

Response from Early Childhood Australia

A national quality framework for early childhood education and care: A discussion paper

In this submission ECA has chosen to focus on some aspects of the quality standards system as well as on the Early Years Learning Framework. We have done this because of the substantial and ongoing work we have been doing with the LHMU on the development of a workforce strategy and the other work we have been undertaking in relation to this process.

Part B: A national quality framework

Chapter 5 – What are the appropriate quality standards for early childhood education and care

Content – The quality drivers

Early Childhood Australia (ECA) believes that the proposed increased focus on early childhood learning and care in the Integrated Quality Standards System (IQSS) must reflect the evidence both about high quality effective early childhood services and about broader societal issues that have implications for children's wellbeing.

For ECA Children's wellbeing is seen as the overarching concept with a specific focus here on how this is realised in early learning and care services. Given this ECA believes that the drivers for the focus on education and care come from at least two sources.

- The work on early brain development and its implications for the role of adults in supporting children's wellbeing and learning, OECD Starting Strong Study and the EPPE research finding about effective early childhood programs. and
- Wider societal and policy issues which will effect children's wellbeing and the society now and into the future

Research findings which make explicit many of the quality drivers for effective early childhood services are well known. All of the findings are important but some of particular significance for the stronger focus on early learning and care particularly as it is captured in the proposed integrated quality standards system. For ECA these include the evidence confirms the significance of:

- Rich, sustained and trusting relationships and stress limited environments in children's early development and learning
- Warm, interactive relationships with children, having a teacher as the leader of the service and a good proportion of trained teachers have the greatest effect on quality.
- Settings with staff with specialist early childhood teaching qualifications with an early childhood teacher as curriculum leader
- The relationship between the improved performance of lesser qualified staff when working with qualified early childhood teachers.
- Services which integrate education and care through the addition of just one teacher or a peripatetic teacher are not associated with higher quality. Settings integrating care and education had high scores only when there was a good balance between 'care' and 'education' in terms of staff qualifications
- Successful integration of care and education is related to the proportion of staff with 'educational' qualifications
- An earlier start (at two) is associated with better intellectual development – high quality early education settings in integrated settings over a longer period has the strongest effect on children

- Settings where educational and social development are seen as complementary and of equal importance – children do better
- Teacher directed and child lead learning in a play based curriculum, the provision of instructive learning environments, sustained shared thinking to extend children's learning and small group activities are key elements of effective pedagogy in the early years.
- Settings where the curriculum was differentiated and there was a focus on children's diversity and where children learning was monitored promoted better outcomes for children
- Homes where parents actively engaged with in activities with children, including sustained shared thinking promoted intellectual and social development in all children.

ECA believes that each of these findings can be made explicit in an integrated standards quality system based on the quality drivers outlined in the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care.

The other set of issues which should be acknowledged as drivers for programs, are societal issues that will have significant implications for children's well being, are:

- Increased obesity and limited physical activity
- Sustainability and the environment
- The Apology to the Stolen Generations and the special obligations that imposes on Australians
- The Productivity Agenda and its implications for workforce reform in the early childhood sector

ECA believes that the only way to reflect the increased focus on early children education, care and outcomes for children is to ensure that the standards themselves reflect the evidence.

It should be noted that the evidence is not strong for some services. The result is that findings from broader research such as the work on early brain development and more specific research such the OECD Starting Strong Report and the EPPE research are being extrapolated to identify quality practices in other services.

ECA recommends that the findings identified above are of such importance that they should have significant status in the proposed integrated quality standards system.

ECA recommends that where standards do not have or depart from the evidence base and are based on practice and experience this should be identified.

Content - The use of the term educator (*Refer page 16. Second last paragraph*)

The use of the term educators interchangeably with teachers in this paragraph is worthy of comment.

Yes teachers are educators and as the paragraph rightly identifies specialist (qualified) early childhood teachers (as opposed to all educators) are knowledgeable in early childhood development and learning and skilled in the development of programs based on the evidence which support children's learning in systematic ways.

