

The Early Years Learning Framework: Building confident learners

Leonie Arthur



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Introduction

This book is second in the *Research in Practice Series* designed to complement *Belonging, Being & Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (DEEWR, 2009). The first book, *The Early Years Learning Framework: Getting started* (Goodfellow, 2009), encourages educators to consider multiple starting points in their engagement with the learning framework. This publication, *The Early Years Learning Framework: Building confident learners*, explores how educators can help children to be confident and involved learners – Outcome 4 of the Early Years Learning Framework (DEEWR, 2009).

Active and critical engagement in learning is also a key characteristic of effective educators. Educators support children's engagement through their warm relationships and when they respond enthusiastically to children's questions and involve them in lively conversations about interesting objects and events. 'Engaged' educators are also active in their own learning and they critically reflect on and adjust their practice. For this reason, throughout the book there is a focus on reflective practice and examples of educators engaged in critical reflection.

'Engaged' educators are active in their own learning

Engagement is central to learning in all areas of the curriculum and for all children (Munns et al., 2006). When children are really engaged in learning, they show concentration, persistence and eagerness in their inquiry. They have a positive attitude towards tasks and expect to succeed. Research indicates that children from low socio-economic backgrounds and children whose language and culture are in the minority are at greater risk of becoming disengaged from learning than are children from other groups (Halpin, 2003). It is important in terms of equity and social justice that strategies are implemented to assist all children to be confident and involved learners (DEEWR, 2009).



As emphasised in the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF), the indicators for each outcome are provided for guidance. They are not an inclusive list. You can add many other examples based on your observations of the children in your setting and your conversations with children and families. Children will take many different pathways in their learning. It is important that we expect all children to succeed and make progress towards meeting the learning outcomes in their own way and in their own time. The examples in this book show how some children demonstrate their progress towards meeting these outcomes and how some early childhood settings plan, document and reflect on children's learning.

Children will take many different pathways in their learning.

Examples used

The Infants Home, Ashfield, which was involved in the trial of the EYLF, is one of the centres providing examples included in this book. It operates a long day care centre for children from birth to school-age, a family day care, and a range of outreach programs for children and families. It employs staff with teaching qualifications, diploma-qualified workers and staff with no formal qualifications. The children and families have a wide range of languages, cultures, abilities, family structures and economic situations. Many children and families have been identified as needing additional support. Some of the documentation and reflections from educators involved in the trial are included in this book.

Mary Bailey House, a long day care centre for children from birth to school-age, has also provided examples used in this book. This centre employs early childhood teachers, diploma graduates and staff with no formal qualifications. While Mary Bailey House was not involved in the trial of the EYLF, the educators are actively working with the EYLF document and exploring different approaches to their documentation.



Note: The names of the children from both centres have been changed to protect confidentiality.

Confident and involved learners

What does it mean to be a successful learner in the 21st century? How can children be confident and involved learners?

Successful learning

Dispositions such as curiosity and flexibility, and processes of learning such as problem-solving, are essential to learning, particularly in a complex and rapidly changing world (Kress, 2000; Reid, 2004). Studies of effective lifelong learning also indicate that successful learning for both children and adults involves:

Curiosity – interest in the world and the capacity to analyse and to see things from different perspectives.

Meaning-making – creating new meanings by connecting new experiences and learning to what we already know.

Creativity – imagination, playfulness, trying and evaluating new ideas.

Metacognitive awareness – being aware of one's own learning strategies and feelings (this helps us to reflect on our own learning and to transfer learning from one context to another).

Learning relationships – being connected to a community of learners and learning from relationships and interactions.

Resilience – the capacity to persist at a task, to see failure as an opportunity to learn and to cope with changing circumstances and conditions.

Growth orientation – an understanding that learning takes time.

(Adapted from Deakin Crick, Broadfoot & Claxton, 2004)

Outcome 4 of the EYLF focuses on:

- ◆ Dispositions such as curiosity
- ◆ Learning processes
- ◆ The transfer of knowledge from one context to another
- ◆ Children resourcing their own learning

Each of these aspects will be explored in more detail in the following pages.



What are dispositions?

Dispositions are 'relatively enduring habits of mind and action' (Katz & Chard, 1989, p. 30) that encourage learners to respond to experiences in particular ways (Carr, 2001). Carr defines dispositions as 'participation repertoires from which a learner recognises, selects, edits, responds to, resists, searches for and constructs learning opportunities' (2001, p. 21). Dispositions are linked to our attitudes and feelings about ourselves and our views about the different identities or 'possible selves' (Carr, 1995, p. 4) that we can be and become.

The EYLF identifies positive dispositions for learning as:

- ◆ enthusiasm
- ◆ curiosity
- ◆ commitment
- ◆ persistence
- ◆ confidence
- ◆ cooperation
- ◆ reflexivity.

Each of these is explored in more detail in the following pages.



Positive dispositions for learning

Children are *enthusiastic* when they initiate and engage in investigations, interactions and play. When children are *curious* they explore, ask questions and solve problems, and can often demonstrate great *commitment* and *persistence* in focusing on a goal.

