



The Early Years Learning Framework Professional Learning Program



Distant conversations

Setting the scene

Newsletters so far have showcased early childhood practice in long day care, family day care, preschool and non-school kindergartens in ACT, NSW, Qld and SA.

In Tasmania and WA, kindergartens are part of the school system and educators in those settings face different issues when implementing the *Early Years Learning Framework* (EYLF). For example, educators may be working with the EYLF and a state curriculum and, if they have composite groups, they may also be engaging with the Australian Curriculum.



Building children's capacity in WA

Marion, at North Dandalup, teaches children across ages and grades, with her Kinder, Pre-primary and Year 1 groups coming on different, but overlapping days.

Marion takes great care to '... provide for continuity of learning and transitions' (EYLF p. 16). As the EYLF reminds us:

(p. 19) Different places and spaces have their own purposes, expectations and ways of doing things.

(p. 19) [Early childhood educators] ... assist children to understand the traditions, routines and practices of the settings to which they are moving and to feel comfortable with the process of change.

The Year 1 children do the most moving between locations at the school. To ensure that children feel they 'belong' to a space, class and teacher on particular days, Marion places named photos of the children on the wall, she provides a labelled tray for their belongings and a chart on the door for children to check where they are on a particular day.

Figure 1: Transitions chart



Marion also takes the opportunity with her mixed-age group to build the confidence and independence of all children, and the sense of responsibility of the most-school-experienced group. She finds that older children are showing increasing responsibility and care for younger children, and she affirms that growth with the children and their families.



Marion is firmly committed to building all children's capacity to be problem solvers. Whenever an issue arises, her first response is to ask the children: 'How could we solve this problem?'

I saw a delightful example of her approach in action:

The Pre-primary group of five-year-olds was developing a drama around Lynley Dodd's story *My cat likes to hide in boxes* (1978). Children volunteered to be particular kinds of cats; naturally, there were more volunteers than parts. So, Marion asks: 'How can we solve this problem?' The children pondered and came up with the following solutions:

- We could have a turn next time.
- Some of us could be the audience this time and have our favourite part another time.
- We could make up new cats for the play.
- People who are the audience could be first to choose an activity.

One day, Marion returned to the room to find three little boys—aged four, five and six—sitting on the step. They told her, 'We're solving a problem.' It seems one had knocked over another's block building. Marion asked: 'Do you need help?' 'No, thanks', they replied. After talking and negotiating, the boys agreed that all three would reconstruct the building.

'I think it's working!' thought Marion!

In fact, Marion is thoughtful and intentional about all she does. She wondered if 'news time' was genuinely valuable for learning. However, she noticed that particular children really gained confidence from standing up in a position of 'power', organising their thoughts, waiting for quiet and telling their story to an engaged audience. She decided to strengthen those aspects of news sessions and children now think ahead about what they want to say, they plan it so it has a good and interesting sequence, and select members of the audience to ask thoughtful questions.

As the EYLF (p. 18) says:

Intentional teaching is deliberate, purposeful and thoughtful.

Educators ... use strategies such as modelling and demonstrating, open questioning, speculating, explaining, engaging in shared thinking and problem solving ...

Marion deliberately uses the potential of a familiar activity to build social skills such as waiting, turn taking and problem solving, verbal language and planning skills. News time is kept short, with only a few presenters so no one gets bored or restless.

Working with different frameworks

Having children across three grade levels, Marion is working with the EYLF, the WA Curriculum and the Australian Curriculum. She agrees that teaching has become much more complex in recent years, but she's excited about the contribution new frameworks can make to her practice.

