



## The Early Years Learning Framework Professional Learning Program



# Myths and realities

## Setting the scene

As elements of the Early Childhood Education and Care National Quality Framework (NQF) roll out, it is important that educators have clear and accurate information about what it means for them and their work.

The NQF is a key mechanism for raising the quality of provision in settings catering for young children. The NQF includes a National Quality Standard (NQS) and the *Early Years Learning Framework* (EYLF).

The National Quality Standard, which is currently in draft form, will be published in time for implementation to begin in 2012. The NQS has seven quality areas:

1. Educational programs and practice
2. Children's health and safety
3. Physical environment
4. Staffing arrangements, including staff-to-child ratios and qualifications
5. Relationships with children
6. Collaborative partnerships with families and communities
7. Leadership and service management.

While the EYLF is most evident in Quality Area 1: Educational program and practice, its Principles, Practices and Learning Outcomes are relevant to all quality areas.

The NQS is based on a quality improvement model and educators in settings where it applies will develop a Quality Improvement Plan, which describes the steps they will take to raise the standard of provision over a period of time.

Planning for, assessing, documenting and providing evidence of children's learning are core aspects of Quality Area 1 and educators are keen to fully understand what will be required.

This e-Newsletter explores some of the 'myths' that have grown up around the EYLF and the NQS. A wider range of 'myths' can be found at:

[www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/eylfpplp/workshop\\_eylf\\_myths.html](http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/eylfpplp/workshop_eylf_myths.html)



## The EYLF/NQS Myths

Throughout the EYLF PLP Workshops and in field visit conversations, a number of educators have sought clarification around many aspects of the EYLF and the NQS, especially in relation to the planning and documentation process.

It has become apparent that many of the beliefs people have acquired, from one source or another, are 'myths' rather than absolute truths deriving from the documents under the National Quality Framework.

For example, some people assume that there is one right way to achieve the requirements of the NQS, when in fact, the NQS allows different ways, as long as educators are clear about their intentions and strategies and able to evidence quality learning in their setting.

The EYLF talks about creating a culture of professional inquiry, where educators work together to discuss issues and explore new ideas. This process does not lead to 'quick fix' solutions but rather encourages educators to respond to all parts of the NQF.

Part of this professional inquiry can be to ask probing questions to address the 'certainties' of myths, how they come about and how to address them.

We hope that the following information will assist educators to think about what is 'true' and what is a misconception; a piece of misinformation, or a misinterpretation of what someone has said.

## Belonging Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia

### ► Myth 1: Business as usual?

#### Myth:

An appropriate use of the EYLF is to simply validate that you're doing everything well—use it to pat yourself on the back.

The EYLF is the same thing as we have been doing so far— 'we're already doing all that'.

We already know the Principles and Practices of the EYLF so just pay attention to the Outcomes.

#### Current reality:

Whilst many educators will already be engaging in high-quality practice, the *Early Years Learning Framework* asks educators to critically reflect on their current practices and programs to ensure they embrace the ideas articulated in the document and think more deeply about what they do and why they do it.

The EYLF requires us to have professional conversations with others; with our colleagues and with families and children to include their voices in our programs. The EYLF asks us to continually reflect and revise our thinking and practices to take into account the changing needs of the children in our education and care settings.

The parts of the EYLF form an integrated whole. Belonging, being and becoming and the Principles and Practices are essential underpinnings for a quality program that supports children's learning in Outcome areas.

#### Myth:

Using the Framework means changing the way you've done things in the past—changing everything.

#### Current reality:

The EYLF does not require educators to 'throw away' all they did before. In many cases, educators are already basing their work on current research about best practice. However, the EYLF encourages us to use the common language of the EYLF and to build new and different understandings.

#### Myth:

The EYLF and NQS have nothing in common.

#### Current reality:

The EYLF has been written to support the achievement of the NQS and the goals of the National Quality Framework. The EYLF is woven throughout the NQS but is particularly evident in Quality Areas 1, 5, 6 and 7. Educators will need to understand and embrace the EYLF in order to achieve the National Quality Standard.



## The EYLF and the NQS

### ► Myth 2: You have to number or code links between the EYLF and the NQS?

#### Myth:

You have to show links to the NQS areas in all of your plans and documentation.

