

National Office PO Box 86, Deakin West ACT 2600

T: 02 6242 1800 **F:** 02 6242 1818

E: eca@earlychildhood.org.au

W: www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au

Patron Her Excellency Ms Quentin Bryce AC
Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia

ABN 44 950 767 752

Review of the Australian Curriculum Submission from Early Childhood Australia

February, 2014

Early Childhood Australia State and Territory Branches

ACT PO Box 396, Woden ACT 2606 **NSW** PO Box 24, Erskineville NSW 2043 **NT** PO Box 41936, Casuarina NT 0811 **QLD** PO Box 685, Spring Hill QLD 4004
SA PO Box 380, North Adelaide SA 5006 **TAS** PO Box 306, Sandy Bay TAS 7006 **VIC** PO Box 2080, Richmond Sth VIC 3121 **WA** 275 Abernethy Rd, Cloverdale WA 6105

Acknowledgements

Editor – Penelope Andersen
Early Childhood Australia Western Australia Branch
ECA Members

Contact

Samantha Page, CEO Early Childhood Australia
Email: spage@earlychildhood.org.au
Phone: (02) 6242 1800

About Early Childhood Australia

Early Childhood Australia (ECA) has been a voice for young children since 1938. We are the peak early childhood advocacy organisation, acting in the interests of young children, their families and those in the early childhood field. ECA advocates to ensure quality, social justice and equity in all issues relating to the education and care of children from birth to eight years.

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Introduction

Early Childhood Australia (ECA) is the peak national, non-profit, non-government organisation which acts in the interests of young children aged from birth to eight years of age. Our interest in the review of the Australian Curriculum (AC) is in relation to the education of children within this age group.

We recognise that the term ‘early childhood education’ has long been used nationally and internationally for the period birth to eight years because this is seen as a stage of children’s development and learning with unique characteristics and needs. This is also acknowledged in the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (2008). ECA is committed to supporting the development and learning of children in this age group and ensuring that curriculum provision is based on developmentally appropriate principles and practices.

View of the current curriculum

Current provision in Australia for the early childhood age group is described by two national curricula. The Early Years Framework (EYLF) and associated National Quality Standards (NQS) cover the period from birth to age 5, and the Australian Curriculum covers the period from the first year of full-time schooling onwards. This usually involves at least three years within the period referred to as ‘early childhood education.’ In those states and territories which enrol children in full time schooling during their fourth year a number of four year olds are enrolled in programs based on the Australian Curriculum. There are also jurisdictions within which teachers working across multiple age groups have to deal with the challenge of using both curricula.

ECA commends the existence of national statements and curriculum frameworks that go from birth to year 12. We strongly support the value of the EYLF and believe that the AC describes quality learning for children in the first years of schooling which is enhanced by Cross-curriculum priorities and General capabilities. We agree about the need for robust curriculum and a common approach with high expectations across the country and have demonstrated through a joint ECA-ACARA paper (*Foundations for learning: Relationships between the Early Years Learning Framework and the Australian Curriculum, 2011*) that the EYLF, the first national framework for early childhood educators, and the AC can work together. At the same time, however, we recognise the risks of a crowded curriculum, top-down pressures, and the effects on quality of learning if early childhood educators are not given sufficient support to use sound principles of learning in implementing the curriculum with young children.

The development of both the current AC and the EYLF present a breakthrough in establishing consistency across Australia, which is of great benefit to mobile families and mobile professionals

and facilitates the effective and efficient development and provision of high quality resources which can be used across a large population

Some of the strongest connections between the EYLF and the AC are contained in the AC's General capabilities – Literacy, Numeracy, ICT capability, Creative and critical thinking, Ethical understanding, Personal and social capability and Intercultural understanding. These reflect the priorities for learning espoused for early childhood education and are seen as very important to retain. They provide a rich description of priority learning for young children. However, the current AC model describes detailed continua for each General capability which presents a linear view of progression through General capabilities which is at odds with the uneven and individual learning patterns of young children. There are also inconsistencies of expectation and demand between the Learning areas and the General capabilities, and between each General capability, which should be addressed in any curriculum revision. Early Childhood Australia sees the General capabilities as an integrating mechanism for early childhood teaching programs and as easing transitions between prior-to-school and school learning and would like to see these retained but reviewed.

While it is recognised that it can be challenging and not necessarily helpful to try and embed cross curriculum priorities in every area of learning, ECA has a strong ethical commitment to Reconciliation, Sustainability and Respect for cultural diversity and believes that these could, for example, be built into, a statement of learning for the early years of schooling or similar, as has occurred with the EYLF.

It is well understood that although the content of learning is important for all age groups, the amount and complexity of this content gradually increases with age. During the period of early childhood education, a focus on how children learn and what principles and practices should guide their learning is very important and should be strongly reflected in the curriculum. For the period birth to age five, the *Early Years Learning Framework* (EYLF) provides a learning guide for educators. The *Australian Curriculum* is focused on the important discipline-based knowledge that every Australian student should have the opportunity to learn, but it does not address pedagogy directly. Each Learning area implies an approach to teaching in its content descriptions and work samples and the suggestions in Learning areas for Foundation, Year 1 and to some extent Year 2 in English, Maths, Science and History are consistent with best practice in teaching young children aged five, six, and seven years.

Position on the review

ECA supports the ongoing review of the Australian Curriculum and believes that such a review should be in response to, and informed by, practitioner concerns about what is in the best interests of children and what can most effectively be managed by teachers. It is inevitable with such a

significant and ambitious national project that ongoing review will be required and will add to its effectiveness, but this should occur in a way that is least disruptive to implementation.

We have participated in, and commend, the work of the Primary Perspectives Advisory Group established to provide ACARA with guidance and expert advice relating to issues that have been raised and actions that could be facilitated by ACARA regarding the implementation of the primary AC, and believe that there would be value in setting up a similar group to focus specifically on the early years of schooling.

Possible additional areas for review

Given the importance of developmentally appropriate pedagogy in early childhood education, ECA believes that more explicit recognition of learning in the early years is needed to enhance the use of the AC and provide teachers of young children with the support they need. A search of the ACARA site reveals that links are provided to national priority statements about early childhood, the EYLF and the NQS, and to the paper *The Shape of the Australian Curriculum* (ACARA, 2011) which refers to the EYLF, but these are not easy to locate. The publication *Foundations for Learning* (2011) mentioned earlier, although jointly developed by ACARA and ECA does not appear to be available through ACARA. On their website, it states that ACARA is responsible for 'A national curriculum from Kindergarten to Year 12 in specified Learning areas'. This may be misleading as it does not acknowledge the different terminology used across the country, and that the term 'kindergarten' for the first year of full-time school is only used by a small number of jurisdictions.

ECA recognises that the implementation of the Australian Curriculum is the responsibility of state and territory jurisdictions and that a number of these are currently responding to the perceived additional needs of early childhood education in various ways. Although we appreciate the advantages of local initiatives, we have some concerns that a proliferation of differing state and territory approaches to managing provision for early childhood curriculum may reduce the coherence and significance of this important national initiative. While recognising the autonomy of state and territory jurisdictions, it seems that differences and how these are being accommodated need to be clearly acknowledged in order to assist national bodies, families and teachers who move between states and territories.

Concerns about top-down pressures and ‘readiness’ for school.

Many members of ECA across the country have expressed concern about top-down pressures on learning provision for children in both the prior-to-school and early school periods.

