



# EXPLORING THE EYLF

Our first national framework has crossed the desks of educators across the country, and while some services are heading in the right direction, others feel a little lost. Hungry for information, practitioners are flocking to seminars to learn more. But on this learning journey there is no set route: children's services must navigate their own roadmap for change.

It's been almost a year since the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) endorsed the Early Years Learning Framework: *Belonging, Being and Becoming*, and early childhood services are busily familiarising themselves with the document, mapping their existing practice against the principles and practice outlined in the Framework.

The intention is for each service to develop their own strategy to implement the Framework, and to do this by taking their own unique context into consideration.

The challenge is proving overwhelming for some children's services who are fearful of

change—but the resounding message is that the EYLF calls for a change in thinking rather than practice.

*'The most dangerous phrase in the English language is "We've always done it this way".'*  
—Rear Admiral Grace Hopper, US Navy.

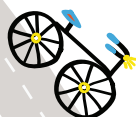
This quote encapsulates the spirit of the EYLF, which calls on early childhood educators to sail out to sea and try new things rather than doing things the way they have always done.

Early childhood consultant, and author of the book, *Planning for Provisions, Provocations and Possibilities*, Joy Lubawy, agrees that as a profession we can sometimes resist change.

'Some practitioners are anxious and the idea of a time line makes them fearful—will they be ready, and are they "doing" it right?'

Ms Lubawy encourages the sector to step out of its comfort zone to embrace the EYLF and to get excited! She believes a successful transition to using the Framework depends largely on a team's willingness to embrace change.

'Often the people who are holding onto out-of-date practices have not attended in-service since they graduated. They might have little or no qualifications but plenty of attitude and resistance.'



Her concern is those ‘tick-the-box’ practitioners will ‘simply change the heading on their box,’ and she says that it is these people who will benefit most by having their thinking challenged.

She says EYLF is ‘a framework [scaffolding] that nourishes and sustains us in best practice’. It is not a tick-the-box exercise, but rather ‘an opportunity for practitioners to do lots of reflection and thinking’.

For Dr Miriam Giugni, an early childhood director, trainer and university lecturer, the EYLF is first and foremost a framework.

‘When you build a house, you begin with a framework, then what you add—wood, sticks or mud bricks—is completely up to you. The EYLF is not asking us all to use the same materials—it’s asking you to build your own house.’

Dr Giugni was a member of the EYLF Consortium and is currently writing a book called *Pathways of Possibilities to engaging with the EYLF*.

She is interested in a methodology of art-based inquiry, which she used with a small group of educators to explore the concepts of *Belonging, Being and Becoming*.

‘Instead of writing something about EYLF, we ‘made’ something (for example, a photograph, a piece of music, a sculpture).’

‘One woman’s arts-based response to the BBB was a video of herself drawing an Indian rangoli pattern. A rangoli isn’t something static, it moves. People joined her as she drew the rangoli and she used that as a way to talk about EYLF and teamwork.’

Indeed, a collaborative approach to the EYLF is essential and deconstructing or ‘unpacking’ what the concepts mean as a team provides a ‘knowledge experience’ that can help give staff a better understanding.

She also suggests avoiding the word ‘implement’ and says to use words like ‘encounter’, ‘engaging with’ or ‘exploring’ instead.

‘The EYLF is an opportunity to debate and discuss and re-conceptualise and rethink... Don’t just implement it—question it, debate it, tear bits out, and stick bits in.’

Dr Giugni says promoting EYLF within the sector and the broader community will help raise awareness and respect for the work that ECEC professionals do.

She says a friend recently spotted the EYLF document among magazines in the waiting room of a dentist, and is encouraged by this.

‘It is leaking into the community in a range of ways. It says to the community: “Look at us. We’re educators and we are still willing to be learners”.’

## >>CHANGES

EARLY YEARS LEARNING FRAMEWORK (EYLF)	
WHAT?	A new national curriculum framework for early childhood
SOURCE?	COAG (National Quality Framework)
WHO?	Compulsory for FDC, Preschools and LDC services.
TO DO?	Ensure your service is using the EYLF as the framework for your curriculum
WHEN BY?	Services will have to prove use as part of the National Quality Framework from January 2012
MORE INFO?	<a href="http://www.cccnsw.org.au/changes">www.cccnsw.org.au/changes</a>

Dr Leonie Arthur, an early childhood education lecturer at the University of Western Sydney, agrees the EYLF helps lift the profile of early childhood but warns ‘a framework can’t do this [alone].’

