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Gowrie  
Australia

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## EDITOR

Josephine Musumeci

## DESIGN

Angela Reeves

## PHOTOGRAPHER

Naomi Mawson & centre staff

## PRINTER

TTR Print Management



## COMMENTS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Feedback, suggestions and contributions are most welcome. Please contact Gowrie Australia to discuss ideas or to submit an article email: [susan.irvine@ladygowrie.com.au](mailto:susan.irvine@ladygowrie.com.au)

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## POSTAL ADDRESS

228 St Paul's Terrace  
Fortitude Valley QLD 4006

Telephone: 07 3252 2667

Facsimile: 07 3252 2258

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## CONTACT DETAILS - Gowrie Australia

### Lady Gowrie Child Centre, Adelaide (Inc.)

39a Dew Street  
Thebarton SA 5031

Ph: 08 8352 5144 Fax: 08 8234 1217

Email: [train@gowrie-adelaide.com.au](mailto:train@gowrie-adelaide.com.au)

Website: [www.gowrie-adelaide.com.au](http://www.gowrie-adelaide.com.au)

Contact: Christine Burgess

### Lady Gowrie Child Centre NSW

3 Joynton Avenue  
Zetland NSW 2017

Ph: 02 8345 7603 Fax: 02 9313 7022

Email: [inservice2@gowrie-sydney.com.au](mailto:inservice2@gowrie-sydney.com.au)

Website: [www.gowrie-sydney.com.au](http://www.gowrie-sydney.com.au)

Contact: Diane Duvall

### The Gowrie (QLD) Inc.

228 St Paul's Terrace  
Fortitude Valley QLD 4006

Ph: 07 3252 2667 Fax: 07 3252 2258

Email: [sharron@ladygowrie.com.au](mailto:sharron@ladygowrie.com.au)

Website: [www.gowrie-brisbane.com.au](http://www.gowrie-brisbane.com.au)

Contact: Sharron Palmer

### Lady Gowrie Tasmania

229 Campbell Street  
Hobart TAS 7000

Ph: 03 6230 6800 Fax: 03 6230 6811

Email: [info@gowrie-tas.com.au](mailto:info@gowrie-tas.com.au)

Website: [www.gowrie-tas.com.au](http://www.gowrie-tas.com.au)

Contact: Ros Cornish

### Gowrie Victoria

Cnr Newry & Canning Streets  
Carlton North VIC 3054

Ph: 03 9347 6388 Fax: 03 9347 7567

Email: [caroli@gowrievictoria.org.au](mailto:caroli@gowrievictoria.org.au)

Website: [www.gowrievictoria.org.au](http://www.gowrievictoria.org.au)

Contact: Carol l'Anson

### The Gowrie (WA) Inc.

275 Abernethy Road  
Cloverdale WA 6105

Ph: 08 9478 7500 Fax: 08 9478 2930

Email: [info@gowrie-wa.com.au](mailto:info@gowrie-wa.com.au)

Website: [www.gowrie-wa.com.au](http://www.gowrie-wa.com.au)

Contact: Virginia Aden

Welcome to the final edition of *Reflections* for 2009, and what a very busy year it has been!

In this edition, we share views and early experiences of our new national Early Years Learning Framework. To begin, Hydon and l'Anson share some very creative thoughts about what the framework offers educators, and how it might be used to strengthen current practice. Fuelled by Thai delicacies and a glass of wine, they have come up with the apt and thoughtful analogy of 'swimming between the (EYLF) flags'. Supporting practical implementation, we then offer some service reflections and learnings from the national trial of the EYLF, and the more recent trial of the Educator's Guide.

Arguably, one of the most challenging and controversial aspects of the EYLF has been the strengthened focus on learning outcomes, in particular assessment and reporting of outcomes. While reflective practice and evaluation have long been part of our professional toolkit, the (new) language of assessment is causing some anxiety, perhaps because assessment is more often linked to the school sector and national testing. In this edition, we preview a new resource being developed by Gowrie Australia to support appropriate and responsible approaches to assessment and reporting in early childhood education and care.

Shifting focus slightly, Dr Lance Emerson, CEO of the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY), focuses on the disparity in outcomes for some Australian children. In this article, Dr Emerson introduces plans for a new social marketing campaign to promote the value of parenting and to marshal better support for parents and young children. This is a shared responsibility, requiring leadership and commitment from government, community and all of us working with children and families.

Taking up this challenge, Gowrie Australia urges government to 'hold firm' on the National Early Childhood Reform Agenda, and the commitment to strengthen quality services and support for children and families. Over recent months there has been a steady campaign from some parts of the sector against increased quality standards, arguing that these are not affordable at this time. We believe this is a very short-term and largely uninformed view. The research evidence across a number of disciplines (eg. child health, mental health, education, child protection) is unequivocal. We all benefit from investment in quality services that support families to give their children the best start in life. Bottom line is that there is no getting away from some investment in this area. The real choice is whether as a society we choose to increase our shared investment in the early years, or pay later to provide more treatment services that cost a great deal more with less chance of successful outcomes. Once again, this is a shared issue and we all have a role to play – governments, business, early childhood services, parents and the broader community. If you agree, take a look at Early Childhood Australia's latest campaign (back cover) and make your voice heard.

To all of our readers and colleagues, we wish you a joyous Christmas and relaxing break. See you in 2010.

**Dr Susan Irvine**  
CEO, *The Gowrie (QLD) Inc*

## OTHER GOWRIE CEO'S

- Ruth Callaghan – *Lady Gowrie Child Centre NSW*
- Gilda Howard – *Gowrie Victoria*
- Ros Cornish – *Lady Gowrie Tasmania*
- Kaye Colmer – *Lady Gowrie Child Centre, Adelaide (Inc)*
- Amanda Hunt – *The Gowrie (WA) Inc*



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# Swimming Between the Flags

**Authors:**  
Catharine Hydon  
Carol I'Anson  
Gowrie Victoria

“Nothing is too small to know and  
nothing is too big to attempt” William Van Horne

The Framework requires of us many things but fundamentally that we see children in new ways, as rich, strong and powerful (Malaguzzi, 1993), and as active contributors to their world. And likewise, it requires that we see ourselves as educators in new ways, as collaborators and researchers, joining with children in communities of learning (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence 1999).