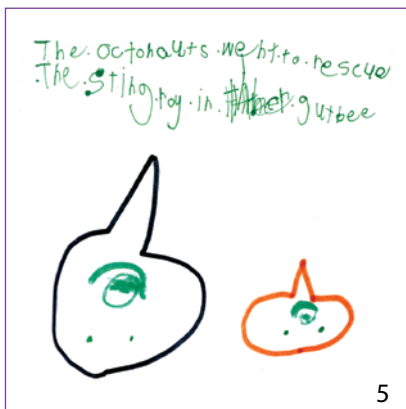
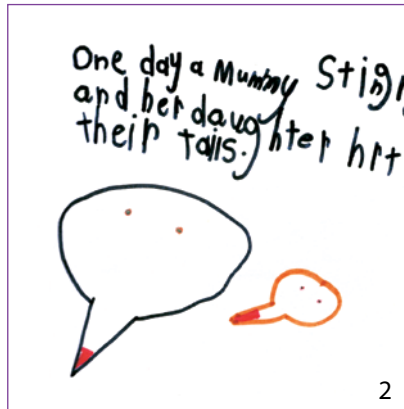
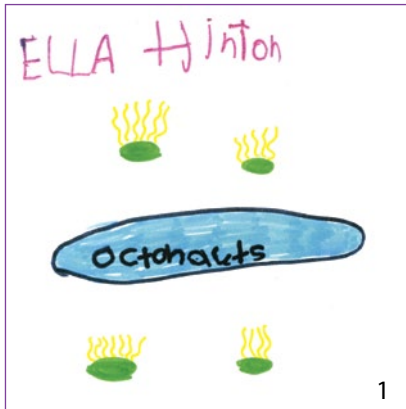
She has created her own 'map' of the EYLF Learning Outcomes in relation to the Overarching Learning Outcomes of the WA Curriculum Framework and to English, history, science and maths in the Australian Curriculum.

She focuses on building a solid foundation in the dispositions, concepts and understandings highlighted in the EYLF, and gradually engages children with the content of the other frameworks as they evidence capacity and interest.

She finds, of course, that some children who are technically 'in Year 1' still need to consolidate 'platform knowledge'; while others, technically 'in Pre-Primary', are moving on rapidly with reading, writing and maths.

Ella, for example, may only be five, but she's a very capable writer. Her story 'Octonauts' below shows her understanding of story form—title, author and cover; beginning, middle and end; strong relationship between word and picture texts; impressive control of spelling and the beginning of punctuation.

Figure 2: Ella's story



Play-based pedagogy in Tasmanian kindergartens

Rose, at Wesley Vale Primary School Kinder, is thrilled with the emphasis on play-based pedagogies in the EYLF and the potential of a National Framework to value early years' teaching and the learning of young children.

Rose takes an approach that involves children in inquiry and projects. The approach, deriving from the work in Reggio Emilia, sees perceptive questions and long-term serious inquiry as an empowering way for children to lead their own learning.

Some inquiries, such as 'What makes sound?' may be short term, with the teacher putting up a piece of paper headed with the question and children's responses being added:

- Piano
- Thunder
- Animals
- Voices
- Tongue clicking.

Other inquiries, such as 'Why does the earth move?' are more substantial and, after children's ideas are documented—'the wind', 'the rocks', 'it floats', 'the tide comes in'—everyone uses all available sources—books, internet, parents—to build a more accurate picture.



Rose's pedagogy is highly intentional and she wants children to be intentional too, so she asks children to 'plan and decide' before going to an activity area or embarking upon a project.

She has a *Project procedure* on the wall, which Koby and Josh used for their Excavator project:

- Idea
- Design and plan
- Collect resources
- Build
- Try it out
- Can you make it better?
- Ask a friend
- Write your name
- Tidy up.

The impetus for 'a project' varies, but always, children are asked to plan ahead, review critically and evaluate their work; the teacher's role is to question, support and extend. For example, investigating sound arose after children had heard the Pamela Allen story *Bertie and the bear* (1990). Koby and Josh had been going to do a different project, but the school is having building works done, so they became intrigued by an excavator on site, wondered how it worked and decided to build one as a box construction.

Individual projects lead to further questions and the teacher closely observes children and plans how she can build on their interests and connect them to concepts and skills she recognises as being important for an individual child and/or for the group.