She too says the EYLF should not be viewed as something that educators need to ‘do’ or ‘implement’. She says the aim of the Framework is to encourage educators to engage in conversations with families and management committees, with educators in other settings, and with each other to reflect on practices and try new ideas.

Dr Arthur was also a member of the EYLF Consortium and has conducted workshops for Penrith City Council, and Community Connections Solutions Australia on the topic.

‘Some practitioners have reported parents saying: “Oh you’ve got a curriculum now”. We’ve always had a curriculum but we should see this as an opportunity to showcase what we do—how we extend children’s learning and how that links in with what happens in school.’

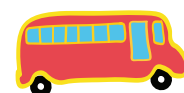
She says some of the language used in the EYLF is similar to the language used by teachers in schools and says a common question in her workshops is how EYLF will link to the new national curriculum for schools.

‘Early childhood educators are keen to see a “push-up” of early childhood curriculum into schools rather than a “push-down” of school curriculum into early childhood settings. It would be great to see the EYLF influence school curriculum and the expectations of children in the early years of school.’

One of the common misconceptions is that educators mistakenly think that the EYLF will somehow supersede or become the new accreditation.

Dr Arthur says there are concerns about how EYLF will be mandated, which will remain unclear until the quality standards are finalised.

**Opposite:** Embracing EYLF...Director of Johnson House Babies, Andi Salamon.



‘What I love about EYLF is that it encourages us to explore what is important to children, families and ourselves as educators—as “pedagogical leaders”.’  
—Jane Kennedy.





Embracing EYLF...Children create a sea-themed mural at Annette's Place Child Care Centre in the country town of Young.

However, she says services in NSW were quick to recognise how the EYLF compliments existing documents such as the NSW Curriculum Framework.

'Educators want to know how the EYLF will be included in the new national standards and what they will be expected to show as evidence.'

Early childhood consultant Jane Kennedy says in her experience, delivering training to rural and remote services across the state, 'there is some anxiety around how we should "do it" and demonstrate it for accreditation and licensing'.

She also says that for 'stressed or already struggling services' finding the time to reflect on practice and implement the EYLF can be problematic.

'Some services are struggling financially or struggling to retain staff or recruit a trained teacher. Exploring EYLF within these contexts may be challenging.'

#### FUNDED TIPS AND TRAINING FOR EYLF

The Professional Support Co-ordinators in each state (Children's Services Central in NSW) are funded by the Commonwealth Government to offer professional development and support to services about the EYLF. Children's Services Central offers a range of different resources to assist services to implement the EYLF. For more, visit [www.cscentral.org.au](http://www.cscentral.org.au)

DEEWR has an *Educators' Guide* to the EYLF in the pipeline, but there is currently no release date for the much-anticipated document. The *Educators' Guide* will explain, interpret and expand the Framework for early childhood educators.

#### Don't resort to Mc-EYLF solutions!

A concerning trend is the emergence of 'off the shelf' or 'tick the box' style training packages that capitalise on sector-wide anxiety around implementing the new Framework.

Earlier this year, *Broadside* editor Lisa Bryant wrote about how these mass programming-type packages are in complete 'opposition to the spirit of EYLF', urging educators to trust in their ability to implement the EYLF without resorting to 'Mc-EYLF solutions' and without spending money.

Leonie Arthur agrees there is no 'one size fits all' curriculum or precise recipe that can be purchased and no method of documentation that is appropriate for all settings.

'The curriculum should look very different for different centres in different communities, which is why a paint-by-numbers approach will not work.

'People should use the EYLF the way it was intended—to think about why you make the decisions you do and if they are the best decisions for children and families. It's important you think about what you're doing and why you're doing it, and not just do it because that's what [you] always do,' Ms Arthur said.

#### Who's in the driver's seat?

If it's the journey children's services should be focussing on, and not the destination, then who exactly should be in the driver's seat?

Not necessarily the director, according to Tracey Sweetman, the co-ordinator of the Five-

Star Family Day Care Scheme in Port Stephens, who believes ‘it is important to have a “pedagogical leader”, somebody that can embrace change and empower staff’.

‘We’re time poor so it’s important to have a plan, and each scheme or service needs a leader. It doesn’t have to be the director or the co-ordinator, but somebody needs to lead the process.’

Ms Sweetman, who recently conducted an EYLF workshop on behalf of Children’s Services Central, recommends having a planning day and placing EYLF as a regular item on team meetings.

‘Engagement with EYLF is an ongoing process. It’s about continual improvement and returning back to the document for critical reflection.’