How do you understand the implications of the arrival of the national Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) - such enormous changes, such immense possibilities? And how do you begin to define what you, as an individual early childhood educator, can do to contribute meaningfully to this process?

A delicious Thai meal and a therapeutic glass of wine is a great place to start! We began to think about the arrival of the Framework and what it would mean for early childhood educators across the country. We reflected on our collective years in the profession and on those educators with whom we had worked. The educators with insight and courage, whose work is reflective of the concepts and practices detailed in the pages of the Framework, others just starting out on their early childhood journey, and still others who had found coming to terms with change a challenge – accreditation, regulations and the numerous other shifts that we have seen over the years. We imagined being in a children’s centre once again – at a staff meeting on a cold Wednesday evening after a long day working with children and their families. How would we tell this group of educators about the arrival of the EYLF? How would we capture their imagination, how would

we engage them in this new challenge and share with them our aspirations for better outcomes for children? We conjured up an interesting metaphor.

From out of nowhere came the image of the flags at Bondi Beach! So, now we beg your indulgence as we use the iconic Australian metaphor of “*swimming between the flags*” to explore what the Framework means for children, families and educators, now and into the future.

Just as we encourage people to enjoy the waves within the boundaries of the flags, the Framework invites educators to articulate their work within the context of contemporary early childhood pedagogy. The Framework asks us to look at how we view the child and how we view ourselves as educators, so we imagined the “Image of the Child” and the “Image of the Educator” as our two flags. In between is a large expanse in which to define our daily practice in the context of the broad vision, guiding principles, practices and outcomes as described in the Framework.

The flags clearly designate the boundaries for our practice, to ensure the best outcomes for children and families. Swimming outside the flags indicates

practice that is out dated and it is important to realise that the time is up for this to keep happening – the lifesavers on duty will get cranky if you keep straying outside these defined areas!! On the other hand, within the boundaries of the flags there is a vast range of opportunities to explore the implementation of the Framework as it applies to your own community. Now, in this space, you can begin in small ways to investigate how **Being, Belonging** and **Becoming** look in your service and your daily practice - by just staying in the shallows and dipping your toes in, or you can swim ever deeper, but still within the flags, and feel supported to be a truly innovative and reflective practitioner.

The Framework becomes a guiding force to underpin all children's rights to access educational opportunities that enrich their lives in the here and now and equip them for the future. The development of the EYLF for Australia signals our commitment to making this right a reality. For too long, we have been content with uncertainty about the meaning of our work with children. We have been unable to speak boldly about our vision for young children's learning and our role as educators. The presence of the early years' flags in life-long learning articulates, for the first time, our capacity to deliver outcomes for young children.

The Framework urges us to think seriously about our practice: how we view and understand children and their learning, how we view and understand our role as early childhood educators and, importantly, how we act on this knowledge. The Framework also recognises the voice of families and children - and early childhood programs and services who are not engaging in this way, must begin to determine ways to make this happen.

Reflecting on these questions and ideas individually, and as a team of educators in your own service, is part of taking those first important steps of paddling in the shallows.

The new understandings we gain will affect our practice in many ways. For some it will reinforce existing approaches, for others it will represent a big change. Irrespective, educators are invited to examine their current practice and take active steps to begin incorporating the broad vision of the EYLF into their work. For the most part, how this will look everyday, in terms of direct programming for children, will be determined as educators reflect on the five outcomes and how they relate within their local communities.

Just like when you are swimming between the flags, there are people and supports to help keep you in the right space. Professional learning opportunities,

resources, talking with colleagues and mentors are just a few possibilities. So, think of the implementation of the EYLF as a journey between the flags – any big change takes time and also a commitment to act. Remember to ask questions and seek support.

And, if you are feeling a little overwhelmed and wondering how and where to start, here are just a few suggestions to get you swimming between those flags:

- Read the EYLF – not once but many times. Talk about it with your colleagues and reflect on your current practice – what of the Framework are you currently doing well and what areas could you work on? Document these insights as they will be helpful tools as you implement the EYLF.
- Put the EYLF as a regular item on your staff meeting agenda. Explore together your understanding of the Vision for Children's Learning – Belonging, Being and Becoming.
- Photocopy the outcomes and display them prominently, perhaps with photos of children demonstrating the outcomes. This will also help inform families of this new approach.
- Circulate the brochures and other information to families and make it a regular feature in your newsletter.

The arrival of the EYLF marks an exciting time for early childhood education in Australia. "It requires of us thought and deliberation, the making of ethical choices and taking responsibility for those choices" (Moss & Petrie, 1999:185) - in other words, a willingness to engage with this process and to commit to changing practices and approaches in the best interests of children and their families.

The success of the EYLF and its capacity to deliver for children depends on us - are you ready and willing to swim between the flags?

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# AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL EARLY YEARS LEARNING FRAMEWORK

## Author:

**Cheryl Coleman**

Early Childhood Quality Section  
Office of Early Childhood Education  
and Child Care  
Department of Education, Employment  
and Workplace Relations

All Australian Governments have committed to a National Quality Agenda that will raise the quality of all early childhood services. The National Quality Agenda forms part of a broader Council of Australian Governments agenda to pursue substantial reform in the areas of education, skills and early childhood development.

Broadly there are three goals which underpin the reforms in the Early Childhood Education and Care sector. These are:

- providing positive outcomes for children through high quality care and education;
- providing better choices for families to participate in work by ensuring the availability of high quality and affordable formal child care and preschool services; and
- ensuring families have the information they require to make informed choices based on their individual family circumstances and the specific needs of their children.

The National Quality Agenda comprises four key components. These are:

- a National Quality Standard
- enhanced regulatory arrangements
- a quality rating system and
- the national Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF).

## What is the EYLF?

The Early Years Learning Framework is a national curriculum framework which will ensure quality and consistency in the delivery of early childhood education programs across all early childhood settings. It covers ages from birth to five years and supports transition to formal schooling.