The best way to do this is to number plans and records or to colour code them to the NQS and EYLF Outcomes.

#### Current reality:

The NQS refers explicitly to the EYLF in Quality Areas 1 and 7, but *nowhere* does it say that a notation has to be made to link all planning and documentation to particular Quality Areas, Standards or Elements.

Assessors will be looking to see that the service philosophy statement reflects the core elements of the EYLF. They will also be checking that experiences planned for individual children and groups of children demonstrate that the five Learning Outcomes are in focus and that these are evident in the documentation of children's learning. (Element 1.1.1 *Draft Guide to the National Quality Standard—DEEWR*).

Linking your plans to the Outcomes of the EYLF is much more than merely numbering parts of the EYLF and placing this on your plans. Developing plans requires deep knowledge of all parts of the EYLF and the children in your context.

Individual children's records will note the 'distance travelled' by each child in relation to the five Outcome areas.



## Planning for learning

### ► Myth 3: You don't need to plan anymore?

#### Myth:

No pre-planning—you just start with a blank piece of paper.

There are NO RULES!! Anything goes!

You can't do long-term planning.

There is one right way/no right or wrong way to assess and plan.

Everything must be child-initiated—you cannot use any teachers' ideas.

You have to do a fixed number of learning stories (or observations or whatever) for each child each week (or fortnight).

#### Current reality:

Under NQS Quality Area 1: *Educational program and practice* the following elements explain the requirements:

- 1.2.1 Each child's current knowledge, ideas, culture and interests provide the foundation for the program.
- 1.2.3 Each child's learning and development is assessed as part of an ongoing cycle of planning, documenting and evaluating children's learning.
- 1.2.4 Critical reflection and evaluation of children's learning and development, both as individuals and in groups, is used as a primary source of information for planning and to improve the effectiveness of the program and teaching strategies.

In addition ... regulations and schedules will include:

*The program is planned, documented and evaluated.*

- Neither the EYLF nor the NQS state specifically how educators should plan for children's learning since the context and the setting of the service will guide the methods used. However, there is an expectation that planning is *undertaken* and that this planning will 'demonstrate over time' children's ongoing learning.
- Educators will need to make their own professional judgements on how/what they record and the number of records they need to take.
- Educators are required to plan and implement a program for *every* child so there needs to be regular review of children's records so that no child is overlooked.
- The emphasis in the EYLF is on **planning for learning**—not just planning *activities*. Some activities and resources may regularly be available to children, but as well, educators need to plan and organise particular experiences that support children to make progress towards each learning outcome. Educators may also plan other strategies, such as specific one-on-one interactions, to assist each child's learning and development.

#### In summary, quality approaches to planning:

- Focus on strengths (what the child *can* do) rather than deficits.
- Focus on the whole child (reflecting the holistic way children learn) rather than focussing on separate developmental domains.
- Include groups of children—reflecting the collaborative way that children learn.
- Mean that documentation is recorded in a way that is accessible to families and children.
- Focus on children's interests and strengths as a way of extending their learning but also as a way to support their areas of need.
- Use a combination of learning experiences based on children's interests *and* planned opportunities for intentional teaching and knowledge building. *Educators have a responsibility to increase children's general and content knowledge.*

## Observations

### ► Myth 4: Observations are 'out'?

#### Myth:

You don't need to do observations anymore.

You must do ten observations per week/three observations per month.

It is a waste of time to teach students at University/TAFE about observations because they are no longer required.

**Current reality:** *In order to plan for and assess children's learning it will be necessary to observe and record information about children.*

Neither the EYLF nor the NQS prescribe how many observations are required. A number of factors such as the frequency of attendance, the strengths, needs and interests of the child may affect how much information is gathered.

However, the information gathered needs to be enough to determine 'where the child is at' (their interests, strengths and needs). This information is then analysed to support further learning.

#### Myth:

Observations have to be linked to quotes from theories or theorists.

**Current reality:** *In order to plan for and assess children's learning it will be necessary to observe and record information about children.*

The EYLF encourages educators to understand the range of perspectives and theories that may impact on the way they work. Reflecting on these may challenge their traditional ways of seeing children and their practice. There is no expectation that observations need to be cross-referenced to theories or theorists.

#### Myth:

Observations record what the child is doing on the day.