With her scheme, Ms Sweetman divided the document up amongst her staff, getting one staff member to look at ‘Becoming’, and two others to look at ‘Being’ and ‘Belonging’. They then returned as a scheme team to brainstorm and discuss it further.

‘Once staff were familiar with the document we met with our Carers. We needed to become familiar with the language e.g. “play-based learning,” “intentional teaching,” and “pedagogy”. We have placed definitions on the walls around the office and used these terms in our parent and carer newsletters. We have also started to add them to our scheme’s policies and documents.’

Jane Kennedy likens the EYLF journey to learning to drive a manual car.

‘At first there is some effort learning the gear changes, and noticing the sound of the engine so as not to stall, then one day you find yourself driving without thinking about gear changes.’

She says it can be helpful to see how our peers are interpreting EYLF but hopes educators feel confident to make the journey.

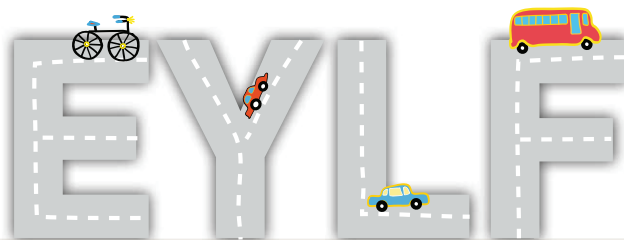
‘It’s a journey of questions, conversations and reflective practice, not just a destination.’

‘I see reflective practice as a disco ball—covered with mirrors—and our working with children and families is the dance below. Our job is to look into those mirrors, to see the reflection of the dance, and explore and question the dance—i.e. the learning.’

‘As we grow more confident as educators, as “pedagogical leaders”, we grow in our capacity to question and reflect.’

Ms Kennedy says the entire sector is on the learning journey together at the moment—it needn’t be a long and lonely drive.

‘I hope, over the next 12 months we will see a variety of ways to map the EYLF journey. Let’s review it again then.’ 🌟



## What the Early Years Learning Framework means to us!

Be inspired as four early childhood directors share their EYLF learning stories.



### TWO KNITTING NEEDLES AND A BALL OF WOOL

**When Elizabeth Warren, director of Sir Philip Baxter Child Care Centre at Woollahra in Sydney (a Benevolent Society long day care centre) first saw the *Becoming, Being and Belonging* document, she sat down and quickly sketched a stick figure, creating an image for her staff that would come to represent the service’s approach to the Early Years Learning Framework.**

‘I’m a visual learner, but I think a lot of us are in early childhood,’ she says. ‘It was partly for my own thinking—I needed a visual image to use as a discussion point with staff.’

The sketch was of an educator knitting a ‘pedagogy’ scarf, weaving together balls of wool from a collection of cane baskets. Ms Warren had gone through the document lifting key phrases such as ‘Beliefs about Childhood’, ‘Professional Qualifications and Journey’ and ‘Socio-behavioural Theories’, which she used to label each basket.

‘When I looked more closely at the Framework, I was particularly excited by the description of “pedagogy” and the way we make professional judgements using a range of theories to inform our thinking.’

The knitting metaphor really resonated with staff, she says, and in the weeks following, as articles and announcements about the Framework crossed her desk, they were placed in the staff room journal to ‘broaden ideas and deepen thinking’.

Initially, there was some anxiety about finding the time to do what some staff feared would amount to more paperwork but gradually it dawned on her team that ‘there might in fact be less’.

Each staff member was given a copy of the *Becoming, Being and Belonging* booklet for team discussions and quickly began to identify key ideas.

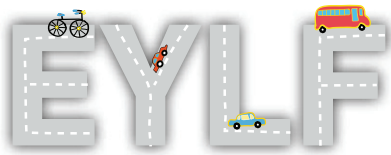
‘We started to mention EYLF in our parent newsletters and changed some of the words in parent request forms—this changed the focus and felt exciting and new...We also conscientiously started using the framework’s language in our daily journals.’

The Framework not only fitted in with the long day care centre’s philosophy and practice, ‘it underlined how important relationships were to emotional and social learning and outcomes’.

‘At our centre we’ve been learning about the importance of attachment theory, using the Circle of Security and Marte Meo to inform our practice.’

The EYLF has helped Ms Warren and her circle of staff to examine their craft and the vital work they do with children and families and knit multiple theories into a pedagogy scarf.





