrated as a tool for the purpose of planning curriculum and the development and promotion of better understandings among families about what learning can mean for individual children. As a means of reviewing progress, this data is often utilised for the purpose of documenting and signalling the achievement of learning outcomes. For example, in the case of one site in the Northern Territory, "reflections are carried out through photos, artwork, observations, evaluations, learning stories that are used to inform future planning. This ensures that stimulating activities and [a] progressive environment are

provided to the children. The centre educators attempt their best to invite parents to participate in centre events." The fact that parents were regularly given the opportunity to form a part in the events and activities of the service could contribute to evidence that links between the curriculum and the home environment were established and productive.

In Western Australia, staff in one setting were also involved in regular and routine reflective practice: "Reflective practice was ongoing between the staff. Teachers met regularly to discuss curriculum matters and staff was very engaged in collective professional enquiry as witnessed over lunch when all Kindy and Pre-primary staff filled out the C-BAMs for this project and discussed how interesting it was to do so." It would seem however that the utilisation of reflective practices may be correlative with levels of professional training and the willingness of management to incorporate reflectivity within staff development processes.

*How well and in what ways are children, their families and communities encouraged to be involved in the planning for and decision making about children's learning and other experiences at each site?*

The existence of effective relationships between staff and families in early childhood services in different contexts was in evidence, although there were a range of meanings attached to the relationship with parents and the degree to which families enjoyed freedom to contribute to decision making was inconsistent. In Queensland at a church-run facility, the researcher noted the comments of the centre manager who claimed that both "the church and families have put much effort into creating and maintaining the resources." The researcher then adds "the outdoor and indoor learning environments offer young children great opportunity to experiment science concepts like environmental sustainability, engineering and construction work. Resources also feature the development of early mathematical concepts, cooking, general office and managerial work". By contrast, in the Northern Territory, the researcher recorded staff describing "parental participation in their service [as] low.

> Few parents ask about the work their children have been doing at the centre. The educators said: "we expect parents to stay and spend a little time with the children, play with them and see what we do…when parents come in to drop off their children we welcome them and greet them but some are just not interested to spend some time with their children, only a few do stay and work with us…some of them just put the children down and walk through the door; a few stay but we need more parents to be involved".

The researcher described staff "planning for individual social and learning outcomes" by modelling curiosity, use [of] observation and [deliberately utilised] communication with family members to achieve these outcomes. Identity is developed through family lockers that identified with each child, family photos and children's photos with holiday pictures or birthdays and self-help skills. Also included in this development is allowing the children to explore their family roots and culture." The researcher was made aware of a series of family-oriented strategies employed by the centre to take advantage of links to the community and to the prevailing relationships with families. For example he notes that "there is also emphasis on communication with parents during drop-off and pick-up times although this is proving challenging. In addition, surveys are used to get parents' opinion on important matters concerning their children, centre activities and programs. Transition is encouraged through engaging children in natural activities and asking parents to assist children to complete some drawing at home. Children undertake excursions to local workplaces to observe activities in [their] natural [context]."

In Western Australia, the fostering of positive relationships with the community were also clearly in evidence. On this occasion the design of the setting itself provided a connection which drew the researcher's attention: "The physical environment of this LDC relates well to the community in a central well-established location next to the local primary school. This has big advantages

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for interactions between the families, children and LDC staff with school staff next door. Transitions to school are word of mouth discussions with visits with folders of children's drawings, paintings and so on, and milestone notes passed on to families and shared with school if needed. Archived LDC records were noted and are referred to over time." It would appear that the quality of such relationships is strong and highly valued by those parents seeking to consolidate them. The benefits for children in such interactions was demonstrated by the effective communication to schools in the form of records of children's experience as well as confirmation to individual children of the value accorded to the activity.

