PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

As many of you know already, ECA is strongly committed to Reconciliation. Our obligation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children flows directly from our commitments to social justice and the rights of children, and forms part of our ECA Strategic Directions.

We are now working to develop and implement a formal ECA Reconciliation Action Plan, or RAP, and hope that you will follow our progress and actively join us in this if you can.

None of us in ECA regards ourselves as experts in this, nor do we find it easy. However, we have come to believe that to achieve the change necessary for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children around Australia, we each need to change ourselves and our organisation. In doing this, we will ultimately change society. We also believe that is more important to do something with care and goodwill than to do nothing for fear of making a mistake.

In this spirit, when I was privileged to make some closing remarks at a recent ECA Tasmania Forum The Door Opens, I reflected on the significance of the day’s events and our learning about Reconciliation—from the warm and generous welcome by Aunty Phyllis, a local Aboriginal Elder, through the key ideas presented by the different speakers. These all meshed together to enrich both our ECEC practice and our Reconciliation journey:

Vision—we need to dream to know what we want the world to be like for all children and particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. This will fuel our commitment to act and our determination to apply the resources required to support action—not only financial resources but qualities like energy, time, creativity, determination, flexibility, and resilience.

Awareness—this involves living fully in the moment—being observant, sensitive and empathetic, looking for opportunities to make a difference, creating those opportunities, and taking them. We need to find out all sorts of things: what is it really like for Aboriginal people? How do they perceive their past and its significance, their present and its realities? What is the significance of their connection to place and nature? What are their dreams for their children and our shared society?

Reflection—being a reflective practitioner and a reflective person. Most of us have some discomfort as we ask ourselves what can we do to make a difference; what if we make a mistake or offend someone? But being reflective helps us to think about, understand and address our own fears and strengths and have the courage to act.

Relationships—one of the great tools we have in our work for Reconciliation. We know that our relationships with colleagues and friends give us support and encouragement in difficult tasks. In the same way, building relationships with Aboriginal people will help us greatly in the work of Reconciliation, where we have so much to learn and so far to go.

Mahatma Gandhi said, ‘You must be the change you want to see in the world’. We believe that this is certainly true, and that if we can change ourselves we will start to see true Reconciliation.

Margaret Young
National President
Early Childhood Australia
FOUNDATIONS FOR LEARNING: RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE EARLY YEARS LEARNING FRAMEWORK AND THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM

We are at an exciting time in the history of education in Australia. Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF), the first national framework for early education and care settings, was launched in 2009 and the first phase of the Australian Curriculum for the school sector is being implemented from 2011.

ECA, in collaboration with the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), has developed an information paper: Foundations for learning. The paper responds to requests from early childhood educators working in the non-school and school sectors for an authoritative statement explaining how the EYLF and the Australian Curriculum are connected.

Foundations for learning describes key connections between the EYLF and the Australian Curriculum and assures educators and families that there is a coherent vision for teaching and learning across the varied geographic, political and institutional landscape of Australia.

It strongly confirms the fact that quality early childhood practice, underpinned as it is by the EYLF, establishes solid foundations for students’ successful engagement with the Australian Curriculum.

Challenges and opportunities

Educators working with children from birth to age five in children’s services, preschool and kindergarten settings are using Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework in conjunction with state and territory curriculum documents as required.

Educators working with children from age five enrolled in full-time school will be using the Australian Curriculum from ‘Foundation’ as each phase of curriculum is developed nationally and implemented in their jurisdiction.

Families with young children often engage with both sectors of early education and care, and children will make transitions between settings which use different guidelines for planning and providing learning programs. In early years composite classes, teachers may face the challenge of working with two or more curriculum documents.

While these different curriculum models can present challenges, they also offer opportunities. Having both the EYLF and the Australian Curriculum available provides a vehicle for a shared conversation between early childhood educators working in school and non-school settings, enhancing mutual respect and continuity of support for children’s learning in the vital early years.

The Australian Curriculum builds on early learning

The objectives enshrined in the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEECDBA, 2008) are lifelong aspirations that acknowledge the learning process begins at birth.

The EYLF respects children as competent and resourceful learners from birth and aims to extend that learning in a variety of early learning settings in partnership with children and families.

The Australian Curriculum recognises that the EYLF establishes the foundations for effective learning in school and throughout life and aims to build on those foundations as learners move through schooling (ACARA, 2001, p.10):

The Australian Curriculum is aligned with the Early Years Learning Framework and builds on its key Learning Outcomes, namely: children have a strong sense of identity; children are connected with and contribute to their world; children have a strong sense of wellbeing; children are confident and engaged learners; and children are effective communicators.