The term educator on the other hand is a broader term than teachers and includes of all those who have a role in children's learning:

- Parents (children's first educators),

- Early childhood teachers as well as other staff working with children in preschools and long day care centres
- Family day care carers. ECA believes that professional staff in the coordination units who have responsibility for the professional support and possibly supervision of the family day care carers should have specialised early childhood teaching degrees.

What differentiates the teacher in this collective concept of educator is specialist early children teacher qualifications which include specialist knowledge and capabilities in regard to teaching and learning, children's development etc. It is these qualifications which the EPPE research has identified as being essential to the delivery of quality programs in centre based services. It is these qualifications which underwrite the finding that people with lesser qualifications work more effectively and intentionally when supported by a qualified early childhood teacher.

Staff members with higher levels of qualification in leadership positions necessarily have different levels of responsibility in early childhood services. This is particularly so in regard to program, pedagogical and professional leadership and support of less qualified staff. The significance of this role in the delivery of an effective early childhood program has been highlighted in the research. Given this the significance of the qualification should not be masked in the integrated quality standards system documentation by the use of a collective descriptor such as educator.

Further making the distinction between early childhood teacher qualified staff and unqualified staff (those that require planned professional support) would allow to standards to highlight the role of professional support as well as pedagogical and program leadership in quality early childhood programs. Importantly it would also provide a framework for focusing the essential role of the FDC coordination in the supervision and professional support of family day care carers.

It is for these reasons that ECA recommends that the term educator should not be used, in the final integrated quality standards document when what is being leveraged is the specialist skills, knowledge and pedagogical leadership that an early childhood teacher brings to an early learning environment.

Coverage

The same for everyone?

The degree to which quality standards can be uniform across service types will be dependent on:

- The purpose of the service and priorities within that purpose e.g. what weight is given to children, families and parents within that purpose – LDC and Mobile Services would be different in this regard
- The service's target audience – age of children
- The requirements in regard to management and leadership, staffing, the relationships between staff and children etc
- The evidence base supporting the specification of standards within each service type

And

- The service delivery context/setting
- The qualifications of the staff

Mapping the various service types against this matrix would make it possible to determine service type x service type whether or to what degree a common rating system is possible.

Outside Schools Hours Care for instance is fundamentally different from all other child care services on key aspects of this matrix.

- The purpose of OSHC is recreation rather than learning. The children in these services have been in formal schooling for the day and so what is needed is a program which allows them to relax, do homework, practice musical instruments or simply play. Some would say they need to be able to veg out.
- OSHC's focus is children from five to twelve year of age and older if these children have special needs.
- OSHC's has many of the same management and leadership obligations of other services including responsibility for staff etc.
- Qualifications and capability requirements for the program facilitators are different
- OSHC services do not generally operate in purpose built facilities in the same way as do child care centres and preschools.
- The evidence base for effective OSHC programs is limited and so often quality practice is practice based or extrapolated from other more general research

What this shows is that some but not all of elements in the integrated quality standards system will need to be different. The most obvious difference will be in relation to the program.

Rating the other services against this matrix would be instructive in making the decision about to what degree the standards can be common.

ECA believes that there will some elements of all services that will be common but that the differences between services on the matrices ECA has identified means that almost all services will require different quality standards in some areas.

Responding to the different ages of the children

ECA is of the very strong view that the drivers for quality are the same for all age groups in child care settings for birth to five year olds. However for younger children the quality of the relationships with adults is central hence the commitment to higher staff: child ratios and also to teacher led programs. It is particularly important that the very young child is cared for by knowledgeable, responsive adults whom children trust because they know them well. This is the foundations of attachment and security.

For the very young the notion that children learn in the context of relationships is fundamental. This does not mean however that all they are learning about is relationships. The child under two is also learning about communication and language, early mathematics, social relationships and about themselves such as early on learning to distinguish between themselves and others. Young children too are developing physically and learning through exploration about the world around them.

What this means is that the quality drivers might be the same but the evidence of their achievement will be different.

Transition to the new system

The transition to the new system will take time given the aspirational nature of the proposed commitments to four year qualified early childhood teachers, increasing child: staff ratios etc. The achievement of the system's vision is dependent on a workforce strategy which will see teacher lead programs in all services and all staff with some level of early childhood qualification.