The connection of families and children to the process of determining policy about curriculum and the development of evaluative systems within a given service is an area that probably deserves a higher degree of assessment and consideration than was possible within the context of this project. The evidence collected seems to indicate that even where positive attitudes were demonstrated toward families and significance accorded to the participation of parents in routine events, the quality of those involvements is not measurable on objective criteria at this time. This means that some instances of strong connection between families and services may only amount to superficial strategies, depending on the way in which such activities are evaluated. For example, in one setting in Tasmania, "family partnerships were valued highly, and great effort had gone into setting up communication channels, and welcoming contexts, to enable interactions where educators could learn about the children from their families, where trust was established, where a sense of community was created, and where communications between families could easily occur. Communication books, scheduling of staff and family communication times in order to meet to discuss individual children, and daily interactions during the transition times (and communication book between staff, to take account of shift work) all contributed to the building of effective partnership between educators and families." The researcher goes on to comment that despite the high value attributed to family partnerships "an area that was not noted was parents' involvement in shared decision making."

Some of the funding provisions and organisational issues with respect to Family Day Care are relatively new structures in some jurisdictions; it is likely that the nature of this change in the way that services are delivered overall will ultimately impact positively on the quality of early childhood education and care in Australia. In Western Australia, the researcher describes the family partnership as providing an existential basis for the scheme itself: "From [the Manager's] perspective by definition such partnerships are the whole reason for the FDC Coordinating scheme unit's existence. Displayed in the foyer is the FDC scheme's rationale… In the remote communities where recent recruitment had been taking place the need for cooperation and coordination of the FDC Scheme unit with families and the remote community resources was imperative for successful establishment of new FDC educator services."

*Overall, family participation is highly valued, and strongly advocated with a range of mechanisms for encouraging involvement. However, family involvement in planning and decision making mostly means educators informing families, rather than families being a part of the decision making processes in the centres.*

## 4.1.4 What level of knowledge do educators have of the EYLF?

The data gathered in site visits provides an overwhelming indication that most of the staff at the settings in question were lacking in necessary professional development with respect to the EYLF, although many were attempting to improve their understanding and a good number were reasonably well-versed in administration and implementation of the framework.

### What is the nature of educator-child relationships and interactions at each site?

The study paints a very positive image of the attitudes that child care/education professionals in the sector bring to their interactions with children. Overwhelmingly, the staff in each setting were

dedicated and highly committed to their service delivery with special attention being paid to the quality of educator-child relationships. Although not a lot of evidence of shared sustained thinking could be found between staff and children, there was significant evidence of the educators being most responsive to the children as they interacted with them. This is not surprising, given that the educators primarily saw their role as matching (not expecting beyond milestones) the children's abilities, and not conceptually making demands upon the children.

Surveys conducted of the beliefs held about EYLF principles, practices and outcomes indicate that varied degrees of understanding and a range of theoretical interpretations (mainly generated at an intuitive level) were evident, influencing both educator beliefs about their interactions, as well as the speed and quality of framework implementation. For example, the SAT survey provided a clear indication that respondents did not understand what the categories of theoretical influence meant and could not interpret the questions in the survey effectively. Responses to the meaning of the Belonging, Being and Becoming questions were similar inasmuch as they confirm a sense that the respondents had little or no skills in placing these thematic concepts within the broader context of professional practice. These kinds of responses do not, however, necessarily imply anything other than a need to support professional development in a concerted fashion in coming years, as part of the ongoing process of implementation of the Quality Reform agenda.

*Is learning at each site play-based, intentional and supported by a rich learning environment?*

Play-based pedagogies formed a significant aspect of many curriculum practices across a diverse selection of the sites visited for this study. However the conceptualisation of play-based pedagogy was equally diverse. Intentional teaching was broadly defined in one Western Australian context: "Intentional teaching was delivered through carefully organized learning experiences that promoted engagement and enthusiasm and full group participation. The Kindy used an expansive outdoor area for both organized physical training and natural exploration with imaginative play. Assessment practices featured outcome charts from DET related to EYLF and children's development." To an extent the understanding of play as a legitimate form of children's learning remained poor in some contexts.

For example, in one setting in the Australian Capital Territory the researcher describes a routine event:

> There were six children seated around a table. The children sat silently but seem to be eagerly waiting for the educator to distribute laminated name cards. Once the children received their respective name card, the educator, in this instance the assistant handed one coloured crayon to each child. The children then proceeded to trace their names, when completed the children handed back their cards, the educator smiled and thanked each child then moved away from the table and placed the cards back in a tray placed on a nearby shelf.

