



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

After the inspiring opening of the ECA 2010 National Conference a delegate said to me 'you know, we can start a revolution with just four words ... I have a dream!' quoting words originally spoken by Dr. Martin Luther King in a famous speech in 1963.

The session we had just attended featured a video address by Peter Garret AM, MP, Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth, and the opening keynote presentation by Professor Lester-Irabinna Rigney. One told us about the Australian Government's continuing commitment to working with the states and territories to achieve quality reform in early childhood education and care (ECEC) and the other challenged us to take realistic actions to bridge the gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Both speakers had touched on issues that are big dreams of Early Childhood Australia, dreams that sometimes feel revolutionary but which I'm sure many of you share.

Achieving dreams and bringing about major change needs not only passionate and committed leaders but takes the goodwill, determination and hard work of many people in many different roles over a long time. Everyone in our sector, from single individuals to peak organisations like ECA, has a part to play.

To fulfill the dream of real quality improvement in ECEC services, each one of us, whatever our role, must stay true to the vision of the 2009 COAG agreements.

An important part of this is implementing *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (EYLF) (DEEWR, 2009), something which is both challenging and rewarding.

This issue of Voice outlines the 'EYLF Professional Learning Program' (EYLF PLP)—ECA's multifaceted DEEWR-funded program of information, exploration and support for people implementing the EYLF. The major focus of the EYLF PLP is the sharing of professional information and

conversation, and it invites participation and input from everyone—practitioners, trainers and others—to make it rich and useful for all.

With regard to Professor Rigney's challenge and encouragement, ECA is committed to building and acting on our own Reconciliation Action Plans around Australia. We are serious about this commitment and invite you to join us. There are many necessities of basic wellbeing that must be addressed for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, if our society is to live up to the promise of the 2008 National Apology and redress injustices. ECA will find ways to advocate strongly in this.

Sometimes it's easy to be overwhelmed by demands for change, the complexity of problems and the need to muster energy and resources to see things through.

The words of Martin Luther King were a great reminder to me that even when the goal is enormous, keeping the vision alive and being energised by the righteousness and importance of the task are powerful inspirations in working for change.

For information about building tailored Reconciliation Action Plans, please visit: www.reconciliation.org.au/home/reconciliation-action-plans.

Margaret Young

National President
Early Childhood Australia

References:

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). (2009). *Belonging, being and becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*. Canberra: DEEWR.

I Have a Dream. (n.d.) Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. Retrieved 28 November 2010, from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I_Have_a_Dream

(Thank you to Elspeth Harley for thinking 'revolution' and Noemi Northridge for the four words.)

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ABOUT THE EYLF PLP

Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (EYLF) was distributed to early childhood education and care (ECEC) services last year. Since then, early childhood practitioners in vastly different contexts have been grappling with what the EYLF means for them and their work with children and families.

Because the EYLF is so important in framing the work of early childhood services, Early Childhood Australia (ECA) has been funded by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations to design and deliver an integrated suite of professional learning strategies to support the implementation of the EYLF.

The EYLF Professional Learning Program (PLP) has five elements:

- EYLF Professional Learning Workshops across urban and regional Australia, delivered by early childhood practitioners with high-level knowledge and practical experience—scheduled for 2011.
- An EYLF PLP online interactive Forum where issues arising in practice are raised in supported professional conversation. Read on to gain a sense of some of the conversations on the forum.
- Regular, fortnightly e-Newsletters which provide information about how educators are engaging with the EYLF across a range of settings.
- A set of EYLF PLP online Master Class videos for use by services with staff. Read on to hear about how one service used the Master Class on *Intentional teaching*.
- A series of film vignettes which capture effective practice in relation to the EYLF and provide stimulus for staff discussion.

These five elements function as part of an integrated strategy that will provide ongoing support to services as they engage in the EYLF implementation process.

The effectiveness of the EYLF PLP will depend on feedback and input from the early education and care sector as it is rolled out. Questions that come up in the Professional Learning Workshops will inform the e-Newsletters and issues raised in the online Forum.

- The online EYLF PLP Forum will provide a space where ECEC professionals can talk about issues, answer questions and share the experience of working with the *Early Years Learning Framework*.
- Case studies/stories contributed by services which are working with the EYLF will be important in making real for others the possibilities of the EYLF. (More information about submitting case studies can be found on the EYLF PLP homepage.)

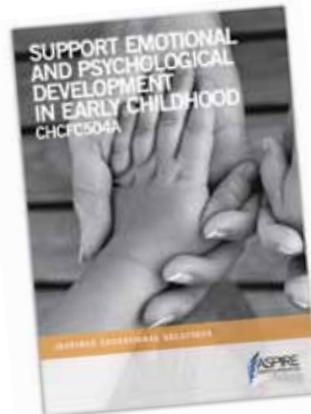
Feedback on online resources will be important in ensuring the usefulness of these resources.