Notwithstanding the Government's commitment to a workforce strategy people cannot be trained overnight. ECA's own view is that the upgrading of EC Diploma qualification to a four years specialist

qualification will take three (3) years. As well as this there are remuneration issues that will need to be resolved if there is to be any real incentive to people to work in the early childhood services sector particularly in childcare. This will take time. What is needed is a strategy which maps out the route to a qualified early childhood workforce, sets interim goals and timeframes for reaching them. This is urgent work as a stable and capable workforce is the glue on which the integrated quality standards system is dependent.

Similarly moving to higher staff: child ratios is not necessarily a simply matter. Baby rooms reflect existing regulations re space etc so moving from a room for 10 babies at a 1:5 ratio to a room for 12 babies at a 1:3 ratio would not be possible. The only other alternative would be to reduce the number of babies enrolled to 9 and employ an additional staff member. Changes of this kind also need to be planned if they are to be implemented without major disruption to families and service providers.

ECA applauds the aspirational elements of the quality standards system and would not want to see this lost in the transition to the new system. If they are then the opportunity to truly raise the quality of the system overall will be lost.

ECA also applauds the explicitness of the acknowledgement that the quality of services is inadequate when the evidence based standards re child: staff ratios and qualifications are not met. This acknowledgement will be a strong protective factor against the watering down of the requirements for quality.

ECA believes that the quality standards system should give some real indication of the quality of the service but that it should also require and ongoing focus on continuous improvement. Accreditation is an event. The delivery of a quality service in an ongoing way requires a commitment to a process of continuous improvement.

What ECA suggests is that:

- The concept of a transition period, where standards are met at a lower level than would be expected with evidence based ratios and teacher lead programs be considered
- The provisional accreditation for two years be given to all services that meet standards to the degree possible given the absence of the evidence based ratios and qualified staff required to deliver a high quality service. Services receiving provisional accreditation are required to develop a quality improvement plan which includes mechanisms to move toward the evidence based standards in regard to child: staff ratios and the qualifications of staff particularly.
- Full accreditation is available to those services which meet all standards including the employment of teachers and adult: child ratios which reflect the evidence.
- That services which fail be required to be work with the PSC to develop and implement a quality improvement plan to mitigate the weaknesses in their services. Following that a second accreditation event is scheduled within 24 weeks. If they fail again then these services are fined, engage in the same process but a pay fee for service to the PSC and pay the full cost of the third accreditation event.

ECA sees these ideas as simply that. What we understand though is the need to find a way to move to the new system that does not imply, as is currently the case, that quality is possible when the fundamentals of the evidence based standards are absent.

Part C: A national early years learning framework

General:

The Discussion Paper offers a sound overview of contemporary understandings about young children's development. At this stage it does not explore the discourses around learning and the role of the teacher; it does not explicate the characteristics of successful early education models in any depth; or investigate the areas of contestation between competing theories and methodologies. It is hoped that these will receive explicit attention in the final Framework and resources. However, the Paper does provide a valuable rationale for thoughtful, planned and informed investment in the early years of children's lives.

It is vital that the relationship between the proposed National Standards Framework and the National Early years Learning Framework is precisely delineated with accountability linked to desirable learning outcomes for children.

Chapter 9

'Quality'

The Paper refers to the traditionally accepted dimensions of quality including structural features around staff training and ratios; and process features affecting the dynamics of the early childhood environment, including group size and most importantly, the quality of adult-child interactions. Both sets of dimensions are prerequisite to providing quality early childhood education and care and the characteristics of 'settings that deliver quality' will need to be described and assured as part of the implementation of the Framework.

Early Childhood Australia (ECA) suggests that the most significant measure of 'quality' lies in the *outcomes* children achieve as a result of the planned learning experiences they are engaged within care and early education environments. Such measures are clearly related to standards; and the standards should relate closely to the goals of each particular service type. Drawing on the work of William Spady (1993) ECA believes that *outcomes should describe the learning children might be expected to exhibit* and that accountability measures should require evidence of children's well being and progress towards such agreed goals. As Spady explains, quality programs arise from 'designing back' from specific learning goals – 'what will we need to do to enable children to learn these things?'