She goes on to comment that "the thinking and practices of educators [in this setting] strongly reflected a maturational view of child development though no staff could articulate the philosophy underpinning their pedagogy." By comparison, the notion of intentional teaching was in evidence in the same setting and was interpreted in terms of transitions to school and children's readiness for a highly structured and teacher-directed curriculum experience.

Elsewhere, in one Western Australian setting, even less experienced staff were described positively with respect to interactions with the children: "She was the only staff member who created an ongoing pedagogy where ideas were noted to be extended intentionally - such as the children's use of the park next door for a leaf walk, the indoor collective tree construction, where she noted the children's questions about why leaves dried out and dropped, named colours,

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grouped those, provided letter A for autumn and apple on the tree and found ways to stick leaves to wall, and explore construction of leaf." This suggests that the level of intuitive experience deployed by staff in centres continues to be a significant factor that operates in both positive (clearly contributing to rich learning environments in the case mentioned) and less positive ways to determine many of the kinds of understandings and practices currently in effect in the sector.

*How are the range of elements of communication, problem-solving and decision-making fostered in children's learning?*

The findings of the current research indicate that since DAP continues to inform much of the pedagogical and curriculum practice, and especially that much of this practice operates at an intuitive level even when staff bring considerable experience to their work, the structural elements of communication, problem-solving and decision-making are approached unevenly. For example, in one Tasmanian setting, the researcher notes

> The practices were tied directly to the setting up of the environment. A great deal of effort had gone into organising resources in creative ways in order to stimulate learning through play. Intentional teaching was delivered through carefully organized learning environments, and a great strength of the Centre was the welcoming way in which the environment was created. They were inviting, suggestive, and very much in tune with what young children would naturally cluster around and be attracted to. The centre deliberately made use of the natural contours of the outdoor area in order to feature natural exploration and imaginative play. Assessment practices featured checklists and running records, with content foregrounding milestones in children's development. A maturational view of child development was evident, with domains of learning featured in both thinking and practices of the educators in the Centre.

Whilst a focus on setting up rich learning environments is important for giving children opportunities to work things out themselves, which may in turn promote problem solving, there is no guarantee. Teacher beliefs which sees the role of the adult de-emphasized (as is evident if DAP based programs), means that problems must be managed by the children themselves. However, this approach to planning does mean that children do have many opportunities to make decisions.

It seems evident that affording children autonomous opportunities to explore and play are difficult practices to incorporate when play-based pedagogies continue to remain poorly understood. In another example from Victoria, the researcher noted considerable rigidity in the structure of the learning experience: "When I entered this room I found that one staff [member] was telling stories to the children and children sat in a group on the mat. I observed that one child was not in the group, he was playing alone. I also observed that the staff did not allow children to talk among themselves and she told one child to get out from the group". Although it is clear that the contextual issues in place during this event need to be given priority when the issues are interpreted, nevertheless the narrative is symbolic of traditional approaches to pedagogy and learning that will no doubt require considerable professional development to transform.

## 4.1.5  How do educators conceptualise and enact quality early childhood education and development?

"Quality" would predominantly be summarised through reference to notions of security, nurturance, and children's well-being. Many of the responses to surveying about understandings of Belonging, Being and Becoming reinforced the sense that these ideas underpin the intuitive approach that many practitioners take to the provision of "quality" services in the sector. Combined with the emphasis on DAP, "quality" will usually be conceptualised as preparing the child for a school context by ensuring that autonomy, resilience and independence are cultivated

among children, and that a safe and healthy environment is provided to augment this form of development in each individual.

*How does each site address and promote principles of social diversity, inclusion and equity?*

As one might expect, those settings visited in the project that were located in social and economic communities characterized by broader ethnic and cultural diversity were accustomed to addressing this issue in a routine manner. In Queensland, at a Christian centre, religious values provided the foundation for inclusive practice: wellbeing is a critical outcome component of practice which is also supported by Biblical principles and that, "God created us all equal so no child or educator should ridicule others" Denise added that, 'ridiculing other children could stop them from trying as well as dislocate their wellbeing.' Hence, the discourse is fair go for each child, use of non-threatening language and respect for children as capable and sensible co-learners. By comparison, at another site in the Northern Territory for example,

> the interactions between the educators and the children were both formal and casual with emphasis on rules and routines. There is frequent use of patterns, painting, discussions, drawings, which were mostly educator directed rather grounded in the principles of co-construction of knowledge. Some of the children's paintings have demonstrated high levels of creativity through their various drawings, which were captured in photos during the site visit. There is a strong emphasis on cultural diversity and inclusion which were evidence through a combination of Aboriginal paintings and artefacts that displayed side by side with objects and paintings from other European and non-European cultures at the centre.