The current heavy emphasis on high stakes, normative national assessment and the publication of comparative school, state and territory results through the media and on the MySchool website appears to be putting undue pressure on individual schools, principals and teachers to ‘lift student achievement’. Members have reported examples of teachers of children in kindergartens for four year olds being pressured by school staff to use literacy teaching methods inappropriate to the age group in order to get children “ready” for the NAPLAN tests three years later. Clearly, we all wish to ‘lift student achievement’, but this will not occur through inappropriate pressures and lack of adequate recognition of how young children learn.

We believe that greater recognition by ACARA of the needs of young learners should include some comment about ‘readiness’ in terms of the expectations of the AC and this may assist in addressing top-down pressure and reducing widespread misunderstandings about what is most likely to assist young children to be ‘ready’ for school learning. Current misunderstandings, for example, are leading well-meaning parents to pay for tutoring, use drill and practice strategies at home and put pressure on early childhood educators to inculcate knowledge by rote and repetition methods. There is no evidence that this kind of learning is beneficial for young children; there is considerable evidence, including that from brain research, that content learned in such ways does not last, cannot be transferred to new learning contexts, and limits opportunities for exploratory, creative and collaborative learning (Engaging families in the Early Childhood Development Story, MCEEDYA, 2010 pp 25-26)

The *Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (Growing up in Australia)* in which 10,000 children have been placed under a sociological and scientific microscope has revealed that a good start to school depends on three fundamental skills: the ability to communicate effectively, an ambition to learn, and the ability to fit in with others. A school-ready child is one who is communicative, confident, persistent, curious, collaborative, cooperative, self-controlled, a problem solver and creative (Zero to Three, 2013) and we need to strongly support curriculum which will enhance these attributes in both the prior-to-school and the early years of schooling.

Recommendations

1. Establish an Early Childhood Perspectives Advisory Group to provide guidance and expert advice relating to issues that have been raised and actions that could be facilitated by ACARA regarding the implementation of the AC in the early years of school (Foundation to Year 2).
2. Acknowledge the NQS and EYLF as the ‘first rung on the national curriculum ladder’, ensuring the accurate use of terminology which recognises variations across the country, and making matters related to early childhood curriculum more visible and coherent on the ACARA website,. For example, the following documents should be connected and made easily accessible:
 - a. *Foundations for Learning: Relationships between the Early Years Learning Framework and the Australian Curriculum*
 - b. *Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)*
 - c. *National Quality Standards (NQS)*
 - d. *Shape of the Australian Curriculum (V3, Oct 2011)*, and the Information Sheet *Connection to the Early Years Learning Framework* (2011) distributed to state and territory authorities which are quite explicit about the unique characteristics of young children’s development and learning and what they mean for curriculum and pedagogy
3. Develop or adapt a statement/framework for learning which will make principles of learning more explicit for early childhood teachers.
4. Provide a national forum to discuss:
 - a. initiatives being put in place by states and territories to support curriculum implementation in early childhood
 - b. suggestions for establishing connections between early childhood educators working with children in the transition period between the Early Years Learning Framework and the Australian Curriculum
 - c. concerns about undue pressures to formalise early childhood learning programs and misunderstandings about what constitutes ‘readiness’ for school
 - d. challenges facing early childhood educators working with multi-age groups, particularly those which cover the transition period between the use of the EYLF and the AC.
 - e. Addressing the manageability of the number of Learning Area subjects, the volume of content, flexibility of the design model, variation in year or band level design.
5. Review the General capabilities of the AC in terms of how well the current progressions describe the patterns of learning in early childhood and whether there are inconsistencies of expectation and demand between the Learning areas and the General capabilities, and between each General capability.



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Foundations for learning: Relationships between the Early Years Learning Framework and the Australian Curriculum

AN ECA-ACARA PAPER



This paper was researched and written by Jenni Connor, Early Childhood Consultant and Writer.

Foundations for learning

Foreword

We are at an exciting time in the history of education in Australia. *Belonging, Being & 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.

This paper, *Foundations for learning*, 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 aligned.

The paper was developed as a joint project between Early Childhood Australia (ECA), the nation's peak body advocating for young children and their families, and the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA).

The collaborative nature of this venture affirms the fact that quality early childhood practice underpinned by the EYLF establishes solid foundations for students' successful engagement with the Australian Curriculum.

The paper 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.

Having both the EYLF and the Australian Curriculum available at this time 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.

Early Childhood Australia (ECA) and the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) commend *Foundations for learning* to education professionals as a basis for discussion and thoughtful reflection on the contributions of the EYLF and the Australian Curriculum to early childhood practice.

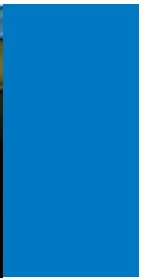
Pam Cahir, CEO Early Childhood Australia and
Rob Randall, General Manager, ACARA

1 November 2011



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Executive summary

Introduction

The *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*¹ (2008) presents an inspiring vision to drive current educational reforms in the prior-to-school and school sectors:

As a nation Australia values the central role of education in building a democratic, equitable and just society—a society that is prosperous, cohesive and culturally diverse, and that values Australia's Indigenous cultures as a key part in the nation's history, present and future (p. 4).

Both *The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*² (EYLF) (DEEWR, 2009) and *The Shape of the Australian Curriculum*³ (ACARA, 2011) are underpinned by the Declaration and its commitment to quality in education and care, with improved outcomes for young Australians.

Having both the EYLF and the first phase of the Australian Curriculum available to educators at this time presents both opportunities and challenges.

There is a golden opportunity to forge connections and relationships of mutual respect between early childhood educators working in school and non-school settings and to provide continuity of support for children's learning in the vital early years.

As well, educators, some of whom are working across sector and curriculum boundaries, deal with the complexities of planning, teaching and assessing with different curriculum documents.

This paper, *Foundations for learning*, aims to inform early childhood educators in varied settings about

developments in the national education context that affect them. It seeks to describe relationships between the EYLF and the Australian Curriculum; to highlight the contribution that quality early childhood practice, based on the EYLF, makes to young children's learning; and to reassure educators and families that key national documents work in harmony to support educational achievement from the earliest years through to the end of schooling.

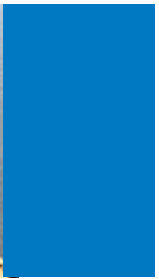
The nature of the two frameworks

The *Early Years Learning Framework* and the Australian Curriculum have a great deal in common. Both take up the challenge of the Melbourne Declaration; both respond to a rapidly changing world context; and both are underpinned by the belief that education has the power to transform the individual and society.

The *Early Years Learning Framework* is focused on learning and the role of the educator. It aims to guide the complex, interactive work of early childhood educators that enables particular kinds of learning and nurtures particular kinds of learners⁴. The framework therefore gives serious attention to essential elements of high-quality early childhood practice, including play-based pedagogies, strong relationships with children and families and intentional teaching.

On these foundations, the EYLF is structured around three interrelated elements: Principles, Practices and Learning Outcomes.





The EYLF (p. 19) identifies five Learning Outcomes as fundamental to the current and future wellbeing, engagement and success of young learners:

- 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 involved learners
- Children are effective communicators.

The five Learning Outcomes include dispositions towards learning that underpin engagement, and the knowledge, skills and understandings that are essential foundations for future learning success.

The Australian Curriculum has a similar mission to foster 'successful, confident and creative learners and active and informed citizens.'