The Framework is an important tool to help professionals and parents achieve the best learning and developmental outcomes for children. It also provides direction in relation to quality early childhood education for children and will significantly complement universal access to an educational program.

The EYLF describes the principles, practices and outcomes essential to support and enhance young children's learning, as well as their transition to school. It is a key component of the quality reform agenda and identifies the most effective conditions for children's learning based on current research. It recognises the importance of play-based learning, communication and language (including early literacy and numeracy), as well as personal, emotional and social development.



The EYLF outlines a vision for children's learning founded on the interrelated themes: *Belonging, Being and Becoming*. These themes reflect the context of children's lives.

Children belong to a family, community, culture and society. This '**belonging**' influences who they are in every way, from the language they use to communicate, to their relationships and to their understanding of their world.

Children are also individuals in the here and now. They have needs, wants, desires and dreams related to their own particular temperaments, interests and abilities. This '**being**' is respected and acknowledged in the Framework through the inclusion of children in the planning of their own programs and in the support of each child's individual contribution to, and experience of, their early childhood setting.

Finally, children are growing and developing every day. They are '**becoming**' the older child and adult they will one day be. To become the very best they can be they need knowledge, skills and experience. The EYLF guides early childhood educators as they plan and deliver challenging, stimulating and supportive learning environments for young children.

The EYLF recognises that culture is fundamental to our sense of identity. The Framework strongly promotes respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in the development of both policy and practice in early childhood services. It challenges early childhood educators to examine their interactions and relationships with Indigenous families to ensure the particular needs of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are always considered in the development and implementation of the program.

The EYLF is also based on three interconnected elements:  
*Principles, Practice and Learning Outcomes*.

The five **Principles** underpin everything that occurs in the early childhood setting. They reflect contemporary theories and research on the optimum conditions necessary to support children's learning.

The eight articles of **Practice** outline the repertoire of educational processes which most effectively promote children's learning. In particular, the importance of play is emphasised as the most appropriate vehicle for young children's learning.

Finally, the five **Outcomes** encapsulate the actual learning undertaken by young children in their early childhood settings. The outcomes can be observed and each child's learning against each outcome can be clearly documented. The outcomes are broad enough to include children of all ages, stages and

abilities but are specific enough to provide educators with clear goals to inform their practice.

In addition, the EYLF provides early childhood educators with a professional tool which helps them to explain to families and the community the nature of their complex and challenging work. In concrete terms the Framework describes how quality early childhood education is delivered in services and explains the knowledge and understanding necessary to do this work well.

The EYLF embodies a vision for children's learning which will underpin early childhood education in Australia for many years to come.

### Why do we need the EYLF?

Governments across Australia recognise the impact of high-quality early childhood education and care on children's lives, both in the present and in their future. Governments also recognise the necessity to improve outcomes for Indigenous and disadvantaged children in our society.

The quality of early childhood education and care is driven by a range of interdependent factors but there is general agreement that one essential factor is the quality of the curricula that support children's learning and development.

Within Australia, each state and territory independently produced their own curriculum documents for their early childhood and primary sectors but it was recognised that a coherent and consistent national approach was needed to ensure young children experienced the same standard and quality of programming, in whichever early childhood setting they attended.

It was also agreed that a single curriculum for early childhood would help break down the artificial divide between care and education services.

### How was the EYLF developed?

The Early Years Learning Framework has been developed collaboratively by the Australian and State and Territory Governments with substantial input from the early childhood sector and early childhood academics. The Framework has incorporated feedback from an extensive consultation process, including two national symposiums, national public consultation forums, focus groups, an online forum and case-study trials.

The draft Early Years Learning Framework and supporting documentation were trialled in 28 case study sites across Australia from 23 February until 10 April 2009 to test the Framework and its application in early childhood settings prior to implementation.

The sites represented a wide variety of early childhood settings and services, including preschools, early childhood settings on school sites, Long Day Care Centres, Family Day Care, Multipurpose Aboriginal Children's Services, early intervention and occasional child care in metropolitan, regional and remote settings across Australia.

### What has been the response to the EYLF?

Many respondents found the EYLF both motivational and inspirational by providing a stimulus for reflection on current practice and by focussing on continual improvement. Respondents reported it had already been a catalyst for conversations among staff and a conduit for more widespread adoption of contemporary approaches to early childhood learning and teaching.

The underlying and interconnected themes of *Belonging, Being and Becoming* resonated with many participants in the trials of the Framework. They viewed them as a unifying thread, woven throughout the document. The themes were seen as meaningful and valuable by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants.

Aspects of the EYLF noted as particular strengths were: the image of children as capable and competent, the emphasis on the integrated nature of children's learning and learning outcomes that focussed on children's strengths.

There was considerable support for the learning outcomes, which were seen as inter-related and providing a holistic view of the child. Participants also felt that the EYLF encourages educators to include children in discussions about their learning, and develop true partnerships.

The emphasis in the EYLF on educators critically reflecting on their practice, both individually and in a team environment was strongly supported. The use of the 'reflective questions' was noted as a particular strength of the document.

For many, the first response to reading and using the EYLF was to validate, check, and confirm their current practice. In this way, the EYLF reinforced what staff were already doing, which they found affirming and reassuring. There was a sense that the EYLF "*explains theoretically what we do*", and "*identifies what is important and why it is important*".

It was reported that the professional language of the EYLF could be used by educators to explain their work to parents. Participants believed the EYLF could provide authority for early childhood educators in their interactions with families, communities and schools. Participants were particularly enthusiastic about the

introduction of the Framework for establishing common standards and expectations across all the states and territories of Australia. It was seen as contributing to the professional status of early childhood educators by its potential to raise accountability.

Participants expressed the hope that the EYLF would also bring greater consistency across the early childhood sector through a shared vision for Australian children and a consistent approach to learning for the birth to 5 years age group. They expressed the belief that the EYLF would help build pedagogical connections between preschool, child care and school sectors and promote a greater appreciation for children's prior-to-school learning. Participants also suggested it could assist mutual recognition and promote a smoother dialogue between educators in prior-to-school settings and schools.