ECA recognises that the 'qualitative indicators of quality' are much harder to measure and to ensure than structural components, but ECA would wish to stress the significance of the following as vital for all children to learn and thrive:

- highly responsive adult-child interactions;
- good management and leadership;
- program planning and delivery that is knowledgeable and skilled; and
- connectedness to families and their communities.

While implied, three points relating to the issue of 'quality' in the Paper could be strengthened: the importance of informed monitoring of children's learning progress; appropriate intervention; and staff stability, which is essential to enable strong, reliable relationships to be built by wise, dependable adults with young children.

Dahlberg, Moss & Pence (*Beyond Quality in Early Childhood* 1999) also point out that:

- Quality is unequally distributed with Indigenous, impoverished and remote communities often unable to access appropriate preschool experiences for their children.

- Quality is a dynamic concept which changes as our understanding of infants and toddlers and their welfare and optimum growth changes.
- Quality is contextualised in that we need to recognise cultural, sub-cultural and other forms of diversity in our understanding and measures.

As a consequence of past practices and current disadvantages, Indigenous families require particular support in bringing up children safe and strong.

Recent studies (Institute of Family Studies & SNAICC 2007) identify the characteristics of 'promising Indigenous services' as:

- Developing positive cultural identity and self-esteem;
- Fostering resilience in the early stages of children's development;
- Nurturing relatedness between children and others;
- Demonstrating respect through understanding and connectivity with children and families;
- Offering appropriate early intervention before problems become entrenched;
- Recruiting skilled, committed, Indigenous staff and providing on-going training;
- Using a collaborative approach where staff feel valued and involved in decision-making; &
- Offering a comprehensive service to children and families.

ECA endorses the following comment from the above study as extremely pertinent to issues of quality in *all* early education and care services:

Carers who are appropriately trained and resourced develop skills, knowledge and confidence in their caring role. This leads to improved outcomes for children and young people in their care (Promising Practices Book 3, p. 5).

While respecting that family members and other caring adults and siblings contribute to children's early learning and dispositions, ECA suggests that the role of the professional early childhood teacher is somewhat different. ECA strongly asserts that to truly 'educate' ('to lead forth') in a deliberate, intentional and informed way, practitioners who work with children in the first vital years of their lives must hold four year degree qualifications in early childhood education/teaching.

All 'quality' early childhood services should be an essential part of the ecological system nurturing the child, networking support, advice and information to families and offering new spaces for conversations about and with children. Such services should play a significant role in giving young children the best possible start in their lives as learners, and as people who can enjoy and contribute to a democratic society.

Effective conditions for young children's learning

A number of studies (QSRLS 2000) indicate that educators generally are good at pastoral care, but less effective in providing cognitive stretch for children and young people or in understanding their backgrounds and preferred learning styles. This focus on 'providing care' is replicated in most children's services and early education settings. Similarly, what is often less apparent is a focus on rich, extended conversations, thinking and problem solving with children; nor is there always evidence of strong cultural connection beyond superficial symbols. ECA urges the national framework to pay respect to the cognitive and cultural needs of young children in Australia's diverse community by encouraging intellectual challenge in programs and connections with children's prior learning.

Referring to the work of Walker, D. & Kelly, M. (2002); Bransford, J. et al (1999); and Fogarty, R. (1998) ECA suggests that 'provision for learning' should meet basic human psychological needs for security,

belonging and stimulation, pay attention to learner motivation and dispositions and operate as learning-focused environments.

Relationship with existing state and territory curriculum and guidelines

There is in fact, remarkable synchronicity between systems' aspirations and expectations at early childhood levels of education.