There is no objective for observation; you 'just look'.

**Current reality:** *In order to plan for and assess children's learning it will be necessary to observe and record information about children.*

Observations are best recorded to note moments of 'significance' for each child. Educators use their professional judgement to decide which of these moments to document. Educators analyse observations as a basis for planning further learning.

#### Myth:

The only interpretation of the observation that can be done is by writing the number of the outcome.

**Current reality:** *In order to plan for and assess children's learning it will be necessary to observe and record information about children.*

The Draft Guide to the National Quality Standard suggests that assessors may need to sight 'documentation demonstrating that the five learning outcomes are evident in documentation of children's learning'. (Element 1.1.1) The information gathered about the child should be analysed and linked to the Learning Outcomes.

However, when analysing a child's learning, educators assess progress over a period of time, rather than 'leaping to a judgement' linked to an Outcome.

Young children will be 'working towards' the learning outcomes and documentation should make this progress visible to the educator and others.

## Learning Stories

### ► Myth 5: Learning Stories are 'in'?

#### Myth:

You have to do Learning Stories—The EYLF says you have to do learning stories.

#### Current reality:

Whilst they are regarded as an interesting way to document children's learning, 'Learning Stories' are just one method that educators may use to capture and record children's learning over time.

#### Myth:

'Learning Stories' are lengthy essays that have to be sent home regularly.

#### Current reality:

'Learning stories' means different things to different people. The term originated in N.Z. (Carr, 2001). They describe children's learning in a rich narrative, or story. As Carr explains, learning stories are designed to capture the complexity of a piece of learning, giving a sense of the context, background and participants that impact on the learning that occurs. Interested educators would be wise to read Margaret Carr's work on the subject (see reference at the end of this e-Newsletter).

#### Myth:

You must do two Learning Stories per week.

#### Current reality:

There is no specific requirement for the number of Learning Stories that must be collected over a certain time and this will be determined by individual needs and educator judgements.

#### In summary:

- Traditionally, anecdotal records attempted to describe events 'from outside'. 'Learning Stories' include the voice of the educator and relevant information about the context.
- They can include the names, voices and actions of other children involved and reflections or 'wonderings' by the educator about the learning that seems to be happening.
- Most educators use a range of ways to capture children's learning—sticky notes, jottings, anecdotal records, daily journals or diaries, annotated photographs and 'stories'.
- Quality, not quantity is what matters and the best records are those that are sifted through regularly with only the most significant kept and used for planning, documenting and communicating children's learning.





## Intentional teaching

### ► Myth 6: Intentional teaching means the teacher taking over?

#### Myth:

There are lots of myths and misunderstandings about what intentional teaching is!

#### Current reality:

Intentional teaching is one of the eight key pedagogical practices described in the *Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)*.

The EYLF defines intentional teaching as 'educators being deliberate, purposeful and thoughtful in their decisions and actions'.

Intentional teaching includes both planned, extended teaching interactions with children and spontaneous, one-off, 'seize-the-moment' teaching when a skill, process or idea is required by a child.

Intentional teaching encompasses 'being intentional' throughout the day in the way we do routines as well as in more obvious 'teaching' aspects of the program.

## Conclusion

There are many more 'myths' than this e-Newsletter can cover. The web site: [www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/eylfp/plp/workshop\\_eylf\\_myths.html](http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/eylfp/plp/workshop_eylf_myths.html) includes a discussion about other areas of potential confusion such as:

- Strength-based learning and teaching
- Capturing the voice of families
- Program formats and templates
- The EYLF and infants and toddlers
- The EYLF and Family Day Care
- Themes, concept maps and webs
- Checklists and stencils.

The intention is not to 'tell educators how to do their work', but to provide current and accurate information so that educators can 'get on with their work' in a professional and informed way.

ECA welcomes input from early childhood educators about other issues that are bothering them and/or their colleagues, so that accurate and timely information can be provided. Please send your input to: [eylfp@earlychildhood.org.au](mailto:eylfp@earlychildhood.org.au)

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**Early Childhood Australia**  
A voice for young children

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The full 'myths' document is available online at:

[www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/eylfp/plp/workshop\\_eylf\\_myths.html](http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/eylfp/plp/workshop_eylf_myths.html)