### What is happening with the EYLF now?

The EYLF was endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) on 2 July 2009. Copies of the EYLF and the Families Guide have now been distributed to all early childhood services in Australia.

Services are currently exploring the document and considering how it will be implemented in their own context. Professional development programs will be rolled out in each state and territory to support educators to use the Framework to its full potential.

Each state and territory government is considering how best to support implementation of the EYLF in their own jurisdiction.

An Educators' Guide to the EYLF is in development and is expected to be released in early 2010. An online forum is currently operating through the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) website. The forum provides an opportunity for participants to discuss the EYLF and to comment on a draft of the first module of the Educators' Guide. All early childhood educators are welcome to register and participate on this forum.

It is also expected that early childhood educators will support each other in the implementation of the EYLF through formal and informal networking groups and through interactive forums such as the DEEWR on-line forum. Early childhood educators have sought this national approach to early childhood education for many years. Their enthusiasm and commitment will ensure that the Framework is utilised to its full potential and that it provides a firm educational foundation for our youngest children.



# REFLECTIONS

## On the National Trial of the Draft EYLF and Educator's Guide

To promote and support informed discussion, we look here at the experience of some services in the national trial of the draft EYLF and the more recent trial of the supporting draft Educator's Guide.

### Snapshot 1:

**Lady Gowrie Warry Street  
Child Centre in Brisbane**

Our involvement in the national trial was welcome but unexpected. Debbie (Centre Director) and I attended the EYLF Forum in late 2008 and generally felt comfortable with the proposed themes and directions in the draft Framework. Some weeks later, we were delighted to receive a letter from the EYLF Consortia, inviting us to be one of 28 case study sites (4 in Queensland) for the national trial of the EYLF.

#### Getting started

As the trial timeframe was relatively short, we started out with a planning meeting to determine how we would implement the Framework and then gather information from stakeholders. This meeting involved the Centre Director, Assistant Director, Kindergarten Teacher, Operations Manager (Child Centres), CEO and a nominated 'critical friend', Associate Professor Donna Berthelson from QUT. We decided on the following key steps:

#### Authors: **Dr Susan Irvine**

CEO, The Gowrie Qld Inc.

#### **Debbie Verstege**

Director, Lady Gowrie Warry St  
Child Centre

- Memo to all staff outlining our trial process, opportunities to be involved and expectations of education staff. The memo asked all staff to begin by reading through the draft Framework.
- Letter to parents providing an overview of the EYLF initiative, the trial and inviting parents to participate in the discussion.
- A desktop mapping exercise to map our existing child outcomes and educational philosophy to the draft EYLF and to see how our current work linked to the Framework.
- Nomination of a 'lead person' in each room. In order to gain a variety of insights, we sought a mix of educators with different qualifications and levels of experience (ie. not simply the group leader in each room).
- Data collection via individual interviews (conversations) with lead staff and a final focus group that involved all centre educators, interested colleagues from other Gowrie services, senior Gowrie staff and a member of the Board of Management.

## General reflections on the draft EYLF

Collectively we viewed the EYLF as a thoughtful and useful framework. Applying a strengths-based approach, implementation validated our current thinking and work, and enhanced this by offering new insights and strategies and highlighting areas where we could do more.

### Some educators' comments:

- *We found that we were implementing many of the indicators across the outcomes.*
- *It is similar to our current practice.*
- *We did identify some gaps in some of the areas which we will reflect on further and add more opportunities to learn in those areas, or resource and focus on them more in our program.*
- *More reflection and building on the areas of play that sometimes get missed – creating more learning opportunities.*

## What helped us in the trial?

All in all we had a very positive trial experience and attribute this broadly to three things. To begin, all our education staff saw value in the EYLF. Having read through the EYLF, staff felt comfortable and positive about it and eager to put it to use, as illustrated by the following comments:

- *... we believed in the content of the document – it was a good fit with our values and beliefs about education and care programs for young children.*
- *...it was backed up by sound early childhood theory and pedagogical practice.*

Second, we weren't starting from scratch. Only twelve months earlier, The Gowrie had undertaken a lengthy and consultative strategic planning exercise that included the review and updating of our educational philosophy and identification of a set of priority child outcomes. This was a very participatory process, resulting in a great deal of community ownership of this work. We were eager to build on this – and were not looking to simply replace it with a new Framework. Mapping our outcomes and philosophy against the draft EYLF provided a quick start and strengths-based approach to implementation.

Third, we promote a work culture of critical reflection, open discussion and shared decision-making. This certainly supported the active and meaningful engagement of staff in the trial, and good data collection. In turn, we also found that the EYLF and trial process offered a tool and process to promote and strengthen this culture.

## Did we have any concerns about the EYLF?

Our feedback on the draft EYLF included the need to promote a holistic approach and to value all areas of learning (not some above others). We also felt that the EYLF needed to be accessible to a wide audience (staff, educators and families), and could do with a good edit to remove unnecessary jargon. There was also a feeling that insufficient attention had been directed toward reconciliation and Indigenous knowledge and culture. We feel that these concerns were considered and have generally been addressed in the final EYLF.

### Some educators' comments:

- *The original draft seemed to have a stronger emphasis on intellectual/cognitive learning, without enough regard for the necessity to establish a secure emotional base for infants and children before learning /development can smoothly progress. This was rectified by the March '09 Draft.*
- *There was a general concern about the roll out of the Framework and the time to support all staff to feel familiar with the document and be clear on the ways they might use it with children, for themselves as professionals and with families and the wider community.*

## Final thoughts

We believe that development of a curriculum framework spanning all formal ECEC services is a welcome development that is somewhat overdue. Development of the Framework acknowledges the significant contribution of ECEC services and educators to a child's education and lifelong learning. Promotion of the EYLF, within the sector and broader community, will hopefully go some way toward raising this awareness and value and respect for the work that we do.

### Some educators' comments:

- *A higher standard of practice.*
- *A base that we can all reflect on and develop into our everyday practice*
- *It is a national Framework and this benefits every staff member, family and child.*
- *A stronger link in the two-way communication that we have with families – sharing views on what is important for young children's learning.*
- *It is a way to promote our contribution and place in the lives of children.*

Article first published in the PSCQ LOOP magazine. Reproduced with permission from the Professional Support Coordinator Queensland.