The broad Learning Outcomes of the EYLF clearly articulate with the general capabilities of the Australian Curriculum.

For example:

- Outcomes 1, 2 and 3 of the EYLF provide essential foundations for ‘Personal and social competence’.
- Outcome 2 underpins the capacity for ‘Ethical behaviour’ and ‘Intercultural understanding’.
- Outcome 4 develops the dispositions for ‘Critical and creative thinking’.
- Outcome 5 includes the fundamental concepts and skills required for ‘Literacy’, ‘Numeracy’ and ‘Information and communication technology (ICT) competence’.

Similar learning emphases

There are specific links between ‘learning content’ in both frameworks. For example, EYLF Learning Outcome 4 closely relates to the Australian Curriculum—Science.

EYLF Learning Outcome 4: Children are engaged and confident learners

Key component 2:

Children develop a range of skills and processes such as problem solving, inquiry, experimentation, hypothesising, researching and investigating.

- This is evident when they:
  - apply a wide range of thinking strategies to engage with situations and solve problems

Continued on p. 3
Implications for educators

The EYLF and the Australian Curriculum are complementary and can provide an articulated pathway of learning from prior-to-school, into school and beyond.

The EYLF presents a national set of priorities for young children’s learning. Using the EYLF, high-quality early childhood settings build the values, dispositions, concepts and skills that are prerequisite to successful engagement with the Australian Curriculum.

Teachers in the early years of school are encouraged to build on what children know and can do, consolidating capabilities essential for later learning. They gradually introduce the content of the Australian Curriculum as learners demonstrate the ability to access it and they revisit concepts and skills as required to ensure solid foundations for next-stage learning.

Educators in both non-school and school sectors need to:

- value the learning that children bring
- establish and maintain strong relationships and communication with families
- provide engaging, inquiry-driven, world-related and learner-focused programs
- integrate and contextualise learning and connect the ‘old’ to the ‘new’
- engage in critical self-reflection and ongoing professional learning.

Continuity of learning provision maximises children’s success in new learning environments. The starting point for early childhood educators at the school interface will lie in rich conversations with colleagues and taking the time to identify and value the dispositions and understandings that children bring to next-stage learning.

Jenni Connor
Early Childhood Consultant and Writer


References


AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE FOR TEACHING AND SCHOOL LEADERSHIP EXEMPLARY PRACTICE PROJECT

ECA is involved in a project to develop supporting documentation for the National Professional Standards for Teachers. There is powerful evidence that the quality of teaching—‘teacher effectiveness’—is the most significant factor in student achievement.

Professional standards for teachers guide continuous improvement across the profession, support recognition of excellence and raise public perception about the vital role that teachers play in the lives and futures of young learners. The Standards describe the key elements of quality teaching, articulating what teachers are expected to know and be able to do at various stages in their careers—as Graduate, Proficient, Highly Accomplished and Lead teachers.

The ‘Annotations’ project is funded through the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL). The project requires myself, Jenni Connor, as a consultant, to visit a small number of school-based early childhood settings and record what high-quality practice looks like in relation to Standards 1, 2, 3 and 4 and a number of their Elements. The documentation will include ‘static’ written annotations and ‘dynamic’ film material.

Four schools with exemplary early childhood teachers who are working with children aged five to eight have been selected and agreed to participate: one in rural NSW, two in northern Tasmania and one in the ACT.

The main focus will be on Standard 3—Professional practice: Plan for and implement effective teaching and learning. The particular strengths of each setting will provide additional information and examples:

- The teacher and school in Orange will provide a focus on culturally inclusive practice and strategies for Reconciliation, including establishing challenging and achievable learning goals.
- The teacher and school in north-west Tasmania will add depth to documentation relating to knowledge of content and teaching strategies, especially literacy and numeracy.
- The teacher and school in Launceston will highlight the use of resources, including ICT to engage students in problem solving, creative and critical thinking.
- The teacher and school in the ACT will encompass inquiry learning to support student engagement, sequencing learning and supporting students with special needs.

I will observe each teacher in the classroom to record how they go about their daily work and identify which key features contribute to their positive impact on children’s learning. It is hoped that this information will not only support the implementation of the Standards nationally, but will inform early childhood educators, more broadly, about models of play-based inquiry learning programs that enable children to achieve vital learning outcomes.

Separately, ECA has also been working for some time on Standards for highly accomplished early childhood teachers working with children aged three to eight years. The AITSL-funded project, with its focus on five- to eight-year-olds, will connect with the ECA work in progress and show ways of capturing rich descriptions of best quality, highly professional early childhood practice. These investigations into Standards will clarify what is ‘special’ about early childhood practice and support early childhood education and care services to make the link between highly accomplished teaching and outcomes for children.