The Australian Curriculum is based on principles of entitlement and responsibility. It sets out what will be taught, what students need to learn and the expected quality of that learning (The Shape of the Australian Curriculum, v3.0, ACARA 2011, p. 10 16a, 16b):

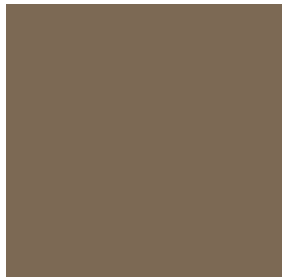
The Australian Curriculum recognises the entitlement of each student to knowledge, understanding and skills that provide a foundation for successful and lifelong learning and participation in the Australian community.

The Australian Curriculum is presented as a continuum that makes clear to teachers what is to be taught across the years of schooling. It makes clear to students what they should learn and the quality of learning expected of them as they progress through school.

The Australian Curriculum has four major components:

- Curriculum content—learning area knowledge, skills and understanding
- General capabilities—sets of skills, behaviours and dispositions that apply across subject-based content
- Cross-curriculum priorities—selected because they represent key issues and opportunities relevant to the lives of young Australians now and in the future
- Achievement standards—a description of what students are typically able to understand and do at particular points in their schooling.





The Australian Curriculum builds on early learning

The educational goals for young Australians enshrined in the Melbourne Declaration are lifelong aspirations with the learning process beginning at birth.

The *Early Years Learning Framework* (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 Shape of the Australian Curriculum (p. 10) 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:

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 Outcome 4 closely relates to the Australian Curriculum—Science⁵.

EYLF 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:

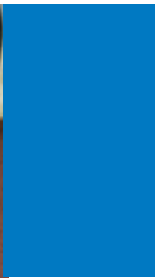
- apply a wide range of thinking strategies to engage with situations and solve problems
- make predictions about their daily activities, aspects of the natural world and environments
- explore their environment
- manipulate objects and experiment with cause and effect, trial and error and motion
- use reflective thinking to consider why things happen and what can be learnt from these experiences.

Australian Curriculum—Science

Foundation Year Level Description

From Foundation to Year 2, students learn that observations can be organised to reveal patterns, and that these patterns can be used to make predictions about phenomena. In Foundation, students observe and describe the behaviours and properties of everyday objects, materials and living things. They explore change in the world around them, including changes that impact on them, such as the weather, and changes they can effect, such as making things move or change shape. They learn that seeking answers to questions and making observations is a core part of science and use their senses to gather different types of information.





Connecting content and pedagogy

Both the EYLF and the Australian Curriculum recognise that personal and social competence, health and wellbeing and literacy and numeracy should be core focus areas for young children's learning. Both respect young children's entitlement to opportunities to develop their sensory, cognitive and affective appreciation of the world around them through exploratory and creative learning.

In terms of continuity of pedagogy, the Australian Curriculum recognises that early childhood approaches espoused by the EYLF continue to be appropriate in the early years of school.

The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) has distributed an Information sheet for use by state and territory school and curriculum authorities titled *Connections to the Early Years Learning Framework*. It encourages teachers, especially in the first years of school, to use their professional judgement and pedagogical repertoire to:

- accommodate the varied learning experiences and diverse backgrounds that children bring to school
- flexibly apply the key principles and practices of early childhood teaching articulated in the *Early Years Learning Framework*
- recognise the complex and integrated nature of learning as described in the EYLF's key Learning Outcomes and as reflected in the General capabilities and Cross-curriculum priorities.



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.

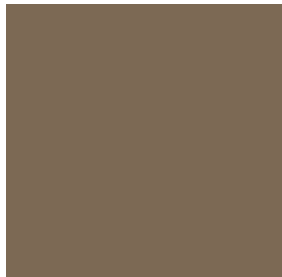
Teachers in the early years of school are encouraged to build on what children know and can do, consolidating capabilities essential for later learning. They gradually introduce the content of the Australian Curriculum as learners demonstrate the ability to access it and they revisit concepts and skills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

As the Information sheet referred to earlier confirms, quality early childhood education before and into school applies the Principles and Practices of the EYLF:

- ongoing learning and reflective practice
- holistic approaches
- responsiveness to children; and
- learning through play.

The EYLF makes a significant contribution to the broader education community through its clear enunciation of pedagogy and the principles that underpin effective practice. Principles, values and professional behaviours, such as respect for diversity and a commitment to equity, remain relevant throughout the education spectrum.

The EYLF and the Australian Curriculum are both operating in the early childhood education arena in various ways. This highlights the importance of cross-sectoral conversations between early childhood educators.



A key to successful transitions between settings catering for young children lies in conversation and collaboration. Educators in different sectors need to share information about children's interests, strengths and progress. They need to communicate effectively with each other and with families, to ensure that children's prior learning is valued, their current needs are met and support for their ongoing learning is concerted and consistent.

The EYLF is a key strategic element in the National Quality Framework aimed at raising the competence and status of the profession and the quality of early education and care provision across Australia. It is an aspirational document projecting an image of early childhood educators as knowledgeable, skilled and engaged in critical, self-reflective and informed decision making. Rising to this vision of the early childhood professional requires a strong commitment to ongoing learning and continuous improvement; and it requires capable and inspiring educational leadership at the service level.

Similarly, the Australian Curriculum is a core component of the national education reform agenda focused on improved learning outcomes for all young Australians. The quality of teaching will be the key to achieving these gains in students' learning. The curriculum calls for new knowledge and skills around subject matter; and a diverse repertoire of teaching strategies to enable all students to fully engage with it. These requirements have implications for professional support at the school, system and jurisdiction levels to empower teachers to fulfil the potential of the curriculum to raise levels of student achievement, leading to more equitable benefits from the educational experience for all young Australians.

Both the *Early Years Learning Framework* and the Australian Curriculum have similar aims, represented differently in structure and content emphases.

This paper, *Foundations for learning*, describes how the two are connected historically, philosophically, conceptually and in terms of focus for learning.

Endnotes

- 1 Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) (2008). *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*. Retrieved 30 October, 2011, from www.curriculum.edu.au/mceetya/melbourne_declaration_25979.html.
- 2 Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) for the Council of Australian Governments (2009). *Belonging, Being & Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*. Canberra, ACT: DEEWR.
- 3 Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) (2011). *The Shape of the Australian Curriculum* version 3.0, October 2011. Retrieved 30 October, 2011, from <http://www.acara.edu.au/curriculum.html#3>.
- 4 Barnes, S. (2011). Early Years Learning Framework National Conference, *Belonging, Being and Becoming in Practice*, Melbourne, 14 April.
- 5 Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) (2011). *The Australian Curriculum v 2.0*: Retrieved 3 November 2011, from www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Science/Curriculum/F-10.

Introduction



Australia is at a pivotal moment in the history of early childhood education. A new national *Early Years Learning Framework* (EYLF) for early childhood education and care settings was launched in 2009 and a new Australian Curriculum is being implemented in schools from 2011. Having both sets of documents available to educators at the same time affords exciting opportunities to forge connections between sectors of early childhood education and to encourage collaboration between professionals working in different types of early childhood settings.

This paper has been written to inform educators in early learning settings before full-time schooling and educators in the first years of school—Foundation to Year 2—about the relationship between two major current curriculum developments that affect them.

Educators working with children from birth to age five in Children's Services, preschool and kindergarten settings are using *Belonging, Being & Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* in conjunction with state or 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 care and education and children 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.

Unless otherwise specified, references to the text of the EYLF are drawn from *Belonging, Being & Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (DEEWR, 2009)¹. The Shape of the Australian Curriculum, v 3.0 (ACARA, 2011)² is the source of direct quotations regarding the Australian Curriculum.