The focus is generally on:

- the personal;
- the interpersonal/social
- understanding the world – science, technology and environmental responsibility
- thinking – including inquiry, mathematics and problem solving
- communicating – including literacy, arts and creativity

As the Discussion Paper notes, systems vary in their structural organisation for education for children from 0-6 and, in most cases, lack an agreed 'curriculum' or 'program guide' across public and private provision. Curriculum statements for the school sector in SA, Vic. & Tasmania have strong similarities of content and intent, but are not necessarily mandated for children's services settings. In other jurisdictions, 'pre-school' is available through a range of providers on a fee for service basis. The intended National Early Years Learning Framework will therefore need to be robust enough to support practitioners with varying levels of training and experience, while retaining sufficient flexibility for highly qualified and skilled educators to respond intelligently to the diverse needs of children in their very different settings.

At the same time ECA is clear that the outcomes for children in programs lead by qualified early childhood teachers will necessarily be better than for those children in programs led by staff with lesser qualifications. ECA believes one of the key stepping stones to system wide quality would be qualified early childhood curriculum leadership in all services. Indeed much of the research indicates that the services with early childhood leadership are more effective in terms of outcome for children.

9.4 Questions

Philosophy:

The Framework should not espouse a single pedagogical approach but should make clear its understandings about learning and about how young children's progress optimally can be supported. A 'philosophy' is a world view and in this case, ECA recommends a view that places the child at the centre of educational endeavours, as an active player in their own lives, working with others to create and maintain a civil society. Learner well being lies at the heart of this vision and strong positive relationships with significant adults are the foundation for well being and learning.

Further, ECA believes that children are entitled to culturally valued knowledge of two kinds: that which enables them to retain and build identity and connection to their cultural roots, including access to the language/s of their culture/s; and that which enables them to fully participate in the economic, social and political life of their wider community, including competence in valued forms of learning.

Form of Framework

'Curriculum' derives from the notion of 'a course to be run' and hence should specify what exactly learners should come to know, understand and be able to do from their experience in the learning setting. The term 'framework', implies a structure upon which educators will need to 'hang' more detailed

descriptions of what learning programs will contain and what they are intended to achieve. A 'skeletal' notion of 'framework' is therefore a cause for some concern. ECA recognises that highly trained and experienced teachers are entitled to the professional flexibility to adapt programs to their circumstances, but, as noted earlier, ECA asserts that the proposed 'framework' should be sufficiently detailed to enable *all* staff, with appropriate support from an early childhood teacher, to implement programs that promote appropriate learning for *all* children. The issue here is that although some jurisdictions already have, or developing, early childhood curriculum frameworks some jurisdictions are without such support to services. The Framework needs to be able to be useful in both context – where there is already curriculum documentation and where there is not.

ECA believes that the Framework should avoid rigid age- and stage-based assumptions about what young children can do, while recognising that many practitioners require information about expected phases in children's development along a continuum in order to plan appropriately. ECA also accepts the significance of the social and cultural features of the learning context and the power of interaction with experienced learners to challenge and extend children's thinking and understanding. It therefore takes a social constructivist view of how learning occurs.

Design principles

ECA believes that an authentic curriculum framework should meet the following criteria:

- Be practical and supportive of the range of users;
- Foster connection to children's learning lives in family and community;
- Introduce central concepts and skills essential for further learning; &
- Promote teaching towards clearly described learning outcomes for all children.

The domains of learning – physical, social, emotional and cognitive – are familiar to most early childhood practitioners and could form a basis for the organisation of the Framework. However, more recent descriptions of 'Essential Learnings' include 'Communicating' and 'Thinking and 'Understanding the world' as distinct aspects of learning that should receive explicit attention in planning and programming. The Framework therefore should 'unpack' the traditional descriptor 'Cognition' and describe the key concepts and experiences that should be the focus of early years' programs in:

- language and literacy;
- maths, science and technology;
- creative and aesthetic learning;
- society and history

The framework should assume a play based pedagogy and a focus on the social and emotional development of young children.

How prescriptive does the Framework need to be?

While not being prescriptive, to be of value to the range of practitioners, the Framework should provide information on:

- Key understandings and skills;
- Key experiences required to foster that learning;
- Indicators of children's progress in those domains;
- Advice to practitioners about beneficial responses and interactions; &
- A guide to monitoring and assessment.

The Ontario framework: *Early Learning for Every Child Today* (2006), while not meeting all of the criteria described above, offers a useful design model. The explicit relationship it outlines between the learning focus (domain and skill), indicators of that skill and what the practitioner does, deserves close attention.