Jenni Connor
Early Childhood Consultant and Writer

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COMMITMENT TO THE NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD (NQS)—WHAT MIGHT IT MEAN FOR AUSTRALIA DAY?

Contributors to the EYLF PLP Facebook page have begun to start their own discussions, unprompted by our professional moderators. This is a great development in the sharing of information and ideas among the ECEC community. The discussion below is an example of this community in action—exploring the cultural competence requirements of the EYLF and how we can relate these to issues surrounding Australia Day. Visit the EYLF PLP Facebook page to read articles and contribute to the ongoing conversation.

**Voice 1:** What sort of activities and learning experiences are educators offering to children to celebrate Australia Day? Would appreciate any suggestions that support the EYLF.

January 16 at 10:43pm  Like 1

**Voice 2:** Thinking of Aus anthem... Other cultures' anthems... Children to reflect and discuss their culture but to conclude that we are all Australian.

January 16 at 10:43pm  Like 2

**Voice 3:** Ask the children what it means to them? Ask your families how they celebrate? Make it meaningful to the children and follow their lead to make connections to their home culture. What do the staff do—what can they share? Look at the maps and countries—use calendars to mark other national days! How did it originate and why do we celebrate? Go on a journey of discovering through your children's eyes!!

January 17 at 9:35am  Like 2

**Voice 4:** We are learning the national anthem, aboriginal pictures, flags, animals, map of Australia and where we live etc.

January 17 at 10:14am  Like 2

**Voice 5:** Australia Day is also known as Invasion Day to our Indigenous people because it signifies a very sad and violent time of loss and destruction in their past. I also wonder how to include Indigenous children and still be respectful of how this day impacts their families. I value all of your suggestions so far, thanks all.

January 17 at 1:29pm  Like 1

**Voice 3:** Voice 1, I would share the Indigenous feelings and stories with the children and explore these emotions with the children. Is there a symbolic or traditional Indigenous way to remember ancestors and celebrate their life? Last term at preschool we explored death, heaven and family rituals surrounding these sad times in our lives. The learning was rich and the children showed amazing insight with empathy and respect.

January 17 at 3:56pm  Like

**Voice 5:** Australia Day is a great opportunity to think about what is means for the range of families we work with. Reflective practice in the EYLF asks us to think about who is advantaged and who is disadvantaged by what we celebrate or don’t celebrate. Voice 1, the issue you raise about the fact that Australia day is also known as Invasion Day is an important one. ECA has thought lots about this in the development of our Reconciliation Action Plan and would encourage educators to consider the different perspective on a day like Australia Day and explore issues of justice and equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families in the context of the programs we design for children. Voice 3, your suggestions to talk to children about Indigenous perspectives is a good one—it would be important to talk to families about it as well. Looking forward to more posts about this important element of Australian life.

January 17 at 4:33pm  Like

**Voice 6:** We are having one of our mums come in and talk to them about Australia Day and singing national anthem with them. She is also bringing balloons and flags with our flag on them :)

January 19 at 11:23pm  Like

**Voice 7:** I have nearly a whole new group of 15-month to two-and-a-half year olds starting on Monday. Ideas on how to introduce Australia Day in a way which is meaningful to them but mindful of EYLF, would be very welcome.

January 20 at 7:15pm  Like

**Voice 8:** A way to display cultural sensitivity when looking at Australia Day may be to use the Aboriginal 'Eight ways of learning' to explore the theme.

http://8ways.wikispaces.com/8way+basics%2C+start-up

January 22 at 2:06pm  Like
Voice 9: At the centre that I am currently relieving at, the age group is approx 12 months to 18 months. We have used the colours of the Aboriginal flag for the children to paint and then paste onto the painting. We have done hand prints of the children and staff on the windows, talking about Aboriginal rock painting as we did each child’s hand. We looked at Chinese New Year, which reminded me that we need to also look at all the cultures that make up Australia today. We used the children’s enrolment forms to find out what countries were represented in our room and what cultures we had in our room. We are now looking to ask families to bring in photos of themselves. We are going to make a permanent display to reflect the culture of the community and the room. We are aiming to celebrate what makes Australia the country it is today.

January 23 at 8:46pm · Like ·

Voice 9: PS. We are not really concerned with any of the art work actually representing a particular finished product, i.e. representation of a flag, animal etc., it is more about the process of experimenting with the mediums in this age group.

January 23 at 8:48pm · Like ·