## Snapshot 2: Gowrie Victoria

**Authors:**  
**Debbie Cole**  
**Carol I'Anson**

Gowrie Victoria was part of the second round of trial sites in Victoria for the EYLF. During this trial period, the Framework was well received by the staff team. It was viewed as a strengths-based document that was user-friendly and easy to understand. It provided staff with consistent language and clear guidelines which enabled them to discuss, reflect and describe children's learning. The Framework is also flexible enough for all age groups and can be easily interpreted to suit varied levels of learning and development.

Reflecting on the EYLF has supported staff to consider a broader range of outcomes for children in their programs. It has reinforced their current practice and assisted them with language to better document their practice. This has been particularly important in the areas of literacy and numeracy and it has provided staff with ideas about ways to extend the program. As families can also access the Framework, it provides a common language that can be shared and discussed between educators and parents.

We have since started the process of implementing the Framework within the children's programs. The first step for us was to establish a pedagogical working party to reflect on our current practices, how these intersect with the Framework vision, principles and outcomes, what, if any, differences were evident and how to implement the Framework within our own context. This also includes a plan to provide staff with support and professional learning opportunities to assist with the implementation.

Over recent years, Gowrie Victoria developed its own core curriculum, as part of a research project with Monash University. The project aimed to develop a curriculum approach that reflected the practice experience of our educators, as well as contemporary understandings of early childhood pedagogy and research-based evidence. Much of the principles, practice and, critically, the key outcomes articulated in the Framework, are consistent with our curriculum and it is these intersections that will drive our future approach to pedagogy.

Our early childhood pedagogical approach will acknowledge the broad vision of the EYLF, to provide children with a sense of *Belonging*, recognise and celebrate their *Being* and support their *Becoming*. This vision will form the foundation of practice with children and their families and be recognisable in all elements of our children's programs. Educators will reference the Framework materials in the design and documentation of the children's programs.

After working with the EYLF over the past few months our early childhood educators have provided the following insights:

*The EYLF has given me a bit more focus in my analysis of observations. When writing up an observation, I refer to the language and concepts outlined in the Framework and use it within my documentation. I have also been trialing the idea of recording the relevant Learning Outcome at the bottom of the page to link the observation to the Framework in a formal way for parents, so that they are more aware of the fact that we do work within a recognised Framework.*

**Daniella La Rosa – Team Leader**

*The Framework has been great for me – it's helped me to streamline my planning and it is so much easier to write about children's learning. It's all there for you. The language in the document is really easy to read and means that at our centre we can speak a common language across all the rooms.*

**Nicole Brunheir – Team Leader**

Overall, the Framework has inspired staff to reflect on their current practices and consider the language they use to document children's learning. All staff in the centre are now using the learning outcomes as the key elements from which they observe and plan the program. The detailed examples linked to each element have enabled staff to confidently articulate children's learning and development using consistent language in their written documentation. This has further enhanced their professional conversations with families and is supporting staff to engage in more meaningful reflection within their teams.



### Snapshot 3:

## Lady Gowrie West & Lady Gowrie Noosa Family Day Care

### Author:

**Dr Susan Irvine**

CEO, The Gowrie Qld Inc.

### Getting Started

As the trial period for the draft Educator's Guide was relatively short, it was necessary to quickly determine an effective start up strategy. We decided on a staged approach that involved providing information and resources, supporting implementation, and collecting feedback throughout the trial period. Key steps included:

#### Information sharing

A memo was sent to coordination staff providing information about the trial. Recognising that carers are self-employed, an Expression of Interest process was used to recruit carers. A letter outlining the trial aim, process and the requirements and expectations of participating carers was emailed to all carers in the two schemes (with an average of 25 carers per scheme). Within 3 days, each scheme had 6 carers engaged in the trial. This included experienced and new carers with a mix of qualifications and cultural and language backgrounds.

#### Initial information sessions

Each scheme held an initial information session with interested carers. The one hour meeting introduced the two primary resources (the EYLF and Educator's Guide), outlined the trial process (confirming requirements and expectations) and identified the focal point for each scheme. Building on recent professional development, both schemes elected to concentrate on reflective practice with a particular focus on the home learning environment. This session was also used to gather baseline data (ie. existing knowledge of selected focus area).

#### Ongoing discussion and support within each service

Coordination staff prompted ongoing reflection and discussion and supported the collection of feedback throughout the trial via home visits, emails and telephone contact.

#### Final feedback sessions

Each scheme held a final feedback session. These were run as a focus group and based on broad prompts drawn from the trial feedback forms



## Some reflections on the trial experience in FDC

- To measure learning and impact, we implemented a brief carer survey to gain some sense of existing knowledge and practice relating to the selected focal point (ie reflective practice). This was a gratifying and validating process, making visible to management, staff and carers the depth of professional knowledge that already existed. It also provided the basis for a strengths-based approach to trialing the EYLF and Guide. *At the beginning of the trial, carers described reflective practice as a critical part of everyday professional practice, spanning children (individual and groups), families, self, colleagues, relationships, interactions, teaching and learning. It was seen to be about personal growth and improved services for children and families.*
- At the start of the trial, we asked carers to identify any things about reflective practice they would like to know more about. Responses focused on the need for *practical* information and support. For example, how to 'timetable' into a busy day, prompts to support reflection and how to document 'properly'.
- There was a general sense of happiness and comfort amongst staff and carers with both the EYLF and the broad content of the draft Educator's Guide. This said, there was a strong view that the Guide needed to be more succinct, accessible and user-friendly. The call was for more practical information and strategies to support implementation of the EYLF.
- There may be a need to determine the best target group for the Educator's Guide. In family day care, it may be best to provide a 'train the trainer' type resource that supports Coordination Teams to build carer capacity to implement the EYLF. It was also noted that given the context of FDC, getting started took a little longer than in other settings where educators are employed.
- One area of difference relates to how the Educator's Guide was perceived and used. Some carers argued for something more like the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System guide, and differentiation of levels of quality. Other participants wanted to avoid any checklist format that could be used simply to validate performance, instead of provoking and supporting critical inquiry, reflection and continuous quality improvement.
- In terms of perceived learning and outcomes, there were a range of views and experiences. Most carers felt they had learned from participating in the trial and engaging with the EYLF and Educator's Guide. A couple saw it more as a process of validation of current practice.