It is essential that the Australian Framework encourages early childhood educators to plan for and assess those aspects of children's learning in a holistic way. In some instances in current practice, observing and recording children's learning in separate categories results in fragmentation of the teaching program and trivialisation of children's learning. What is needed is a framework which recognises children's emerging strengths across these domains but which at the same time positions that learning in context and inside wider and explicit goals in relations to children's rights and collaborative participation in a democratic community.

Supporting resources

The Ontario Framework, for example, is over 100 pages long and encompasses philosophical, theoretical and practical information in one document. ECA would recommend that such information be packaged separately with accompanying film material which models best practice on CD & DVD. The full range of audiences for such material should be considered, including LDC, FDC, Play Groups and families operating in urban, rural and remote environments and within Indigenous and multicultural communities. Examples therefore should reflect those different settings and the materials should be developed in consultation with end users.

Issues in implementation

As noted earlier, challenges in implementation are likely to relate to structural variations in the ways in which early education and care are provided in different jurisdictions and the degree to which State and Territory guidelines are mandated for the non-school sector.

Chapter 10: Contemporary research

As noted earlier, the Paper provides valuable references and commendable currency of research as a basis for its discussion about key issues in early childhood education, care and curriculum.

In particular, ECA supports the following research findings:

- The early years of children's learning and development are valuable in their own right as well as a foundation for the future;
- The first three years are particularly significant in 'setting up for life success';
- Positive, stimulating environments and nurturing relationships are vital in optimising children's capacity to reach their learning potential; &
- It is important to emphasise family capacity-building and strengths-based approaches to sustaining community connectedness.

ECA recommends that the 'Four factors that make a difference in learning for infants and young children' (Discussion Paper p.31) be expanded in the final documentation.

Dispositions

ECA supports the importance of 'Dispositions for learning', but suggests that practitioners also need professional knowledge from the Disciplines – Maths, Science etc. - in order to involve young learners in inquiry which builds the key concepts foundational to future learning success. Hence, habits of mind and 'dispositions to learn' should be fostered with a clear view to *what* children and young people will need to

learn about. This professional knowledge dimension has often been lacking in training and in the everyday practice of early childhood education and care.

Principles underpinning quality learning for young children

ECA supports the principles outlined in the Discussion Paper. In particular, ECA encourages 'conceptually-sustaining programs' which stress sustained thinking, intentional teaching and connection to relevant cultural resources. 'Play' is a way for young children to learn that is commonly accepted in early childhood education and care communities. It is important to note and explain explicitly in the Framework, that 'play is more than fun' and that learning is maximised when practitioners provide thoughtful environments for exploration, inquiry, puzzlement and problem-solving. It is also essential that the Framework recognises cultural differences in the definition of 'play' and how different cultures view 'learning' and how they believe learning is enhanced.

Learning drives development and the Framework should make clear that it is not acceptable simply to provide an environment rich in learning possibilities, without providing the challenges and interactions that actually promote learning for all children.

10.5 Questions

The analysis of the literature is accurate and comprehensive.

ECA strongly supports a focus on language and communication and social development in the Framework.

ECA's comments on 'play-based learning' are noted above. High quality play will mean that the child is deeply involved, learning and practising skills. This requires the adult to make provision tailored to the child's needs.

All of the evidence about 'successful learners' indicates that children who experience linguistically and symbolically rich environments are advantaged in thinking, further learning and school and life success. This focus means that educators need to understand the importance of both extended, reflective oral exchanges between children and adults, and between children; and the value of other forms of expressive and communicative activities, such as movement, music, visual art and play in the outdoors, which develop children's creative imagination.

'Social learning' in the opinion of ECA should encompass not only traditional notions of interpersonal skills, but also empathy and a disposition to act inclusively towards others. It should also include a sense of personal agency so that children are encouraged to understand the effects of their behaviour on others.

The roles of the educator (see ECA's comments on the use of the term educator on Page 2)

In commenting on this section ECA notes again the danger of making invisible the differences between the roles of the qualified early childhood teacher and other lesser qualified staff. The use of the term educator to cover all staff with direct contact with children does this.