There is concerted agreement that the first years of a child's life are a critical period for learning and development:

There is powerful evidence from neuroscience that the early years of development from conception to age six, particularly the first three years, set the base for competence and coping skills that will affect learning, behaviour and health throughout life (McCain & Mustard, 1999)³.

The authors also noted:

There is encouraging evidence that good nutrition, nurturing and responsive caregiving in the first years of life, linked with good early childhood programs, improve the outcomes for all children's learning, behaviour and physical and mental health throughout life.

It is therefore very important to identify the significant ways in which education in these early years establishes the foundations for young children's current and future learning success; to see these developments in the context of Australia's overall vision for its young people; and to describe key relationships between the EYLF and the Australian Curriculum as they apply to the early years of school. Identifying such connections has the potential to reassure educators and families that there is a coherent national direction and to contribute to continuity of support for children's learning across transition points.

A time in Australia's history



McCain and Mustard and subsequent studies (for example Gallinsky, 2006; Gauntlett et al., 2001)^{4,5} persuasively argued that investing in family support and high-quality early education and care programs brings far greater returns to society and the economy than interventions later in life.

The *Early Years Learning Framework* (EYLF) and the Australian Curriculum were both developed in a political and policy context that reflects this commitment to young children and their families.

'The Early Years Learning Framework and the Australian Curriculum both reflect a commitment to young children and families.'

The Australian Government in 2007 announced a 'productivity agenda' to strengthen the economy through increased investment in social and human capital. An 'education revolution' is seen as central to increasing national productivity and improving the quality of early childhood education and care is recognised as a core strategy to achieve these aims⁶. The EYLF is part of the Council of Australian Governments reform agenda for the early years and a key component of the National Quality Framework⁷. The National Quality Framework will be underpinned by universal access to early childhood education in a variety of settings and a National Quality Standard designed to ensure delivery of high-quality, nationally consistent early childhood education and care.

The *Early Years Learning Framework* (EYLF) is significant for a number of reasons:

- it marks a point in Australia's history when supporting young children's learning became a national priority
- it is the first national statement to guide learning and teaching across the varied settings providing early childhood education
- it applies to different early childhood service types, breaking down the traditional 'care' and 'education' dichotomy that has characterised the sector
- it validates the work of early childhood educators as valued and highly skilled professionals
- it offers families a coherent and agreed view about what constitutes quality early childhood provision in the twenty-first century.

Sumsion et al.⁸ (2009) on behalf of the Consortium charged with developing the EYLF, explains that the framework carries 'narratives of hope'—hope that the EYLF can actively contribute to reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians; and hope that:

... the EYLF will lead to increased valuing by society of the important role of early childhood settings and enhanced professional status for early childhood practitioners through public recognition of the complexity of their work.

'An "education revolution" is seen as central to increasing national productivity and improving the quality of early childhood education and care is recognised as a core strategy to achieve these aims.'

The Melbourne Declaration underpins the EYLF and the Australian Curriculum



In 2008, state, territory and Commonwealth Ministers of Education, meeting as the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), released the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* which set the direction for Australian schooling for the next 10 years⁹.

As *The Shape of the Australian Curriculum* document explains (pp. 5–6) ‘... in 2008, ministers nominated five major developments that, over the twenty year period since the *Adelaide Declaration*, had changed the ways in which people interacted with each other and thought about the purposes of schooling’. They cited global integration and international mobility, shifts in Australia’s orientation towards Asia in its region, globalisation and technological change, complex environmental, social and economic pressures and rapid advances in information and communication technologies.

The Melbourne Declaration ‘commits to supporting all young Australians to become successful learners, confident and creative individuals and active and informed citizens and to promoting equity and excellence in education’.

The Early Years Learning Framework through its Principles, Practices and Learning Outcomes affirms these goals and guides early childhood educators in contributing to their achievement.

The Shape of the Australian Curriculum is the translation of the Melbourne Declaration into a form that guides the development and writing of the Australian Curriculum. It is an important document that provides the policy background for the development of the Australian Curriculum and presents agreements about its structure and organisation.

Having an Australian Curriculum for schools invites professional conversations and exchanges within and across schools, systems and jurisdictions and provides mobile families and students with a consistent sequence of expectations about what students will be taught wherever they travel and live.

The Australian Curriculum describes the education entitlements of all students from Foundation to Year 10, with decisions to be made subsequently about further learning in the senior secondary years. The curriculum (34 p. 16) identifies particular priorities that apply in the early years of school.

In ‘big picture’ terms, there are strong connections between the *Early Years Learning Framework* and the Australian Curriculum. They share a policy context and a commitment to equitable learning outcomes for all young Australians.

Both the EYLF and the Australian Curriculum are driven by the vision enunciated in the Melbourne Declaration (p. 4) about the kind of society that education should seek to promote:

‘As a nation Australia values the central role of education in building a democratic, equitable and just society—a society that is prosperous, cohesive and culturally diverse, and that values Australia’s Indigenous cultures as a key part of the nation’s history, present and future.’

The nature of the EYLF and the Australian Curriculum



The *Early Years Learning Framework* and the Australian Curriculum have a great deal in common. Both take up the challenge of the Melbourne Declaration; both respond to a rapidly changing world context; and both are underpinned by the belief that education has the power to transform the individual and society.

The *Early Years Learning Framework* is focused on learning and the role of the educator. It aims to guide the complex, interactive work of early childhood educators that enables particular kinds of learning and nurtures particular kinds of learners¹⁰. The framework therefore gives serious attention to essential elements of high-quality early childhood practice, including play-based pedagogies, strong relationships with children and families and intentional teaching.

The Australian Curriculum has a similar mission to foster 'successful, confident and creative learners and active and informed citizens'. It 'recognises the entitlement of each student to knowledge, understanding and skills that provide a foundation for successful and lifelong learning and participation in the Australian community' (16a p. 10).

The EYLF and the Australian Curriculum have similar aims represented differently in structure and content emphases. This paper therefore begins by outlining the content of each framework separately in the interests of clarity, before identifying the many connections and meeting points between them.

'The Early Years Learning Framework ... aims to guide the complex, interactive work of early childhood educators that enables particular kinds of learning and nurtures particular kinds of learners.'

1. The Early Years Learning Framework

The *Early Years Learning Framework* (EYLF) is built on a number of fundamental beliefs and understandings about young children and their learning. It has 'a view of children's lives as characterised by *belonging, being* and *becoming*' (p. 7). These concepts stress that connection to family and community is vital for children's security and identity; recognise that children have the right to enjoy being a child in a particular time and place; and acknowledge the distinctive, rapid change that occurs as young children learn and grow.

On these foundations, the EYLF is structured around three interrelated elements: Principles, Practices and Learning Outcomes.

Principles and Practices in the EYLF

The EYLF (pp. 12–13), on the basis of international research evidence, identifies five Principles which underpin effective early childhood practice:

- secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships
- partnerships between early childhood educators and families
- high expectations and equity
- respect for diversity
- ongoing learning and reflective practice.

The EYLF highlights eight pedagogical Practices (pp. 14–18) as essential to promote all children’s learning:

- adopting holistic, integrated approaches to teaching and paying attention to children’s physical, personal, social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing as well as cognitive aspects of learning
- being responsive to children, valuing their different ways of knowing and building on their strengths, skills and knowledge
- planning and implementing play-based programs and engaging with children’s play to extend their learning
- intentional teaching, which includes providing challenging experiences and interactions that foster high-level thinking skills
- creating vibrant and flexible learning environments which respond to the interests and needs of children and families, and which also provoke complex and increasingly abstract thinking
- valuing the cultural and social contexts of children and their families and developing ‘cultural competence’—the ability to interact effectively with people across cultures
- providing for continuity of experiences and successful transitions for children—from home to early childhood settings, between settings, and from early childhood settings to school
- assessing and monitoring children’s learning to inform provision and to support children in achieving learning outcomes.