*Thank you to the staff and carers of Lady Gowrie West and Lady Gowrie Noosa Family Day Care Schemes.*



This small trial, spanning the full range of early childhood education and care settings was an interesting and fruitful exercise. It highlighted the depth of existing professional knowledge, the general desire to learn and strengthen practice, and the practical application and value of the EYLF across the ECEC settings.



## Collaboration at a Local Level to Support the Implementation of the National EYLF

### Authors:

#### Ros Cornish

CEO, Lady Gowrie Tasmania

#### Annette Barwick

General Manager, Professional Support  
Coordination, Tasmania

In all aspects of our profession, it is important for early childhood stakeholders to work in collaboration to support best possible outcomes for young children.

With Tasmania being a small state, such collaboration can be easily facilitated and supported and an example of this is the implementation of the EYLF. Through discussion it has become evident that the key stakeholders are keen to work together for the following purposes:

- to gain shared understanding of the EYLF;
- to support clear consistent messages to the field;
- to prevent duplication of support/training/resource development;
- to make best use of the resources available.

The Tasmanian Government Department of Education Early Years, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations and the Tasmanian Professional Support Coordination, sponsored by Lady Gowrie Tasmania, are working to explore:

- existing support structures;
- current plans to support the implementation;
- identification of further assistance required.

Following on from this initial work, a state-wide meeting was scheduled for mid- October to extend the stakeholder network to include:

- Early Childhood Educators of Tasmania
- Early Childhood Australia (Tasmanian Branch)
- Early Childhood Intervention Service
- The Tasmanian Skills Institute
- Tasmanian Polytechnic
- The University of Tasmania
- Tasmanian Aboriginal Education Unit
- Launch into Learning Project Team.

From this networking it is envisaged that all stakeholders will commit to the development of a state plan to support the implementation of the EYLF in Tasmania. The outcome will provide a planned and consistent approach which meets the needs of all stakeholders using the collective knowledge, expertise and resources of the respective agencies.

The Inclusion and Professional Support Program, funded by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, includes the Professional Support Co-ordination and Indigenous Professional Support Unit.

These two funded programs will be supporting the Australian Government Child Care Services in the implementation of the Early Years Learning Framework.

Check out these websites for updates and information:

- PSCTas, Lady Gowrie Tasmania (Tasmania) [www.psctas.org.au](http://www.psctas.org.au)
- PSCQ (Queensland) [www.pscq.org.au](http://www.pscq.org.au)
- PSC (Australia Capital Territory) [www.actpsc.com.au](http://www.actpsc.com.au)
- CHILD Australia (Western Australia) [www.pscwa.org.au](http://www.pscwa.org.au)
- Children's Services Central (New South Wales) [www.cscentral.org.au](http://www.cscentral.org.au)
- Lady Gowrie Child Centre (South Australia) [www.psc.sa.org.au](http://www.psc.sa.org.au)
- Community Child Care Resource & Development Unit (Victoria) [www.cccvic.org.au](http://www.cccvic.org.au)



# Assessment in the Early Years: A Resource from Gowrie Australia drawing on the National Early Years Learning Framework

## Author:

### Annette Russell

Resource Centre Manager

Lady Gowrie Child Centre, Adelaide (Inc.)

**Gowrie Australia** brings together the CEOs and Executive Directors of Gowrie Services from around Australia and is dedicated to promoting better practices to benefit children, families and the Children's Services sector through ongoing research in early childhood education and care, and the professional development and support of educators working in the field. To support services in implementing the national Early Years Learning Framework, Gowrie Australia's current project is the development of a practical resource for the assessment of children's learning for educators working in Family Day Care, Long Day Care and Preschool services. During 2010, Gowrie services will be providing a range of associated professional development opportunities.

This article outlines some of the work to date.

This project aims to bring together current research and understandings about assessment practices in a user friendly resource for educators working in Family Day Care, Long Day Care and Preschools. The resource will provide examples of documentation that has been created by Gowrie educators as part of the assessment processes used in their work, linking these with EYLF's framework of principles, practices and outcomes.

The development of the resource has been a rewarding professional learning opportunity and one rich with lively dialogue and robust debate. During the beginning phases of this work, our focus was on developing an understanding of some key questions.

- **What is assessment?**
- **What does EYLF say about assessment?**
- **How can we use the principles and practices outlined in EYLF to guide / refine our approach and understanding?**

On the surface, the question *What is assessment?* seems straightforward enough. There are, however, many different ways that assessment can be understood, written about and practised. In her article, "Framing the Assessment Discussion," Jacqueline Jones (2004) draws attention to a complex debate and some critical assessment related issues that early childhood educators need to become more aware of. She argues strongly that we need to develop our 'assessment literacy' to enable us to understand the strengths and limitations of different approaches.

We responded to the challenge of developing our own understanding of the debates and multiple perspectives in the literature on assessment by considering the many possible ways that information about children's learning can be gathered and recorded. As part of this work we considered not only the methods and practices we used, but other common practices within early childhood, such as using checklists and developmental record keeping systems. For example, we argued whether checklists were appropriate or produced useful information in everyday use. These discussions identified contentious issues and there was lively and passionate discussion within the team as positions, beliefs and practices were debated.

The principles and practices outlined in EYLF were a valuable resource in these discussions and our key point of reference in developing our own position. For example, we asked "Do checklists capture the holistic nature of children's learning?" "Do they show the richness of a child's cultural knowledge, and their strengths and talents?" "Do they provide meaningful information for families and rich information to inspire ongoing planning and curriculum development?" "Can they capture the child's and family's voice?" If not, is there a place for checklists and ratings against predetermined measurements? If so, what is it?

We went on to gather together the different ways we currently record observations, create documentation and keep programming records so that we could discuss their purpose, strengths and potential in the same way. In reflecting on the examples we studied, we were able to refine and develop a shared understanding of three different and valued dimensions of our practice, all of which we could align to EYLF and the vision of children's learning underpinning it.



