

EARLY YEARS LEARNING FRAMEWORK



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Putting the EYLF into practice in our centres

We have seen many articles, books and workshops on the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) which have informed us, amongst other things, that the EYLF is Australia's first national learning framework for all early childhood services for children from birth to 5 years and for transition to school, and that it will be incorporated into Licensing and Accreditation requirements by 2012.

Our problem is that very few, if any, have given us any ideas how to put it into practice. We are left wondering about the changes we need to make to meet the requirements of the 47 page EYLF document.

The purpose of this article is to suggest a seamless way to go about it by focusing on what is different about the EYLF and how the differences will affect what we do in our centres every day. In other words, what we might need to change about: what we say; what we do and, our documentation. Of course, the changes will vary between educators and between centres.

Difference 1: Terminology

The EYLF uses some very interesting words, 31 of them in fact - 34 if you count Belonging, Being and Becoming.

Fortunately, learning to use the new terminology will not be difficult, and familiarity with this 'child-speak' will bring advantages. For a start, the EYLF confirms us as 'educators'. We have always known that we are educators, but it is nice to be formally recognised as such. When we are all regular users of its other terms, such as 'pedagogy', 'agency', 'co-construct' and 'reflexivity', our communication will be more concise and precise.

Recently, another consultant and I conducted a state-wide series of workshops on the EYLF for Childcare Queensland and compiled a list of ideas to introduce these words to educators and parents. You can access this list on www.childcareqld.org.au

Difference 2: Emphasis on the link between our beliefs/values and our practices

The EYLF requires us to clearly link our beliefs

and values (about the way children grow and learn) with our practices. In other words, our work with children should reflect what we believe and value and should align with the EYLF's principles.

We already value these five principles. However, the EYLF strongly emphasises Partnerships with families. It also stresses Respect for Diversity, especially in relation to Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander cultures, to be expected given that the EYLF is an Australian framework. In addition, the EYLF requires us to think of 'culture' in much broader terms than ethnicity, and to consider such matters as how children and their families function together. The way children live affects the way children learn.

Difference 3: Educators' roles

Under the EYLF we are expected to be more knowledgeable, skilled, intentional and reflective than ever before.

While our programs already include child- and educator-initiated learning experiences, the EYLF is asking us to be more thoughtful, deliberate and purposeful about: what we are going to do; why we are going to do it; when and where we are going to do it; and how we are going to do it

...the how is what the EYLF calls 'intentional teaching' strategies. You would be using some intentional teaching strategies already but it asks us to use a wider range and to use them more often and more skilfully. The list of these strategies and their definitions is included in the workshop materials on www.childcareqld.org.au

Another difference in the EYLF is its strong emphasis on reflective practice. The list of the reflective questions from the workshops, together with the questions contributed by participants, can also be accessed on www.childcareqld.org.au

Difference 4: Including natural elements in the environment

The EYLF asks us to look closely at our indoor and outdoor learning environments from

the perspective of supporting a play-based curriculum. These environments need to optimise children's ability to initiate and lead their learning experiences, access the required materials, and support educators' involvement and use of intentional teaching strategies.

The EYLF stresses the inclusion of more natural elements and objects in both indoor and outdoor learning environments. It is not asking us to make immediate and costly changes, (e.g. replace synthetic with natural grass). Rather, it asks us to prioritise the inclusion of natural items when adding to or replacing worn resources and when renovating learning spaces.

Difference 5: Documentation

An effective and efficient way to identify changes the EYLF might require us to make to our programming and documentation is to ask ourselves a series of questions about the information our programs and their documentation will need to meet the requirements of the EYLF. The answers to these questions will dictate any changes we need to make. The list of questions used in the EYLF workshops can be accessed on www.childcareqld.org.au

Given that our current ways of programming and documentation must have already met accreditation and licensing requirements, the EYLF is unlikely to require us to completely change our current ways of programming and documenting or to adopt a one-size-fits-all format.

Summary:

Now that you have touched upon the differences in the EYLF, you probably feel reassured that you currently do much of what it requires. Your task, now, is to build upon the skills and knowledge you already have to make the changes you have identified in order to meet all the requirements of the EYLF.

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