The EYLF Professional Learning Program will complement and add value to the work of the Professional Support Coordinators (PSCs).

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FEATURING THE EYLF PLP ONLINE FORUM

As an EYLF PLP Forum Contributor I have been really interested, challenged and informed by the Forum posts so far. My workplace challenge is to find a way for all my staff to become as engaged in the Forum and its various threads as I have. It is a wonderful way to 'test' ideas and thinking as well as reflect on ways each of us is approaching the implementation of the EYLF in our own unique settings. Early Childhood Australia can tell by the statistics that many people are reading the posts. Please take the next step—register and comment, respond, clarify and engage in the whole process. It is only when we as practitioners tell our stories and talk about our practices that we can make sense of all that sits behind the Early Years Learning Framework. There is no one way.

Judy Radich, Forum Contributor.

Voices from the EYLF PLP online Forum:

Holistic approaches—require educators to understand terminology and be reflective

Voice 1 One of the struggles we have faced in a childcare service where educators work different days and shifts, is to find time to have professional conversations around the EYLF. While the glossary at the back describes the terminology, which is really helpful, we decided it was important that our staff created their own understandings. We created a wall space in the staff room and placed a large easel sized post it note up. We have chosen one word or phrase from the Framework, such as belonging, cultural competence, reflective practice etc. and educators are asked to jot down a few examples of how in their own practices they do this... This has enabled us to work through the 'big ideas' in the EYLF along with the principles and practices. What we are finding is the more we discuss these things the less certain we become. It would have been easy to focus on the outcomes but we now understand that when we work this way the outcomes will unfold.

Voice 2 I think the process you have described is so important — making the terms real, making them live in practice and linking them to the everyday.

Voice 3 It's also great that you're paying attention to the Practices and Principles. They are as important as the Outcomes, and have direct implications for what you do every day.

Voice 4 I think one of the reasons that some services are going straight to the Learning Outcomes is that they are just feeling their way with the EYLF and this seems to be a good place to start. It is important however, that over time, educators reflect on how their service is engaging with each of the elements of the Framework Principles, Practice and Learning Outcomes, and to see the multitude of ways that Belonging, Being and Becoming are reflected in their work with children and families.

Voice 5 The Framework is providing early childhood educators nationally with a common language to communicate about and reflect on children's learning.

Voice 6 I agree with you all that it is very important to reach shared understandings of the terms used in the EYLF as a group of colleagues. I find that we often assume 'everyone thinks the same as me' because we use the same terms but often we have different understandings of the same term.

Learning through play—play-based curriculum for kindergarten to Year 2 versus national curriculum

Voice 1 What are other early childhood teachers' experiences of professional development for the new national curriculum? Early indications for science and English literacy is 10 week mandatory units with activities and pedagogy prescribed. Not much scope therefore to incorporate our considerable efforts implementing play-based early childhood approaches (at least for part of the day) for Kindergarten, Year 1 and Year 2 classes.

Any thoughts? Have we lost the chance to extend early childhood practices beyond Preschool?

Voice 2 Wouldn't it be great if the EYLF flows on well into the national curriculum, I don't know too much about it yet. Wouldn't it also make sense that as we will have a national EYLF and a national curriculum we should be using the same terminology so as not to confuse parents?

Voice 3

The forthcoming Australian Curriculum for Schools is just that – for schools. It begins with what (for some reason) is termed 'Kinder' but is intended to apply to 'students in school settings who are five years and over' – i.e. Prep or Reception in most jurisdictions. It is certainly important that ECA, like-minded organisations & individuals in early childhood advocate for informed play-based practice across the early years of children's learning lives.

Continuity of learning and transitions

Voice 1

We know that continuity of experiences and effective transitions from one setting to another are very important in assisting with children's long term and short term growth.

Voice 2

Children are transitioning daily - drop off's, pickups, friends, moving play rooms, new relief staff, new additions to families. How we enable children to deal with this constant shift around them is one of the keys to resilience. Knowing who their primary carers are, stable play environments, and carers taking the time to connect with families each day to ensure that there is a smooth hand over and also so that we can manage the collection at the end of the day.

Voice 3

How do other services manage these when like us they have children going to six, seven or eight different schools? We like to give schools some information about each child - not all of them want it. How do other services manage these things to support this really important transition?

Voice 4

We also provide a very detailed transition to school statement, that has previously reflected the NSW Curriculum Framework and last year we transitioned to the EYLF language. Schools ask for this early in term four, most are using this to help them with classroom arrangements. We provide the statement to families and provide them with additional copies and ask that they hand this onto their school.