Learning Outcomes in the EYLF

The EYLF (p. 19) identifies five Learning Outcomes as fundamental to the current and future wellbeing, engagement and success of young learners:

- 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 involved learners
- Children are effective communicators.

The EYLF (p. 19) explains that:

The five Learning Outcomes are designed to capture the integrated and complex learning and development of all children across the birth to five age range.

The outcomes are broad and observable. They acknowledge that children learn in a variety of ways and vary in their capabilities and pace of learning.

An examination of the outcomes and their 19 key components reveals that they are long-term goals, not finite skills that can be declared ‘mastered’. For example, ‘a sense of identity’ develops and changes throughout life; ‘resilience and a sense of agency’ varies according to life experiences and circumstances; ‘responding to diversity with respect’ is learned over time through intentional teaching, sensitive modelling and intervention.

While the Learning Outcomes encompass lifelong goals, it is expected that educators will:

- plan and provide programs that optimise learning and development across the five outcomes
- monitor and assess each child’s progress
- record a ‘snapshot’ of children at significant points in their learning journey.

The EYLF is not ‘content-free’ and the five Learning Outcomes include dispositions towards learning that underpin engagement, and the knowledge, skills and understandings that are essential foundations for future learning success.

The EYLF Learning Outcomes represent a national set of priorities for young children’s learning, enabling consistency of provision and a shared language for conversation between educators in different settings about children’s wellbeing, engagement and learning progress.

‘The EYLF Learning Outcomes represent a national set of priorities for young children’s learning, enabling consistency of provision and a shared language for conversation between educators.’

2. The Australian Curriculum

The Shape of the Australian Curriculum document proposes principles of 'entitlement' and 'responsibility'. The Australian Curriculum (27 p. 14) sets out what will be taught, what students need to learn and the expected quality of that learning:

The Australian Curriculum describes a learning entitlement for each Australian student. It sets out what young people should be taught (through the specification of curriculum content from learning areas, general capabilities and cross-curriculum capabilities) and an expectation of the quality of their learning (depth of understanding and sophistication of skills described through achievement standards).

As will be discussed in a later section of this paper, the Australian Curriculum builds on the learning children achieve under the EYLF and recognises that learners in the first years of school have particular needs and entitlements.

The Australian Curriculum has a three-dimensional design (28 p. 14):

- Curriculum content—discipline-based knowledge, skills and understanding
- General capabilities—knowledge, skills, behaviours and dispositions that can be developed and applied across the curriculum
- Cross-curriculum priorities—contemporary issues about which young Australians should learn.

'... the Australian Curriculum builds on the learning children achieve under the EYLF and recognises that learners in the first years of school have particular needs and entitlements.'

Curriculum content

The key elements of the Australian Curriculum in each learning area are the rationale, aims, curriculum content and the achievement standards (48 p. 19).

The curriculum content, presented as content descriptions, specifies the knowledge, understanding and skills that young people are expected to learn across the years of schooling Foundation to Year 10 (F–10) and what teachers are to teach (49 p. 19).

The achievement standards describe what students are typically able to understand and able to do. Across F–10 the set of achievement standards describes a broad sequence of expected learning (51 p. 19).

The Australian Curriculum is designed to ensure students develop the knowledge and understanding on which the major disciplines are based (56 p. 19):

Each discipline offers a distinctive lens through which we interpret experience, determine what counts as evidence and a good argument for action, scrutinise knowledge and argument, make judgements about value and add to knowledge.

Curriculum content is being developed for the learning areas and subjects (29 p. 14) as set out in the Melbourne Declaration:

- English
- Mathematics
- Science
- Humanities and Social Science (comprising History, Geography, Civics and Citizenship and Business and Economics)
- The Arts (comprising Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music and Visual Arts)
- Languages
- Health and Physical Education
- Technologies (comprising ICT and Design and Technology).

General capabilities

While the Australian Curriculum (60 p. 20) is designed on a 'disciplinary' model, it also strongly emphasises general capabilities:

The disciplines provide a foundation of learning in schools because they reflect the way in which knowledge has, and will continue to be, developed and codified. However, 21st century learning does not fit neatly into a curriculum solely organised by learning areas or subjects that reflect the disciplines.

The Australian Curriculum (63 p. 21) identifies seven general capabilities, which derive from the 'Commitment to Action' for young Australians described in the Melbourne Declaration. They include:

- Literacy
- Numeracy
- Information communication technology (ICT) competence
- Critical and creative thinking
- Ethical behaviour
- Personal and social competence
- Intercultural understanding.

Cross-curriculum priorities

In line with the goals of the Melbourne Declaration, the Australian Curriculum (65 p. 22) gives special attention to three priorities that are relevant to the lives of students and address the contemporary issues they face:

- **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures**—to ensure that all young Australians will be given the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, their significance for Australia and the impact these have had and continue to have, on our world
- **Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia**—to reflect the importance of young people knowing about Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia because as they develop a better understanding of the countries and cultures of the Asia region, they will appreciate the economic, political and cultural interconnections that Australia has with the region
- **Sustainability**—to allow young people to develop an appreciation of the need for more sustainable patterns of living, and to build capacities for thinking, valuing and acting necessary to create a more sustainable future.



The Australian Curriculum builds on early learning



The educational goals for young Australians enshrined in the Melbourne Declaration will take at least a lifetime to achieve with the learning process beginning 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.

'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, in its propositions (16d p. 10), explicitly states the relationship between the learning children have been doing in settings using the EYLF and the learning they will engage with at school:

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 involved learners; and children are effective communicators.

'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.'

What does it mean to say 'the Australian Curriculum builds on the EYLF'?

It means:

- respecting the nature of learners at particular stages in their learning lives
- recognising that there is a set of foundational dispositions, knowledge and skills that underpin future learning success
- acknowledging the diversity of starting points that learners bring to next-stage learning
- allowing teachers to connect their pedagogical practices in the first years of school to those used in prior-to-school contexts.

Respecting the nature of learners

The EYLF (p. 9) 'puts children's learning at the core' and affirms that:

Children's learning is dynamic, complex and holistic. Physical, social, emotional, personal, spiritual, creative, cognitive and linguistic aspects of learning are all intricately interwoven and interrelated.

The Foundation to Year 2 section in the introduction to each learning area on the Australian Curriculum website outlines the premises about young learners considered relevant to that learning area context. For example, in the Australian Curriculum: Science (ACARA, 2011)¹¹:

Foundation–Year 2

Curriculum focus: awareness of self and the local world

Young children have an intrinsic curiosity about their immediate world. Asking questions leads to speculation and the testing of ideas. Exploratory, purposeful play is a central feature of their investigations.

In this stage of schooling students' explorations are precursors to more structured inquiry in later years. They use the senses to observe and gather information, describing, making comparisons, sorting and classifying to create an order that is meaningful. They observe and explore changes that vary in their rate and magnitude and begin to describe relationships in the world around them. Students' questions and ideas about the world become increasingly purposeful. They are encouraged to develop explanatory ideas and test them through further exploration.

These sentiments are entirely consistent with the EYLF and they affirm children's right to learn through exploration and play. Both the EYLF and the Australian Curriculum assert the power of stimulating interactions with peers and the role of the educator in refining and extending children's theories about how the world works.