This suggests that while socially inclusive practices are regularly included in children's experience, their quality could be improved even in those settings where a strong awareness of diversity and inclusion are paramount concerns. Play-based pedagogies could powerfully contribute to the improvement of social inclusion: this is because they more organically incorporate the issues of autonomy and interaction between adults and children, by comparison to a rule-laden approach in which the curriculum structure is perceived to impress itself on children who more or less passively absorb the value inherent.

*Do educators demonstrate culturally competent practice? In what ways?*

The competency of staff toward inclusive and culturally aware practices are exemplified by the fact that in each setting these kinds of skill and knowledge are understood in terms of the children's security and well being. The nurturance of young children was consistently at the forefront of the experiences and observations yielded by this research. Provisions were always made at some level for the diverse needs and interests of children, and these provisions demonstrate the responsibility that staff ordinarily show toward the quality and competency of their professional practice. In the Christian centre in Queensland, "Denise reported that because they do not have any multi-cultural children in their service they take this particular area for granted and may be challenged by it should they have a child from a different cultural group attending." By comparison, in one South Australian setting, it was observed that

> Although the families were homogeneous, there was one child with additional needs who was attended by the special needs support worker in her daily interaction, joined by other children who were attracted to the activities and this worker's seated posture which made her accessible to children. While the staff room featured historic photographs of the farmhouse's original occupants, an area that was not evident was the explicit planning for broadening the children's understanding of the history and/or any broader cultural communities of the neighbourhood.

In this case, it is evident that an intuitive approach to access and inclusion was the guiding factor. By comparison, in one of the Western Australian settings visited, the researcher described a sensitivity to cultural issues that enabled the staff to moderate the evaluation process with respect to the attainment of learning outcomes for different cultural values.

> The Kindy used an expansive outdoor area for both organized physical training and natural exploration with imaginative play. Assessment practices featured outcome charts from DET related to EYLF and children's development. A social view of child development was evident with great care taken of individual interests being coordinated in tandem with the collective group intentions that developed as the day went on. Each day was building on from the last in this sense and the continuity of learning was clear through, as exemplified by the ongoing narrative of the journeying Possum Magic character….The Kindy teacher who had worked in indigenous communities considered that for some indigenous families the high expectations for technical literacy and numeracy were not considered a "measure of success for their mob." Outcome 2 in her opinion was therefore non-inclusive for some children and depended very much on 'the world' that the child and family inhabited.

The way in which local families "measure success" and the application of prevailing understandings of learning outcomes as universal values were addressed cohesively in this example. Children were not excluded and their cultural integrity accounted for in order to produce more authentic outcomes for their community.

### *How do educators seek to prepare children to make successful transitions between the site and other settings?*

Combined with the emphasis on DAP, "quality" will usually be conceptualised as preparing the child for a school context by ensuring that autonomy, resilience and independence are cultivated among children, and that a safe and healthy environment is provided to augment this form of development in each individual.

The opportunity for transitions between child care and home environments and between child care and school environments each pose separate challenges and structures for the sector. The involvement of families and specifically the inclusion of parents within routines of a service clearly enhanced the opportunities for successful transitions between service and home contexts. In one Tasmanian setting, "family partnerships were valued highly, and great effort had gone into setting up communication channels, and welcoming contexts, to enable interactions where educators could learn about the children from their families, where trust was established, where a sense of community was created, and where communications between families could easily occur. Communication books, scheduling of staff and family communication times in order to meet to discuss individual children, and daily interactions during the transition times (and communication book between staff, to take account of shift work) all contributed to the building of effective partnership between educators and families." By comparison, one site in Queensland that was located adjacent to a school setting was described positively in relation to the enhanced opportunities that this arrangement made available to children and the forward planning of curriculum and learning outcomes.