Assessment for learning—planning and documenting

Voice 1

I have started this new thread because I cannot tell you how many conversation I have with educators about planning and documentation. It's another one of the 'hot topics'.

Voice 2

I think the documentation is hard - I know we are on a constant journey here - we are always tweaking how we record, map and gather information. (since we have changed formats three times this year already!) I think you are right when asking for us to explore what and why we are doing this. I think we need to have the conversations in our settings that ask that very question. WHY! WHERE! WHEN! What do I record, How do I plan? etc.

Voice 3

I think the documentation is probably the most challenging of all the areas. I personally would like to see a few examples/models of the expectations.

Voice 4

In Victoria I see a wide range of methods used including, written observations, samples of children's work, photographs, videos, checklists, learning stories, portfolios, journals, children's words and ideas written down etc. It seems that some educators are either 'drowning' in documentation because they document too much and find it difficult to be selective-what is worth documenting, or they don't have sufficient or appropriate documentation to help them understand what children value, know and can do. One of the things to think about is that documentation has little value ... until it is analysed or interpreted by educators, families and children or other professionals who might be working with the child. The analysis then forms the basis for further planning... offering the same learning experience, modifying the learning experience, adding something new to the learning experience—re-thinking what you are planning and doing to support or promote a child's or a group of children's learning.

Feel free to email your questions and comments to us at eylfpjp@earlychildhood.org.au and we'll post your contributions onto the Forum so that early childhood and care professionals can respond to them. Make sure you watch the Forum to see other people's responses to your contributions!

BEGINNING CONVERSATIONS

Here, Neville Dwyer talks about the impact that one of the 'beta' version Master Classes had on his staff at a recent staff meeting.

1. What situation did you play the Master Class video in?

We used the Master Class at our staff meeting—after we had dealt with the day to day and mundane. We have staff meetings each month and staff from both services attend. This year we have been exploring aspects of the EYLF and having long discussions about practice—what we will change and why and then has it made a difference? We have redesigned templates that we use to gather data and have re-tweaked these.

Over the past few months we have held the staff meeting in two parts—first off we deal with the operational issues, and then we have a workshop—mostly presented by myself. With the Master Class option I thought it would be advantageous to have a different voice speak to the staff.

2. Did your staff discuss the video?

Once the video was finished I asked for thoughts and impressions.

My newest staff member commented: 'Wow this is about everything we do—intention is about our whole day, everything we plan for and provide'.

We then talked about the content. Everyone commented that it was easy to understand, it clarified our discussions and also gave new knowledge.

3. What impact did the Master Class have on staff?

I followed up the next day with all staff who had attended. I asked what they had reflected on since watching the presentation.

Some had gone back to look at it again when they got home, or had read through the PowerPoint notes—some staff had actually been taking lots of notes as Judy spoke. All said that it made them reflect on what they did, and gave them a greater sense of how important all their contact with children was, and how they set up the spaces and the routines.

'I really liked the statement that Judy made that we need an "outlook of uncertainty" to re-think what we thought we know, that's our challenge'—is a comment that one staff member made to me.

Overall the Master Class is great. It isn't me talking, it's a different voice, it's a similar message, but for my staff I'm often the only voice they hear. Even though we have access to training and staff attend workshops, choice is limited. Access to exceptional practitioners talking and also seeing examples makes it real—Judy spoke of examples that resonate with my team, they see themselves in her space, they can identify and that makes a difference.

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The format of the Master Classes is currently under review and being updated. The new versions will be launched in early 2011.



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THE EYLF PLP E-NEWSLETTER

The EYLF PLP e-Newsletter gives momentum to the work of implementing the EYLF by providing case studies and other information about how educators are engaging with the EYLF across a range of settings. Researched and written by an ECEC expert, with the support of other ECEC practitioners, it responds to content in the online Forums; questions and issues raised at the Workshops; information from case studies of services; and requests from services about particular issues they are facing.

The first issues:

EYLF PLP e-Newsletter #1:

Talking about play—gives consideration to ‘... play as a legitimate space in which young children learn’ and challenges our understanding of how play enriches the value of children’s learning.

EYLF PLP e-Newsletter #2:

Intentional teaching—focuses on teaching in a ‘... thoughtful, informed and deliberate way’, in order to maximise children’s learning and development outcomes.

EYLF PLP e-Newsletter #3:

Thinking about play—unpacks some of the tensions that exist between ‘traditional practice’ and ‘new perspectives’.

You can be notified about the latest edition of the EYLF PLP e-Newsletter by subscribing on the EYLF PLP Homepage (www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au), where you can also access previous issues of the EYLF PLP e-Newsletter.



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