## What the Early Years Learning Framework means to us!

### BUILDING A CITY OF IDEAS

**Lyn Connors, director of Hamilton Child Care Centre, a 36-place long day care centre in inner-city Newcastle, says she has always believed in 'intentional teaching'.**

Set in a converted Federation house, the centre has a strong arts program and employs a part-time art educator to work with children individually and in groups. For Ms Connors, the Early Years Learning Framework validates the centre's current practice and emergent curriculum.

With three staff members currently studying for their Diplomas and another at university, Ms Connors says her team was particularly keen to 'unpack' the document and quickly get to grips with the Framework.

'They saw it as a means of self-reflection and communication with each other.' It also offered them a new language for talking to parents about their child's development.

'It was important for all staff, but especially the younger or less experienced members, to understand terms such as "pedagogy".'

Like many services, Hamilton Child Care Centre used EYLF to revise its centre philosophy.

'By looking at our philosophy we have reflected on how the principles of the Document are embedded. We didn't want to just drop in the words such as "equity", "respect for diversity" and "reflective practice" but we did want to see if our philosophy had those understandings.

'Next, we looked at practice and asked ourselves—how does a child's play reflect their experiences of the world and how could we connect with families to give greater meaning to our planning?'

Ms Connors had been examining the idea of 'shared sustained thinking' and last year used this to run a project, in which children looked at 'what is a city?'

'The children constructed a city using collage materials. As they continued to discuss their ideas of a city, they added more buildings, then roads, traffic lights, cars and people. The city became bigger and bigger, and they added parks, a cricket pitch and a racecourse.'

The project culminated in an excursion into the city to 'co-construct meaning' and see if the child theories were correct. At the end of the year parents were invited to view the work and see how the children's understanding of a city had changed.

'Parents could see how the learning occurs and how skills relating to literacy and numeracy "ride along for free". They can see children "Belonging" and "Becoming"—realising their potential and "Being" ready for school.'



**Director Wendy Foster (back row) and staff brainstorming the EYLF.**

### A TEAM OF CRITICAL THINKERS

**Wendy Forster, director of Annette's Place, a rural multipurpose Child Care Centre in the country town of Young, says that for her team of 'critical thinkers', the EYLF was an opportunity to reinvigorate practice.**

'Change is an ongoing process and we need to give ourselves time to read, trial, reflect and adapt practice. Our core focus hasn't changed—relationships remain central to all that we do. We've continued to use an emergent planning process, but are clearer about outcomes.'

Staff at the service—which provides up to 65 places per day for long day care (0 to 5) and an additional 15 places per day for preschool (3 to 5)—began looking at the document while still in its draft form.

'It was clear that the EYLF would be a major focus for the year. As with most centres, we were at various stages in the implementation of a range of other projects (e.g. taking part in the national Kidsmatter trial), so it was important to link our work rather than be overwhelmed by many disparate themes.

'For this reason we decided to begin with the theme "Belonging" and map what we were already doing. Staff then used the Framework to set beginning goals and monitor them in room meetings.'