> Although transition times were not observed due to the police locked down during the visit, one important transition practice noted by the educators is the relationship between the kindergarten children and their counterparts at prep in the college. The educators informed that being part of a school contributes to the richness of transition for the children as they get to see the big girls in learning activities. This ensures continuity for the children, particularly the girls who normally transit from kindergarten to the college prep. This internal exchange between the college and the kindergarten enhances children's transition to school programs.

Attention to physical infrastructure, remoteness of the community and supply of resources, as well as the nature of links between service staff and families are all critical factors impacting directly on the efficacy of transition arrangements.

*How attentive and responsive are educators at each site to children's individual strengths, abilities and interests?*

The variability of responses to notions of individuality and well being, to the unique strengths and interests of each child, are reflections of the diversity of the community itself, and the broad spectrum of ways in which different cultures legitimately define autonomy and diversity. For example, in one Western Australian it was reported that

> A newly arrived Italian boy was immediately included in all group times. Teacher comments in a humorous fashion: "he's Italian but I'm turning him into an Australian with this accent poor child" and she introduced him to families as well. Muslim mothers brought in cake for a birthday party to share with all children and acceptance of everyone on equal terms was also reflected local community attitudes in this multi-cultural mining boomtown.

At a separate Western Australian setting, the issue of children's individuality was evident as an outcome of the pedagogical structure: "children were engaged fully throughout the whole day (8.30am-3.30pm with no rest period) and intentional teaching was highly evident in every interactive moment that teacher Anthea undertook. Story telling narrations were left open for children to enact and add to. Not every child spoke English, so every time that a word was used that could be misunderstood, Anthea would give an extended meaning: e.g. "choose can also mean 'pick out' or 'point to' you know". Teacher's strong confidence in playing roles with children made the whole day playful and the particular focus on story Possum Magic character journeying to find visibility was a very engaging experience played out purposefully throughout the day."

Providing for and building individual strengths is best addressed within the EYLF practice principles that emphasize intentional approaches. However the meaning of "intentionality" and the confidence with which professionals can either understood or incorporate these understandings within routine practice is an area that ought to be evaluated in future measurements of the program/framework implementation. For example, the visit to one Tasmanian setting yielded the following comments about planning for individual strengths from the researcher: "Planning was based on the individual children, but she also did some group things too. The approach that Charlotte said she was learning about at the Polytechnic was creating portfolios of children's work. At this stage she had not learned about how to keep records in ways that were in line with the EYLF. The Assistant Day Care Coordinator indicated that the 'old ways' were still being used at the Polytechnic because the staff were still learning documentation in relation to the EYLF. Charlotte had not seen the Educators Guide." This strongly suggests that implementation of the framework will require a heightened attention to the complexity of professional development that is necessary throughout the different professional structures operating in the sector across different jurisdictions and in a diverse range of communities.

*The overall findings of the study strongly conclude that the heightened attention to notions of security and well-being, which feature as principle outcomes for the EYLF, are consistently addressed in the routine practices of early childhood professionals working in the sector.*

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# 5 Conclusion

The baseline study presents a picture of strengths and limitations in the early childhood educational practice in the services selected for study. Overall, the study found a high level of attention to the children's sense of security and well-being, sustained by positive educator-child relationships. Play based pedagogies were observed across a range of sites and there was considerable evidence of diverse and inclusive program planning.  These contexts supported valuable intuitive and intentional teaching. The principal limitation observed was in the range of concepts in use and the depth of reflective practice. Concepts about learning clustered around a maturational view of child development understood with reference to a linear progression of milestones. This view naturally structured assessment and planning and placed limitations on the reach of intentional teaching. Intentional teaching was more likely to be observed in connection with the children's transition into formal schooling. There was only limited evidence of sustained shared thinking in educators' interactions with children and quite varied understandings of the role of play in children's learning. Reflective practice was found to be embedded within the practices of the sites but it tended to focus on specific activity rather than holistic practice. The documents supporting educators were state based curriculum or longstanding planning and reporting practices ascribed by Quality Improvement and Accreditation System or state/territory licensing authorities. The development and maintenance of positive and effective relationships with families was in evidence but with a bias towards communicating with the families rather than engaging them in shared decision making and as partners in supporting the children's learning.