Recognising foundational knowledge and skills

The Australian Curriculum (16e p. 10) recognises that to 'prepare all young Australians to become competent members of the community' 'firm and meaningful foundation skills' are required.

It therefore affirms (34 p. 16) that some aspects of learning should have priority status for young students before and in the first years of school:

- In the early years of schooling priority is given to literacy and numeracy development because these are the foundations on which further learning is built.
- Priority is also given to motor skills development, physical activity and the development of safe and healthy personal practices ...
- Equally, all students in these early years will have the opportunity to develop their sensory, cognitive and affective appreciation of the world around them through exploratory and creative learning in the arts and technologies.

The Australian Curriculum (33 p. 15) suggests that the organisation of curriculum changes from a broad base in the early years to reflect progression and increasing challenge and specialisation as students move through primary, secondary and senior secondary phases of education.

Acknowledging diverse starting points for learning

Both the EYLF and the Australian Curriculum acknowledge the diversity of learners and their different starting points for learning.

The EYLF:

The diversity in family life means that children experience *belonging, being and becoming* in many different ways. They bring diverse experiences, perspectives, knowledge and skills to their learning (p. 9).

Educators are responsive to all children's strengths, abilities and interests (p. 14).

... educators assess, anticipate and extend children's learning via open ended questioning, providing feedback, challenging their thinking and guiding their learning (p. 15).

The Australian Curriculum:

Students in Australian classrooms have multiple, diverse and changing needs that are shaped by individual learning histories and abilities as well as cultural and language backgrounds and socio-economic factors (38 p. 17).

The curriculum provides flexibility for teachers to take into account the different rates at which students develop and a diverse range of learning and assessment needs (39 p. 17).

The EYLF recognises that the rate and pattern of young children's learning varies significantly and that children may take very different pathways to achieving learning outcomes:

Ongoing assessment processes ... do not focus exclusively on the end points of children's learning; they give equal consideration to the 'distance travelled' by individual children and recognise and celebrate not only the giant leaps that children take in their learning but the small steps as well (p. 17).

The EYLF also confirms the importance of diagnostic assessment to identify children who may require additional support to achieve particular outcomes and to inform collaboration with families and specialists:

The five Learning Outcomes ... provide early childhood educators with key reference points against which children's progress can be identified, documented and communicated to families, other early childhood professionals and educators in schools (p. 17).

Both the EYLF and the Australian Curriculum stress that the key purposes for assessment are to:

- plan for learning
- communicate about progress
- determine what might be impeding progress
- identify children who might need additional support
- evaluate the effectiveness of teaching programs
- reflect on pedagogy that will suit this context and these children.

The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) has distributed an Information sheet for use by state and territory school and curriculum authorities titled *Connections to the Early Years Learning Framework*. It highlights statements made throughout the Shape paper about the need for teachers to adapt their programs to suit the different learning starting points of individual students:

The Australian Curriculum is designed to accommodate the varied learning experiences and diverse backgrounds that children bring to school.

Taking the child on from where they are in knowledge and skill is part of teacher judgement and teacher expertise. A 'capabilities' approach works from a child's entry-level competence and builds capacity.

Connecting pedagogies

The Australian Curriculum organises knowledge, skills and understanding by learning areas. However, it also recognises (57 p. 20) that:

Rather than being self-contained or fixed, disciplines are interconnected, dynamic and growing. A discipline-based curriculum should allow for cross-disciplinary learning that broadens and enriches each student's learning.

Teachers therefore, are encouraged to make professional judgements about how to deliver the curriculum in age-appropriate, contextualised and cross-disciplinary ways (55 p. 19):

Teachers are able to choose how best to introduce concepts and processes and how to progressively deepen understanding to maximise the engagement and learning of every student.

The Information sheet explicitly encourages age-appropriate pedagogies and integrated learning programs:

The Australian Curriculum provides teachers with the flexibility to apply the key principles and practices of early childhood teaching articulated in the *Early Years Learning Framework*, including:

- ongoing learning and reflective practices;
- holistic approaches;
- responsiveness to children;
- learning through play; and
- intentional teaching.

The Australian Curriculum's focus on general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities also reflects the interconnected nature of learning as described in the *Early Years Learning Framework's* key Learning Outcomes.

'Teachers therefore, are encouraged to make professional judgements about how to deliver the curriculum in age-appropriate, contextualised and cross-disciplinary ways.'



General capabilities and the Early Years Learning Framework



The Australian Curriculum (p. 20) recognises that knowledge is not static, nor will it fit immutably into discipline-based 'silos':

Increasingly, in a world where knowledge itself is constantly growing and evolving, students need to develop a set of skills, behaviours and dispositions or 'general capabilities' that apply across subject-based content and equip them to be lifelong learners able to operate with confidence in a complex, information-rich, globalised world (60 p. 20).

... the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* sees these general capabilities as including 'planning and organising, the ability to think flexibly, to communicate well and to work in teams, the capacity to think creatively, innovate, solve problems and engage with new disciplines' (61 p. 20).

Because of the complex and interrelated nature of the EYLF Learning Outcomes, it is potentially misleading to draw simplistic lines of connection between them and the Australian Curriculum's general capabilities. However, a careful analysis reveals significant points of contact:

- 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 'ICT competence'.

Table of relationships

The following table on page 19 indicates relationships between the EYLF and the Australian Curriculum. It includes 'broadbrush' connections that are philosophical and conceptual and some more specific links at the level of Learning Area content.

References to Learning Areas in the Australian Curriculum Phase 1 are drawn from Foundation Year Content Descriptions. EYLF references relate to the Learning Outcomes and their Key Components.

Early Years Learning Framework	Australian Curriculum			
EYLF Outcomes	Melbourne Declaration Goals	Discipline/Learning area	General capability	Cross-curriculum priority
Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity Key component (KC) 1: Children feel safe, secure and supported KC 2: Children develop their emerging autonomy, inter-dependence, resilience and sense of agency KC 3: Children develop knowledgeable and confident self-identities Evidence examples: use home languages as foundations for culture ... develop their social and cultural heritage through engagement with Elders and community members KC 4: Children learn to interact in relation to others with care, empathy and respect Evidence example: reflect on their actions and consider consequences for others.	Goal 2: Confident individuals: have a sense of self-worth, self-awareness and personal identity that enables them to manage their emotional, mental, spiritual and physical wellbeing	Health and physical education (to be developed) Intended educational outcomes for young Australians (v 3.0 p. 13) [The curriculum] will enable students to build social and emotional intelligence and nurture student wellbeing through health and physical education in particular History: Foundation Year Content Descriptions Historical Knowledge and Understanding - Personal and Family Histories Historical Skills - Perspectives and interpretations - Explanation and communication Languages: (to be developed) Languages Shape Paper, January 2011 (p. 7): The Australian Curriculum: Languages recognises the unique status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages as the languages of the first peoples of Australia. The Australian Curriculum: Languages recognises Australia's distinctive and dynamic migration history.	Personal and social competence: Students develop personal and social competence as they learn to understand themselves and others more fully, and to manage their relationships, lives, learning and work effectively. This includes recognising and regulating their emotions, establishing positive relationships, making responsible decisions, working effectively in teams and handling challenging situations constructively. Ethical behaviour: Students develop ethical understanding as they learn to recognise and understand matters of ethical concerns, make reasoned judgements and, in so doing, develop a personal ethical framework.	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures: to ensure that all young Australians ... gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, their significance for Australia and the impact these have had, and continue to have, on our world. Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia: to reflect the importance of young people knowing about Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia because ... they will come to appreciate the economic, political and cultural interconnections that Australia has with the region.