For example:

A group of infants and toddlers at the Infants Home, Ashfield were interested in a basket of bracelets. They showed they were *enthusiastic* by deciding to explore the bracelets. They were *curious* – picking up the bracelets, taking them out of the basket and putting them back. They were very *persistent* in their explorations and working out how to put the bracelets on their arms and legs, on the bike handles and on the dolls – picking them up and counting them, and putting them one at a time on a doll until the doll's arm filled up. The children showed *commitment* to their interactions with each other and to the experience. They persevered to reach their goal and applied a variety of strategies to solve problems.

Confident learners ask questions, are open to different perspectives, and try new ideas and resources. With adult support and scaffolding, children learn to listen and to *cooperate* with others. They listen to others' explanations and ideas, often solve problems collaboratively, and negotiate and work towards shared goals. When children are *reflexive*, they are aware of others and their relationships with others, and reflect on their own learning.

For example:

A group of two- to three-year-olds at Mary Bailey House demonstrated *persistence, confidence, cooperation* and *reflexivity* when they worked together to test their ideas with toy cars on a race-track game. Educators supported these investigations by asking questions that encouraged children to think of and try different ideas, such as: 'What do you think would happen if you started the track up higher?'; 'How do you think you could attach the track to this block so that it doesn't keep falling off?' Children were encouraged to work collaboratively to test different theories, and challenged each others' ideas. Further questions from the educators, such as 'Why do you think that car was fastest?', and documentation that educators and children later discussed encouraged children to *reflect* on their learning.



Confident learners ask questions and try new ideas and resources.

What are learning processes?

Learning processes are also featured in Outcome 4 of the EYLF. These include:

- ◆ problem-solving
- ◆ inquiry
- ◆ experimentation
- ◆ hypothesising
- ◆ researching
- ◆ investigating.

Children engage in these processes as they take part in everyday life with their families and in early childhood settings. From the time they are very young, children are interested in investigating how things work, and ask many 'how' and 'why' questions.

Problem-solving involves viewing situations from a range of different perspectives, and posing problems as well as searching for their answers. Children involved in collaborative problem-solving in small groups also share ideas, challenge each others' thinking, negotiate and work towards shared goals. This means they also develop their capacity to communicate their ideas to others (Outcome 5 of the EYLF) and contribute to a group (Outcome 2 of the EYLF). As children's vocabulary increases, they are able to use language to: ask questions, make predictions, articulate their hypotheses, give reasons for their predictions and solutions, and reflect on their learning.

The Hot Wheels™

The children in 'the Hot Wheels™ track' example (Figure 1, p. 7) demonstrate dispositions such as curiosity and persistence as well as problem-solving strategies. The children engaged in investigations and problem-solving with cars and tracks over an extended period. This example is an excerpt from the documentation of this project.



Figure 1: The Hot Wheels™ track

(Documented by staff at Mary Bailey House)

Today we set up the Hot Wheels™ track again and this time we had some more cars. The children chose their cars and started taking turns in launching them from the top of the track. Kathy (educator) showed them how if they put a block under the end of the track, the cars would jump off the end. Ciaran added some more blocks on top and watched as the cars jumped higher off the end. Georgie commented that her car 'skipped off the end'.

Ciaran had put a 'walk/don't walk' green and red light sign on the shelf next to the track, and the children started talking about whether the light was red or green and whether they could or couldn't go. When Georgie's car didn't make it to the end of the track, Kathy asked Georgie why she thought that happened, and she said that it was because the light was red. Miga said her car went down and crashed. Ciaran said his car went straight ahead and it kept breaking and then he fixed it each time.

Kris then added a block, which he said was a tunnel, and Ciaran and some of the other children started experimenting with using the trains on the track. Jack came and joined us and decided to add some blocks as a jump and then said it needed another tunnel block. When Jack's car didn't go to the end of the track, he went to get it. Kathy asked him why it didn't go to the end and he said, 'It wasn't on the track properly'.



Reflecting on practice:

- ◆ How are the children exploring and making theories about the movement of the cars (and trains) along the track?
- ◆ What are the children's aims when they add and take away pieces? Are they testing theories? Do they want to make the activity more interesting and challenging?
- ◆ What resources could we add or what questions could we ask to increase the problem-solving challenges of the activity?

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The Early Years Learning Framework: Building confident learners

***The Early Years Learning Framework: Building confident learners* explores how educators can help children to be confident and involved learners, focusing on Outcome 4 of the first national Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) for Australia.**

Children will take many different pathways in their learning. It is important that we expect all children to succeed and make progress towards meeting the learning outcomes in their own way and in their own time.

Author Leonie Arthur, a member of the consortium responsible for the development and trialling of the EYLF, uses practical examples in this book to show how some children demonstrate their progress towards meeting these outcomes and how some early childhood settings plan, document and reflect on children's learning. This book will help you understand:

- Dispositions
- Learning processes
- How children transfer and adapt learning from one context to another
- How children resource their own learning
- How we can help children to be confident and involved learners

The Early Years Learning Framework: Building confident learners is the second in the *Research in Practice Series* about the EYLF to be published by Early Childhood Australia. The first book, *The Early Years Learning Framework: Getting started* by Joy Goodfellow, is specifically designed to both introduce and support early childhood educators in coming to know about, understand and work with the EYLF.

While these are practical guidebooks for educators, they may also be of interest to families and others who work closely with young children.



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