

## **THE EARLY LEARNING FRAMEWORK**

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Submission and comments

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Aligning State systems of Education and Care to form a National Framework for Early Learning is an overdue and worthy task I think. My own children moved states three times and the transfer from one system of schooling to another was challenging for all of us.

### **PLAY-BASED CURRICULUM**

When Early Years are being discussed, the description '*play-based curriculum*' is used and I become most concerned about the understanding of the term '*curriculum*'. This is an opportunity to take child-centred programming upwards into transition to school and into the first years of schooling, rather than have 'formal teaching' methods adopted in a 'pre-school' year.

The Early Learning Framework for the 15 hours preschool for children in the year before school, can only be positive if the experiences and activities are truly based on the child's development stage and are play-orientated

### **FIRST THREE YEARS**

The *first three years* are critical in developing skills for '**life readiness**', not just to get the child to the year before school so that he can develop "school readiness". While numeracy and literacy are important, so are the skills which will enable a child to succeed (including being able to communicate, follow instructions, and work cooperatively with other children). These skills are among others which a child is developing in the first three years before he reaches "the year before school". So while much discussion and attention is given to endeavouring to provide every child with 15 hours preschool experience for 40 weeks before entering school; I think there needs to be action for provision for children and families before that time. From birth, children and families need an infrastructure of support. Provision of preschool is a transition or interim between 'the amazing learning years from infancy through to three years' and 'starting school'. A kindergarten we use as one of our venues has displayed a sign "The best way to get a child to be five, is to let them be four for a whole year." Similarly, the best chance for optimum development in the planned pre-school year is to ensure equity of opportunity for children's care, nurture and development from birth to three years.

### **DELIVERY FOR ALL CHILDREN**

Working in a *rural* area illustrates some of the *challenges* to be met in the implementation of this framework :

1. Services in rural areas experience difficulty in attracting *qualified staff*. There needs to be a transition plan in place until sufficient numbers of Qualified and trained Early Learning teachers are available.  
( 'P' plates for centres working towards quality standards has been mentioned, maybe 'P' plates for Qualified Care Professionals training towards Early Learning qualifications is also a possibility?).
2. Strategies need to be developed to attract and retain EL teachers in rural and remote areas (as is also the case with Qualified Care Professionals).

Our service (CCOWS) has developed a unique collaborative study system, where a lecturer from TAFE in Mt Gambier (??km and 1 ½ hrs away) travels to Robe to meet regularly with local students (interested adults, present child care staff, school age apprentices) to guide, facilitate, assist as they study Certificate and Diploma courses at their own rate. The belief is that by training local/rural people, we are more likely to retain their services.

3. Other possibilities may include;
  - \*Offer training experience in rural/mobiles/to introduce students to these models of care
  - \*Offer recognition of some kind for country service.
  - \*Some other incentive devised.

## RURAL AND REMOTE AREAS

Rural and remote areas will present more challenges than suburban centres, in the implementation of this Early Learning Framework:

1. *Numbers of children at each location are less*, this affects the financial viability of appointing Early Learning teachers. *The distribution of population* means that a large area, and long distances are to be covered.
2. Many areas presently have *no children's services*. There is no system with which to 'piggy-back'. Perhaps the establishment of *further mobile services* can be a stepping-stone to a more accessible network for children and families. These operations can be the 'vehicle'(!) by which integrated services may be delivered.
3. Mobile services innovatively respond to some needs of rural and remote families. These services would *not be in a financial position* to hire an early learning teacher. Some services will have children who already receive EL with a Kindergarten eg we use a Kindergarten site for child care on the days that it is not in use as a Kindy, and our 4-year olds go to the Kindergarten on days when they are not attending child care. Other mobile services offer pre-school exclusively.(eg NSW in both rural and disadvantaged urban fringe areas). Mobile services may not necessarily offer 15 hours contact at any one location. Eg In Cowra 7 sites are visited over a fortnight. Some children may have one day/ week.
4. **Surveys/research will indicate the "gaps" in isolated and remote areas:**
  - \*where indigenous children live in communities and cannot access the planned integrated centres.
  - \* towns/venues where children have access to mobiles/ and children also have access to Kindergarten and preschool, compared with those who access mobiles for child care , but **do not** have access to pre-school
  - \*and in some cases yet-to-be identified children and families that are between towns, where children and families are missing out on contact with services. In many cases mobile services are the first opportunity there is for children to be professionally observed and recognized if they need referral for assistance /intervention.

Research or a scoping exercise needs to be designed to ascertain where children and families are not able to access care/services.
- 5 Where mobile services are already in existence a strategy to share an EL teacher between services
  - \* so that instruction is given at intervals to children at venues
  - \* and then is backed up by carers in the interim with appropriate resource packs, instructions and monitoring (similar to the way in which *parents* assist

the pre-school-of-the-air teacher in Port Augusta. Where the teacher instructs via "Centra-Symposium" directly with the child, then has follow-up visits with the child and family ( when both children and parents are mentored and assisted), and parents have curriculum packs to work with children, progress is displayed in "learning journals" which are sent back and forth by post between the station and the 'school-of-the-air').

Rural families nearer towns are in a different position from those on stations where parents have taken the responsibility to be actively involved in their children's education. Frequently rural parents are working away from the home and are not available to assist with the education of their children. This is where the Care staff may be an appropriate source of assistance and support. (Training sessions, collaborative meetings with an EL teacher, and resources would be needed.)

- 6 Upskilling of present qualified Child educators may be a supplementary way to meet the needs for pre-school instruction.

### A SUMMARY OF CONSIDERATIONS

#### The Early Learning Framework:

1. Must be responsive to child's stage of development, interests and abilities. Play oriented, not "formal teaching".
2. First 3 years of child's life must receive greater recognition and financial provision/ for assistance, services and information for children and families from birth onwards.
3. Must provide equal opportunity and be inclusive of children in rural and remote areas

#### Challenges:

1. Provision of sufficient qualified teachers
  - Upskill present carers
  - Incentives for work in country
  - Assisting provision of delivery by collaborative strategy with parents and/or child care professionals
2. Basics instruction or delivery
  - Preschool of air model (for isolated children, they will need computers)
  - Mobiles (purely preschool). Need more to fill the 'gaps'.
  - Mobiles (child care and preschool) See suggestions above.
  - Where preschools and child care exist and are closely located/ then it would be easier to transfer the teacher to the child care site, rather than the children to the EL site.
3. Education of families
  - Life and parent skills.
  - Recognition of importance of early years.
  - Understanding of the importance of 'play' and recognition of the components of 'quality'.