The teacher, and other staff with teacher support, in the early childhood setting performs the roles of wise adult, learning facilitator, guide and mentor. The child both initiates their own learning and responds to stimulus provided by adults and peers. Young children respond enthusiastically to challenges to think about things in new ways, providing that the questions hold interest for them and the learning is appropriately scaffolded.

Chapter 11 Foundations for the framework

Children's learning

As noted earlier, Social Constructivist approaches comprise best wisdom about enhancing learning. ECA agrees that a 'structured play-based approach' that is rich in inquiry and language interactions provides the best basis for a preschool program. ECA agrees that such programs must be lead by qualified early childhood teachers and accessible through a range of settings. With the varied contexts in mind, ECA recommends a concerted and comprehensive workforce strategy and program of professional development that enables existing practitioners to update, upgrade and transform their existing qualifications into new requirements. Further, ECA recommends that's special consideration be given to developing courses in management and leadership for early childhood settings.

Values

ECA applauds the described basis for the values to underpin the Framework, especially 'respect, compassion and empathy for all' which not only offers an inspirational slogan, but, if enacted, could develop the inclusive and just society that Australia desires.

ECA would recommend the value base be strengthened in relation to:

- Cultural recognition and respect
- Partnerships with families
- Respect and responsibility for the environment

Chapter 12: Building the Framework

ECA agrees that our national framework should describe what we want 'children to know, understand and do', but also, what we might wish them to 'feel' about themselves and others.

In terms of 'desired outcomes' ECA accepts the proposed list, but feels that they might be too couched in individualistic modes. ECA would wish to strengthen children's emotional well being and interpersonal and social competence, as a basis for engagement with learning and so that children can come to contribute to a caring society.

12.4 Questions

Special needs: The Framework should address issues of difference in inclusive terms, offering guidance about diversifying curriculum and teaching strategies to encompass all children, rather than offering separate content or recommending withdrawal models of provision. Advice to the educator should be practical, including 'what next' information if children do not appear to show expected patterns of learning.

English as a second language: Research (Brooker, L. 2005; Delpitt, L.D. 1998; Drury, R. 2005) indicates that teachers frequently underestimate the intellectual competence of young bi-lingual children, especially when children are in the process of accommodating to the new language and culture. The Framework and Resources therefore, should provide practitioners with information concerning the phases of second language acquisition and encourage them to value the child's capabilities that are demonstrated in out-of-centre contexts. The special needs of Indigenous children, who are often accommodating to a new language and 'the culture of school', should also receive attention. Methods of assessing children's progress should enable *all* children to demonstrate what they know, understand and can do.

Managing children's behaviour: Children's behaviour is a major concern for early years' educators in contemporary learning settings. While the Framework cannot contain all possible advice on all matters,

ECA recommends that it should contain 'watchpoints' about emotional and social development which inform practitioners about when children's behaviour requires specialised intervention.

Assessment: It is an educator's professional responsibility to assess children's learning in early childhood settings.

ECA believes that assessment should be:

- Purposeful – linked to clear, achievable goals;
- On-going – spaced, timely and constructive;
- Inclusive – catering for different learning styles and demonstrations of achievement; &
- Transparent – explicit, collaborative and free from bias.

Such assessment should always be designed to:

- Support children's learning, emphasising their strengths in showing how far children have progressed towards desired outcomes;
- Identify and respond to children's individual needs;
- Inform decisions about teaching programs and intervention strategies; &
- Communicate with families about children's strengths and how they can offer further learning support.

Appropriate to all educators: The Framework should be precise enough to support least experienced practitioners in developing quality programs, but it cannot take the place of high level tertiary qualifications, quality, ongoing professional learning and onsite leadership and support.

Professional development: An extensive, staged and comprehensive professional learning program will be required to ensure that the resultant Framework can be enacted. Such programs are best developed in consultation with the end-users and their communities.

Conclusion

ECA has appreciated the opportunity to be engaged in this process and looks forward to continuing involvement as the work progresses.