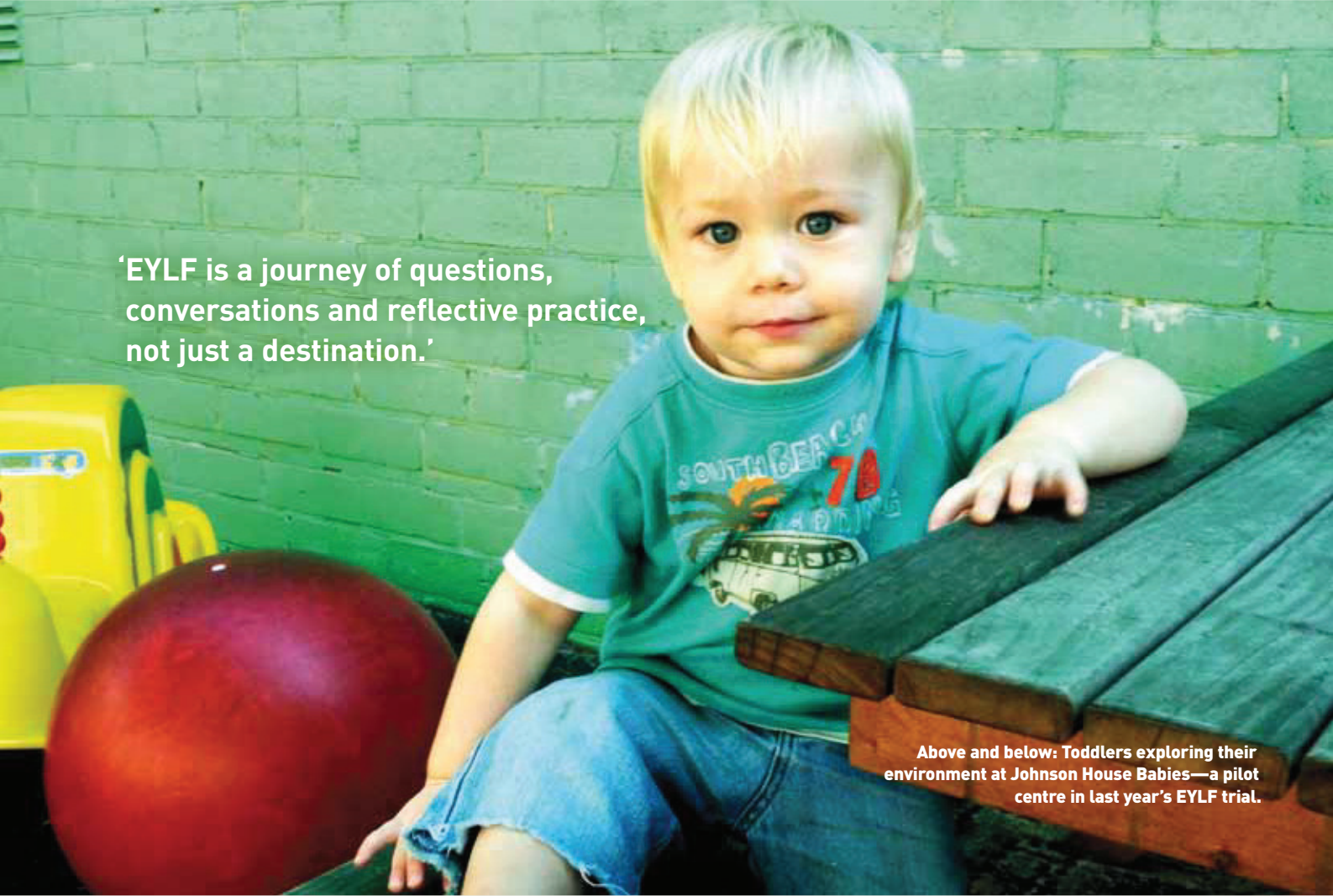
To maintain momentum, an early childhood teacher (ECT) was released for two days each week to oversee implementation and provide individual support to staff. Room leaders also met with individual families to discuss the strengths, needs and interests of children, explaining that this was related to the work we are doing with the EYLF.

For Ms Forster, the Framework is very much a 'reflective tool' that invites discussion and 'a working document' that enables each service to reflect their own context and needs.

The next step is to use EYLF to evaluate the centre's philosophy and goals, and to do this alongside a focus group of parents: 'We have agreed on where to start, however somehow I don't expect that this will be where we finish,' she explains.



**Lyn Connors and children at Hamilton Child Care Centre.**



**'EYLF is a journey of questions, conversations and reflective practice, not just a destination.'**

**Above and below: Toddlers exploring their environment at Johnson House Babies—a pilot centre in last year's EYLF trial.**

## **ALL CHILDREN ARE ARTISTS**

**Andi Salamon, team leader of Johnson House Babies (0–2s) is organising a children's art show for The Infants Home Child and Family Services, which she says will highlight the place of the EYLF in children's learning.**

'Displaying children's art will affirm the children's work and help give families and the wider community a sense of what we do. We have themed it 'Art is', which is broad enough to link to the EYLF.

The Infants Home Child and Family Services is a not-for-profit organisation that last year commemorated 135 years of service. Located in the Sydney suburb of Ashfield, it offers a range of childcare and specialised family support services including long day care, family day care, playgroup, parenting programs and early intervention.

The Infants Home was in fact a pilot centre in last year's EYLF field trial, and Ms Salamon also participated in the EYLF ARACY Framework Research Network Meeting.

'Participating in the trial meant we learnt about the EYLF before it was introduced, so our transition to using the Framework has been relatively easy.

'We experienced no resistance but some staff found the document difficult to read and a bit wordy. We talked it through in a team meeting looking at our own understanding of the outcomes.

'The document should not be considered; it's not a prescriptive or formulaic tool. It's a guide.

'The challenge of creating a system or format is in making our own meaningful interpretation in the context of our service. We have done what it says to 'Add your Own

Examples', and this has helped make it more real to us.

Ms Salamon says the EYLF is really 'an affirmation of what we already do' not something new to start 'doing'.

'I went to Reggio a few years ago and it was interesting because people looked at that as this amazing new thing that they would start doing. In the same way, EYLF will influence practice but it won't replace you, and your centre and your people.'