### Three dimensions of our approach to assessment

- **Assessment for learning** – the process of noticing, recognising and responding to children’s learning. This is ongoing and not always documented or recorded but when it is, it provides records of children’s learning, as well as the thinking of educators about the intentional ways they respond in their interactions and planning.
- **Assessment of learning** – the process of reflecting on children’s learning over a period of time to summarise information in a broad way. Summaries such as these are used for developing transition reports as well as evaluation at different points in the year.
- **Assessments as learning** – the process educators use to provide feedback for children about their learning. It involves creating documentation of important moments in a child’s learning to reveal and celebrate both the achievements and the learning strategies a child has brought to their learning experience.

Central to all of these practices is our commitment to working in partnership with families, so each dimension includes ongoing sharing of ideas and information between home and centre. Sometimes assessment information is captured in documentation about the experiences of children in a group, while at other times it focuses on children individually. In combination, we believe that the range of assessment approaches used creates a rich picture of each child’s learning, as well as important information for planning and evaluation.

In bringing together examples of our work in this resource and explaining how we see this linking to EYLF, we hope to inspire and support other early childhood educators to engage in similar professional dialogue and reflection about their own assessment practices, processes and the contribution to young children’s learning.

**Watch out for the release of this resource in 2010**

**Reference:**  
Jones, J. (2004) “Framing the Assessment Discussion” in Koralek, D., (ed) *Spotlight on Young Children and Assessment*, NAYEC, Washington DC.

# Obama, the GFC, and valuing children and young people in Australia

**Author:**  
**Dr Lance Emerson**  
CEO - The Australian Research  
Alliance for Children and Youth

Change is in the air, President Barack Obama was brought to power on the promise of change and Primer Minister Kevin Rudd, in *The Monthly* earlier this year stated that *"From time to time in human history there occur events of a truly seismic significance, events that mark a turning point between one epoch and the next; when one orthodoxy is overthrown and another takes its place ...there is a sense that we are now living through just such a time"* (Rudd 2009).

One of the many other authorities adding to the debate is leading social scientist and economist Riane Eisler. Be sure to add her book *The Real Wealth of Nations* (Eisler, 2007) to your summer holiday reading list. She argues that the world's economy must be rebuilt into a caring economy, to one that has inbuilt basic human values that place people and the environment as central to its theme, rather than a world economy determined by, as Kevin Rudd states *"extreme capitalism and excessive greed which became the economic orthodoxy of our time"* (Rudd 2009).

So what is the link between Obama, Rudd, Eisler, the world economy and children? The answer is that greed is bad for children – and our leaders know it.

As we reported last year with the release of the ARACY Report Card on the Wellbeing of Young Australians (ARACY 2008), and validated through numerous other reports such as UNICEF's Wellbeing of Children in Rich Nations (UNICEF 2007), Hesmati's Measurement and Analysis of Child Well-Being in Middle and High Income Countries (Heshmati 2008) and the recent OECD Report on Children (OECD 2009), Australia's rank is 'very average' in child and youth wellbeing outcomes in comparison to other developed countries. We fare even worse when it comes to early childhood development (UNICEF 2008).

In countries throughout the western world, some groups of children and young people are displaying unacceptably poor or worsening outcomes in many areas of health and development. Australia is no exception to this trend. In these western countries, problems seem to be occurring at younger ages and these problems are more severe, more complex and more difficult to treat and manage than problems encountered 10 to 20 years ago.

Critically, the gap in outcomes between the higher and lower socio-economic groupings within the Australian populations is increasing. And we still don't really know why.





What we do know is that these problems all have associated social and financial costs. Costs such as reduced skill levels that make Australia less competitive internationally, sub-optimal workforce participation and productivity, and increased welfare dependency. That's what really interests governments and business. The same set of problems also result in dramatic and unsustainable expenditure at the 'crisis end', without serious consideration of what the underlying causes may be or how to change them.

In the light of this evidence, there is mounting concern in many western nations (eg the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada) about the health and wellbeing of children and young people. A number of recent publications argue that our societies cannot afford, socially or economically, to allow this situation to continue and that there needs to be a fundamental change in the way we meet the needs of children and young people.

The global financial crisis presents us with this opportunity to achieve change. It allows a new dialogue about what is important to us. And most importantly, a (re)focus on the needs of children and young people.

In September, her Excellency the Governor General hosted a dinner at Government House, assisted by ARACY and the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. The dinner was attended by business leaders, senior Cabinet Ministers (including the Deputy Prime Minister), influential politicians from all sides of politics, key researchers and early years'

experts and practitioners. The event was a forum to progress discussion on how we can instil greater community-based leadership for children and young people.

ARACY will be following up with a planning meeting with participants and others in the coming months where I hope to discuss an evidence-informed strategy ARACY has been working on to advance leadership for children and young people, and to raise the relative value of children, young people and those who care for them.

Presented at the recent ARACY Conference (Donovan 2009), and based on the best evidence and principles of social marketing, the strategy aims to ensure we better support and nurture our children and young people by creating the social conditions (values, practices and policies) that are conducive to their emotional and physical well being.

There is strong community support for this idea. Interim results (to be released shortly) from community research across a wide demographic found that parents are finding it harder and harder to "parent". They fear bringing up children "the wrong way", which is leading to a sense of hopelessness in trying to "hold back the tide" in the face of increased influence from the media (eg leading to the over-sexualisation of young teens), their children's peers and the power of marketing. These pressures are strongly associated with an underlying sense of competition and a drive to be successful, which in turn is expressed as expectations for material gains and professional advancement. The great myth that emerges is that the success of parents is determined by the success of their child or children, so it's no wonder there is a greater tendency for so called "hyper-parenting", and "over-scheduling" of children, based on the underlying pressure to give children every single opportunity available within the parent's budget.

The picture that emerges is that parents are desperately trying to grapple with these external influences and struggling to meet the material requirements dictated as essential by these influences. Parents feel this is at the emotional expense of children and young people, which in turn is leading to the many increased complex problems.