Early Years Learning Framework EYLF Outcomes	Australian Curriculum		
	Melbourne Declaration Goals	Discipline/Learning area	General capability
			Cross-curriculum priority
Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world Key component (KC) 1: Children develop a sense of belonging to groups and communities and an understanding of the reciprocal rights and responsibilities necessary for active community participation KC 2: Children respond to diversity with respect Evidence examples: notice and react in positive ways to similarities and differences practice inclusive ways of achieving coexistence KC 3: Children become aware of fairness KC 4: Children become socially responsible and show respect for the environment	Goal 2: Active and informed citizens: - act with moral and ethical integrity - appreciate Australia's social, cultural, linguistic and religious diversity ... - understand and acknowledge the value of Indigenous cultures - possess the knowledge, skills and understanding to contribute to reconciliation ... - work for the common good ... - are responsible local and global citizens.	Civics and citizenship (to be developed) Geography (to be developed) Languages (to be developed)	Personal and social competence: ... making responsible decisions and working effectively in teams. Intercultural understanding: Students learn to respect their own cultures and beliefs and those of others. Ethical behaviour: This includes acting with integrity and regard for the rights of others; and having a desire and capacity to work for the common good.
			Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia
			Sustainability ... to allow young people to develop an appreciation of the need for more sustainable patterns of living, and to build capacities for thinking, valuing and acting necessary to create a more sustainable future.

Early Years Learning Framework		Australian Curriculum	
EYLF Outcomes	Melbourne Declaration Goals	Discipline/Learning area	General capability
			Cross-curriculum priority
Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing KC 1: Children become strong in their social and emotional wellbeing Evidence examples: make choices, seek out and accept new challenges, manage change assert their capabilities and independence while demonstrating awareness of the rights and needs of others KC 2: Children take increasing responsibility for their own health and wellbeing Evidence examples: happy, healthy, safe and connected to others demonstrate spatial awareness ... moving around environments confidently	Goal 2: Confident individuals: have a sense of optimism about their lives and the future—are enterprising, show initiative and use their creative abilities and have the knowledge, skills, understanding and values to establish and maintain healthy satisfying lives relate well to others and form and maintain healthy relationships	Health and physical education (to be developed)	Personal and social competence: ... recognising and regulating their emotions, establishing positive relationships making responsible decisions ...
		Mathematics: Foundation Year Content Descriptions Measurement and Geometry • Shape • Location and transformation	

Early Years Learning Framework		Australian Curriculum		
EYLF Outcomes	Melbourne Declaration Goals	Discipline/Learning area	General capability	Cross-curriculum priority
Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners KC 1: Children develop dispositions such as curiosity, cooperation, confidence, creativity KC 2: Children develop a range of skills and processes such as problem solving, inquiry experimentation, hypothesising, researching and investigating Evidence examples: create and use representation to organise, record and communicate mathematical ideas and concepts contribute constructively to mathematical discussions and arguments KC 3: Children transfer and adapt what they have learned ... KC 4: Children resource their own learning through connecting with people, place, technologies and natural and processed materials	Goal 2: Confident individuals: embrace opportunities, make rational and informed decisions about their own lives and accept responsibility for their own actions. Goal 2: Successful learners: are creative, innovative and resourceful, and are able to solve problems in ways that draw upon a range of learning areas and disciplines are creative and productive users of technology, especially ICT	Science: Foundation Year Content Descriptions Science Understanding - Living things have basic needs ... - Objects are made of materials that have observable properties - Daily and seasonal changes ... affect everyday life - The way things move depends on a variety of factors ... Science as human endeavour - Nature and development of science: Science involves exploring and observing the world using the senses Science inquiry Skills - Questioning and predicting - Planning and conducting - Processing and analysing data and information - Communicating Mathematics: Foundation Year Content Descriptions Statistics and Probability - Data representation and interpretation Proficiency strands - Understanding - Fluency - Problem solving - Reasoning	Critical and creative thinking: Students develop creative and critical thinking as they learn to generate and evaluate knowledge, ideas and possibilities and use them in combination when seeking new pathways and solutions.	Sustainability: ... young people ... build capacities for thinking, valuing and acting necessary to create a more sustainable future.
		ICT competence: Students develop ICT competence as they learn to use ICT effectively and appropriately when investigating, creating and communicating ideas and information at school, at home, at work and in their communities.		

Early Years Learning Framework		Australian Curriculum	
EYLF Outcomes	Melbourne Declaration Goals	Discipline/Learning area	Cross-curriculum priority
Outcome 5 KC 3: Children express ideas and make meaning using a range of media		English: Foundation Year Content Descriptions Language - Expressing and developing ideas Literature - Creating literature Literacy - Creating texts The Arts (to be developed)	Literacy: These skills include listening, reading and viewing, writing, speaking and creating print, visual and audio materials accurately and purposefully in all learning areas.
		English: Foundation Year Content Descriptions Language - Sound and letter knowledge Mathematics: Foundation Year Content Descriptions Number and Algebra - Patterns and Algebra Measurement and Geometry - Using units of measurement Statistics and Probability - Data representation and interpretation	Numeracy: Numeracy is about students engaging with whatever mathematical knowledge and skills are needed for understanding in all learning areas.
KC 5: Children use ICTs to access information, investigate ideas and represent their thinking	Successful learners	Technologies: (to be developed)	ICT competence: Students learn to use information and communication technology effectively and appropriately to access, create and communicate information and ideas, solve problems and work collaboratively in all learning areas at school and in their lives beyond school.

A closer examination of connections

To illustrate how learning under the ‘umbrella’ of the EYLF builds the dispositions, knowledge and skills that are required for successful learning at school, some connections between EYLF Outcome 4 and the Australian Curriculum: Science and those between EYLF Outcomes, especially Outcome 5, and the Australian Curriculum: English are summarised below.

The EYLF and the Australian Curriculum: Science

EYLF Outcome 4 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
- make predictions and generalisations about their daily activities, aspects of the natural world and environments
- explore their environment
- manipulate objects and experiment with cause and effect, trial and error, and motion
- use reflective thinking to consider why things happen and what can be learnt from these experiences.

EYLF Outcome 4 Key component 2:
‘Children develop a range of skills and processes such as problem solving, inquiry, experimentation, hypothesising, researching and investigating.’

Foundation–Year 2

The Australian Curriculum: Science:

From Foundation to Year 2, students learn that observations can be organised to reveal patterns, and that these patterns can be used to make predictions about phenomena. In Foundation, students observe and describe behaviours and properties of everyday objects, materials and living things. They explore change in the world around them, including changes that impact on them, such as the weather, and changes they can effect, such as making things move or change shape.

They learn that seeking answers to questions and making observations is a core part of science and use their senses to gather different types of information.

Foundation Year Achievement Standard:

By the end of the Foundation year students describe the properties and behaviour of familiar objects. They suggest how the environment affects them and other living things. Students share observations of familiar objects and events.

‘From Foundation to Year 2, students learn that observations can be organised to reveal patterns, and that these patterns can be used to make predictions about phenomena.’

The EYLF Learning Outcomes and the Australian Curriculum: English

EYLF Outcomes 1, 2, 3 and 4 develop children’s capacity to use oral language and symbol systems to express, represent and communicate meaning, building on children’s home and community languages and cultures.