*In this base line study, the generalised picture of practice and educator knowledge that was evident in most of the settings could be described as free play programs, with a focus on providing rich set of materials and equipment, with child expectations that meet ages and stages as set down in maturational theory, with the role of the adult to plan and assess against the developmental domains, and for family involvement to focus on clear and rich communications of what is happening in the centre.*

# 6 Next Steps

As alluded to earlier, the EYLF is designed to be flexible enough for each early childhood service to develop their own strategy to implement the Framework, taking their own unique context into consideration. The services that this study aims to represent are of particular interest because they are at a standpoint where they will have to make a decision about how best to make the transition between whatever, if any, framework that currently exists and the new Framework. (The independence of the individual services making this kind of decision may be an area for attention and ongoing investigation as is further outlined below).

Strategies for assisting such services formulate their approach to the transition would certainly involve training and mentoring support such as is being delivered by various programs and agencies including the Professional Support Coordinators program, Indigenous Professional Support Units and Inclusion Support Agencies. In addition to workshops, initiatives are being implemented to deliver training through different mediums including interactive online forums, e-newsletters, e-learning videos and a series of short professional learning vignettes delivered by a national peak body, Early Childhood Australia. Remote Indigenous educators will be receiving training in location through a new Remote Indigenous Professional Development Project.

In addition, the Framework for School Age Care in Australia, developed by Griffith University, which builds on the EYLF principles, practice and outcomes to accommodate the age range of children attending school age care settings, will serve as the vehicle for designing and delivering programs that enhance children's experiences and development through planned leisure activities. As of January 2012, under the National Quality Framework for ECEC services caring for school aged children, including long day care centres and family day care centres, will be required to demonstrate their use of the Framework.

A series of issues arise from this baseline study that suggest that the direction forward for quality reform of the early childhood sector may be guided by further investigation of particular kinds of evidence that the study raised. These factors may partly be explained through the "tyranny of distance" in the Australian national context, which makes for a known "disconnect" between government and services in remote areas.

The proliferation of DAP methods and knowledges within services is itself an indication of conflict between different sources of knowledge for early childhood education and care professionals. Traditional early childhood education and care providers have always been dominated by biological/maturational notions of development., While this approach is not contradicted by the EYLF it is not absolutely coherent with the EYLF's position, which requires a broad knowledge of theoretical approaches.

These two problems may seem to be disparate issues for the early childhood sector. However with respect to steps forward that may be drawn from evidence which this baseline study raises, it is the position taken by the authors of this report that an investigation of the ongoing implementation of the EYLF over coming years would be strongly complemented by a corresponding inquiry about the opportunities for improving pedagogical leadership practices in the sector. Professional development options should be aimed to improve the likelihood of industry professionals being self sufficient, and more capable of addressing reform in ways that promote service quality and add to the value and visibility of what the sector does for the Australian community in general.

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Improvements in administrative and pedagogical leadership practices may constitute a streamlined approach to quality reform in the early childhood sector. Since the childcare sector continues to emerge from a history in which government intervention and budgetary support has only developed in the last two decades, and in which childcare was usually treated as a charity/philanthropic sphere for which little business investment was available, a recognition of the contribution that women make to the economy through their participation in the childcare workforce is only now becoming feasible. Leadership roles and professional development continues to be an important avenue that will serve this opportunity in future years. Improvements to leadership and attention to what kinds of professional skills should be targeted more generally should lead to improvements in communication between regulatory authorities and services, and that services themselves can be better supported. It should mean that the breadth and depth of professional knowledges specific to the sector are more likely to be aligned, leading to targeted improvement, specific to the broad reforms that the Quality Reform Agenda provides. But it also means that the independence of the extant services operating may eventually be separated from jurisdictional controls in order to make the industry more viable as a site for business investment.

| Next Step | Action | Projected Outcome |
|---|---|---|
| **Ongoing evaluation of EYLF delivery and implementation** | A second phase study following on from the outcomes of the present report | Evidence about the quality of service delivery in relation to the EYLF |
| **Evaluation of Transition arrangements** | Various existing initiatives as outlined above | Evidence of take-up rates for specified changes to inter-service quality and delivery |

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