Figure 3: Seeds

'Seed collection' meet and greet children and parents:

Observations and conversations with children and parents give 'seeds' for some opportunities for learning where we plan from the children's interests/questions/news/special events etc.

From these seeds some purposeful planning takes place, albeit on the run! It looks something like this:

John's seed for the future learning (provocation)

John's Dad: We went to the snow, didn't we John?

John: Yep

John's Dad: Tell Mrs Delvin—What did you see?

John: No fence.

John's Dad: When we were going up Jacob's Ladder there was no guard rail and...

Teacher: What did you do when you went to the snow John?

John's Dad: We made a snowman didn't we John?

John: Yep.

Observations: John is not a confident communicator however he is beginning to answer simple questions in group learning times. John needs to extend his expressive language. Provide opportunities to communicate effectively with peers and adults.

Teacher response: Focus for John on EYLF Outcomes 1, 3 & 5

John:

- Emphasise oral language, e.g. he can share his news story with a small group
- Support John through a brief 'questions and answers' time.

After group time:

- Work one-to-one with John on recording his ideas—which becomes John's project
- Focus on talking through ideas retelling his experience and perhaps creating a map/drawing.

Whole group brainstorm: using John's news as the provocation for learning:

- 'What do we know about snow?'
- Teacher models writing, model 'sounding' simple words with childrens' help.
- Lead on to 'What do we know about weather?'

Seeing the learning

Educators agree that 'seeing the learning' is crucial for their future planning and for communicating learning progress to children and families; they agree that it's not always easy to 'see the learning' or 'see the potential' in a learning moment.

Other Tasmanian educators interviewed on these visits use 'provocations' or starting points for inquiry. Vicki and Lisa who teach kinder at Nixon St. Primary, for example, talked about how a visit to the beach had led to a large-scale investigation about 'environments'—how they differ and why. A child's question: 'How do they breathe in Space?' led to a major inquiry into space travel and breathing apparatus generally. Recent volcanic ash problems resulted in a study of volcanoes and thundery weather led children to theory making about 'What causes weather?'; 'What causes thunder?'

The teachers stress that it is essential to focus on and follow through with the 'big idea', rather than just a topic.

For example, 'how skeletons differ and why'—is a richer starting point for a deeper inquiry than 'skeletons' which may simply involve looking at bones. 'How and why' questions involve considering how an animal's skeleton and the functions its body parts fulfil may have adapted to its living environment; a 'What' question generally only has one answer.

It's also important to share with families the significant learning that can arise from a child's comment, question or study. Then, families become excited and support the learning at school and at home.

Conclusion

Educators in early childhood settings across the nation are dealing with different challenges as they begin to work with new frameworks and meet new expectations. These educators and others who agreed to be interviewed are taking on those responsibilities with impressive professional skill, commitment and courage—and no little excitement!

Having the EYLF as a 'high status' framework for the birth to five-year age range, encourages early childhood educators to have conversations about pedagogy and children's learning across and beyond the early childhood professional community.

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Acknowledgments

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North Dandalup Primary School, Perth, WA.
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Early Childhood Australia
A voice for young children

The EYLF Professional Learning Program is funded by the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

Figure 4: Excerpts from the art study of birds

Birds



-an exhibition of art work

Welcome to our exhibition.

This term all the children in the early childhood section of Nixon St Primary School have been involved in an art project about birds. Six beautiful stuffed birds from QV Museum in Launceston have provided the stimulation for drawing, clay and wire representations.



The exhibition includes work from very young children who are discovering the power in making marks on paper through to Grade 1 children where lines and shapes are becoming more intentional as they seek to represent what they see.

I like the sketching, I liked sketching the penguin because I got all the detail in it.



I liked doing the clay duck and I liked looking carefully at it so that I didn't miss any pieces.



"...children use drawing as a powerful tool for thinking. In different ways and at different rates, they develop a range of mark-making, skills and strategies, and use their drawings for various representational purposes in their quest to make sense of themselves and their world.

Ursula Kolbe *It's not a bird yet- The drama of drawing p7*