Such relentless pressure is also negatively impacting on parents. Adult mental health problems have increased over the past 20 years and shortly to be released National Health Survey data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics reveals that while the level of high and very high psychological distress (ie levels at which help is required) for males and females without children has decreased since 1997, the levels of high to very high levels of distress for mothers of children aged 5 to 14 has increased, and for single parents is almost double that of partnered mothers.

The increasing levels of complex problems affecting our children and young people and the increasing anxiety that parents are experiencing is unacceptable, socially and economically unsustainable and needs to be addressed as a national priority.

The new world economy, one which empowers and raises the value of children, families and people to be an equal part of the economic algorithm cannot come soon enough. But this change is not the sole responsibility of Government. One of our Conference keynote speakers was the former UK Health Minister, Alan Milburn MP, who was largely responsible for the major health reforms in the UK. He states, “It is only the State that can equalise opportunities throughout life and empower its citizens. Equally, only citizens can seize those opportunities and realise their own aspirations to progress ... social marketing’s biggest contribution lies not simply in persuading people to change but in helping empower them to do so...”.

Australia has a great record of progressing major social and health reform and improvement, led through social marketing particularly in areas such as tobacco, HIV/AIDS and road safety. In fact these strategies would probably not have worked without social marketing (Donovan & Vlasis 2005). We need a situation where parents feel confident parenting and a society which better supports and nurtures our children and young people by creating the social conditions that are conducive to their emotional and physical well being. We need a strategy to provide an umbrella “banner” such as *BeyondBlue*, which has been very successful in raising awareness and action on mental health and depression.

Through the strategy, people like town planners would better understand the needs of children, which in turn would lead to better planning for child-friendly cities and towns. Business would be more in tune with the needs of families. As Dr Andrew Scott, another keynote speaker at our Conference pointed out, perhaps this could lead to a situation like in the Nordic countries where business activity supports up to one year paid parental leave (at your current salary) and other family friendly policies. The ‘payoff’ for businesses in these countries is the highest levels of workforce participation and worker productivity in the world. This strategy may even lead to the award wage for child care workers exceeding that of cleaners.

There will be critics to this strategy. But the fact is, despite our best efforts, intentions and increasing resources, complex problems for children and youth are still increasing and these problems are increasingly impacting on parents. The recent COAG early years reforms and partnerships are critically important and, while treatment and early intervention programs targeting individual and families must continue, it is the population-level change that is also required. In fact, as with *BeyondBlue*, we would see a better integration of primary, secondary and tertiary prevention in Australia.

ARACY Board Chair Fiona Stanley AC has stated that this strategy will be the most important work she will ever do. She has stated that “we will not improve the mediocre results for children and young people if we continue to do what we have always done” (Stanley 2009).

President Obama promises change toward a more inclusive society, our Prime Minister foresees a dramatic change to our economic agenda away from the excessive greed of the past and the community are crying out for anything to better help meet the emotional needs of children and young people. The time is right for this change to occur. Let’s make it happen.

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Autumn 2009



Winter 2009



Spring 2009

## Join Early Childhood Australia in calling for quality improvements for children!

All children deserve the best start in life – including places and relationships where they can be safe and happy, with opportunities to reach their health, learning and social development potential. This is important for children, families and the future of our nation. For many, Early Childhood Education and Care services have a major role to play. The need for quality improvement in these services is widely acknowledged, including by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) – see the Regulation Impact Statement at [www.coag.gov.au](http://www.coag.gov.au)

**It's time to act** – at its meeting on 7 December 2009, COAG will decide the future for quality in Australia's Early Childhood Education and Care services. They need to hear what you think about this – now!

**Write or email your Premier or Chief Minister and tell them to stand firm, put their hands up high for quality for our children and make a national commitment for:**

- improved regulated staff-to-child ratios of 1:3 for babies up to two years, 1:5 for two to three-year-olds, 1:10 for three to five-year-olds in centres
- all services to have well-trained and qualified staff including degree-qualified early childhood teachers
- a quality rating system ('accreditation') that requires these standards in ratios and qualifications and high standards in practice as well.

**It can be done! For children, we need COAG to:**

- commit to high quality up front
- make a staged plan for gradual improvement so that services can get there over time, and
- be open about addressing cost increases. Quality improvement is needed for our children, it costs money, and must be paid for. Governments need to bear some of this cost increase, and parents will bear some. Governments also need to make sure that low income families can afford high quality services.

**Urge your Premier or Chief Minister to stand firm and commit to quality.**

See below for email addresses:

### NSW

Hon. Nathan Rees  
Email: [thepremier@www.nsw.gov.au](mailto:thepremier@www.nsw.gov.au)

### QLD

Hon. Anna Bligh  
Email: [premier@ministerial.qld.gov.au](mailto:premier@ministerial.qld.gov.au)

### SA

Hon. Mike Rann  
Email: [premier@saugov.sa.gov.au](mailto:premier@saugov.sa.gov.au)

### TAS

Hon. David Bartlett  
Email: [premier@dpac.tas.gov.au](mailto:premier@dpac.tas.gov.au)

### VIC

Hon. John Brumby  
Email: [john.brumby@parliament.vic.gov.au](mailto:john.brumby@parliament.vic.gov.au)

### WA

Hon. Colin Barnett  
Email: [wa-government@dpc.wa.gov.au](mailto:wa-government@dpc.wa.gov.au)

### ACT

Hon. Jon Stanhope  
Email: [stanhope@act.gov.au](mailto:stanhope@act.gov.au)

### NT

Hon. Paul Raymond Henderson  
Email: [chief.minister@nt.gov.au](mailto:chief.minister@nt.gov.au)

Also please copy us in at [handsupforquality@earlychildhood.org.au](mailto:handsupforquality@earlychildhood.org.au) and keep in touch at [www.earlychildhood.org.au/handsupforquality.html](http://www.earlychildhood.org.au/handsupforquality.html)



**Hands Up for Quality**

Campaigning for better early childhood education and care



## Gowrie Australia

Promoting and supporting quality services for all children.

## Our Mission

A national collaborative approach to better practices which benefit children, families and the children's services sector.