EYLF Outcome 5 explicitly addresses skills and knowledge pertinent to the Language, Literature and Literacy Strands of English:

- EYLF Outcome 5.1 Children interact verbally and nonverbally with others for a range of purposes
- EYLF Outcome 5.2 Children engage with a range of texts and gain meaning from these texts
- EYLF Outcome 5.3 Children express ideas and make meaning using a range of media
- EYLF Outcome 5.4 Children begin to understand how symbols and pattern systems work
- EYLF Outcome 5.5 Children use information and communication technologies to access information, investigate ideas and represent their thinking.

‘They learn that seeking answers to questions and making observations is a core part of science and use their senses to gather different types of information.’

The Australian Curriculum: English

Foundation Year Level Description

The English curriculum is built around the three interrelated strands of Language, Literature and Literacy. Teaching and learning programs should balance and integrate all three strands. Together the three strands focus on developing students' knowledge, understanding and skills in listening, reading, viewing, speaking, writing and creating. Learning in English builds on concepts, skills and processes developed in earlier years, and teachers will revisit, strengthen and develop these as needed.

Foundation Year Achievement Standard:

Summarised

Receptive modes (listening, reading and viewing)

By the end of the Foundation year, students use predicting and questioning strategies to make meaning from texts. They recall one or two events from texts

with familiar topics. They understand that there are different types of texts and that these can have similar characteristics. They identify connections between texts and their personal experience.

They read short, predictable texts with familiar vocabulary and supportive images, drawing on their developing knowledge of concepts of print and sound and letters.

Productive modes (speaking, writing and creating)

Students understand that their texts can reflect their own experiences. They identify and describe likes and dislikes about familiar texts, objects, characters and events.

In informal and whole class settings, students communicate clearly. They retell events and experiences with peers and known adults. Their writing shows evidence of sound and letter knowledge, beginning writing behaviours and experimentation with capital letters and full stops.



Implications for the enactment of the Australian Curriculum



The EYLF makes a major contribution to the broader education community in Australia through its enunciation of core principles and the practices of effective pedagogy. These underpinnings of quality practice are particularly pertinent to the early years of school and they remain relevant throughout schooling.

‘Equity’ for example, resonates through both the EYLF and the Australian Curriculum as a value, a belief and a commitment to achieving more equitable learning outcomes for all learners. ‘Respect for diversity’ is explicitly espoused as a Principle and as the Practice of Cultural Competence in the EYLF. In the Australian Curriculum, these views are captured in the general capabilities and the cross-curriculum priorities.

Ongoing learning and reflective practice are hallmarks of high-quality professional operation at every stage of pre-school and school education.

Some of the Practices identified in the EYLF ‘look different’ as learners progress into and through school.

The EYLF discussion on ‘holistic approaches’ and ‘responsiveness to children’ for example, closely relates to research¹² that confirms how much students’ self-concept affects their motivation to learn, dramatically impacting on learning success. The research indicates that student engagement is enhanced when students feel connected, competent and in control of their learning and part of this connectedness involves knowing that teachers care about your interests, experiences and abilities outside the classroom.

‘Ongoing learning and reflective practice are hallmarks of high-quality professional operation at every stage of pre-school and school education.’

Play-based pedagogy is a fundamental precept pervading the EYLF as well as being a defined key Practice. The way ‘play’ is used for learning may change as students move through the grades, but humans of all ages engage in play and it continues to be beneficial. It may later be referred to as ‘experimentation’ or ‘improvisation’ and these forms of ‘play’ underpin the creativity and innovation on which the nation will depend.

‘Children do not “magically” become different kinds of learners as they move from prior-to-school settings into the first years of school, so there are “principles” of teaching, learning and provision that apply to educators in both sectors.’

‘Learning environments’ in the EYLF refers both to physical spaces, materials and resources and to interactions that foster learning. Similarly, in school, teachers continue to create effective ‘learning environments’ as they differentiate resources and teaching strategies to cater for the different abilities and learning styles of students.

Continuity of provision for learning is clearly in the best interests of learners and learning success. The starting point for early childhood educators at the school interface will therefore be to establish the prior knowledge, skills, dispositions and understandings that children bring. On the basis of a sensitive understanding of each child's capabilities, educators in the first years of school, in consultation with families, will determine immediate and long-term priorities for each child's learning.

Children do not 'magically' become different kinds of learners as they move from prior-to-school settings into the first years of school, so there are 'principles' of teaching, learning and provision that apply to educators in both sectors.

Recommendations for effective provision in the early years

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

- value the learning that has gone on before—in the home, community and early learning settings
- establish and maintain strong, respectful and reciprocal relationships with children's families
- recognise and take into account the unique learning pathways of young children
- establish systems for communication within and between early childhood settings about what children know, understand and can do
- connect learning experiences to children's out-of-school experiences to maximise engagement
- provide an inquiry-driven, learner-focused and world-related learning program—global and local
- provide opportunities for children to use play to process and make sense of experience, to test understandings and to build imagination and social skills
- integrate and contextualise learning while teaching with clear intentions and a specific focus as required for particular skills
- stress 'learning how to learn', transfer of knowledge and metacognition
- monitor and assess children's learning so that intervention is timely and programs are adjusted
- engage in critical self-reflection as a form of ongoing professional learning, examining what is happening in their settings and deciding with others what might change to enable more equitable participation, learning and outcomes.



Conclusion



The EYLF and the Australian Curriculum are different in structure and in some of their emphases because they focus on particular phases in the learning lives of children and young people. However, the two sets of documents are complementary and can provide an articulated pathway of learning from prior-to-school, into school and beyond.

This discussion about the relationship between early learning under the umbrella of the EYLF and learning under the Australian Curriculum demonstrates areas of convergence and connection that enable continuity of educational provision. Most importantly, it indicates how high-quality early childhood settings using the EYLF can build the solid foundations necessary for lifelong learning.

The key to successful transitions between settings catering for young children will lie in collaboration—collaboration between educators and education leaders in varied early learning environments; and collaboration with families to ensure that children's prior experiences are valued and their current needs are met.

The EYLF is focused on the learner as a person with strong connections to family, community and culture and with particular needs in this time and place. The framework seeks to provide authentic experiences which help children to feel a secure sense of 'belonging', so that they can enjoy 'being' a child with rights, agency and decision-making capacity, while expanding their learning capacity and opening up exciting new possibilities.

The Australian Curriculum is focused on developing a nationally consistent, high-quality educational experience for all young Australians so that all can gain knowledge, skills and understandings at a level which enables them to fully participate as future citizens.

The EYLF is an aspirational document projecting an image of early childhood educators as knowledgeable, skilled and engaged in critical, self-reflective and informed decision making. Rising to this vision of the early childhood professional requires a strong commitment to ongoing learning and continuous improvement; and it requires capable and inspiring educational leadership at the service level. The EYLF is a key strategic element in the National Quality Framework aimed at raising the competence and status of the profession and the quality of early education and care provision in the years prior to school across Australia.

Similarly, the impact of the Australian Curriculum on students' learning will depend on the quality of teaching. The Curriculum calls for new knowledge and skills around subject matter; and a diverse repertoire of teaching strategies to enable all students to fully engage with it. These requirements have implications for professional support at the school, system and jurisdiction levels to empower teachers to fulfil the potential of the curriculum to raise levels of student achievement, leading to more equitable benefits from the educational experience for all young Australians.

'The key to successful transitions between settings catering for young children will lie in collaboration—collaboration between educators and education leaders in varied early learning environments; and collaboration with families to ensure that children's prior experiences are valued and their current needs are met.'

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