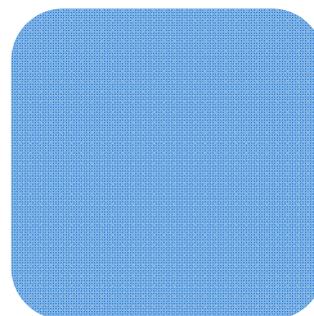
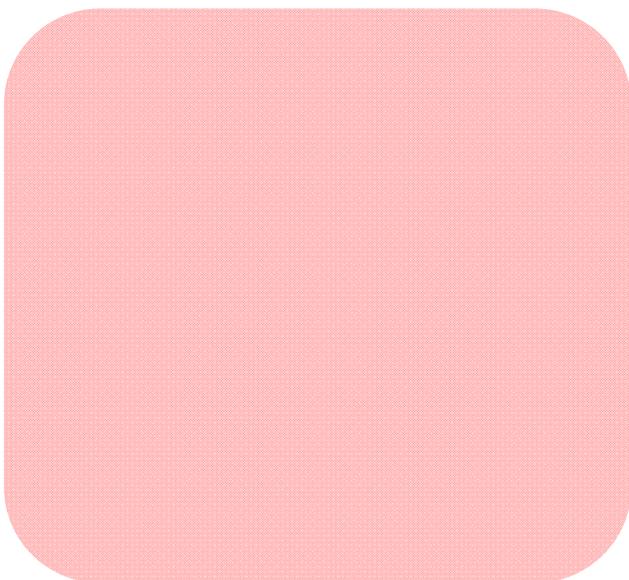


EARLY YEARS LEARNING FRAMEWORK IMPLEMENTATION LEADERSHIP PROJECT



EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICES 2010



Government of South Australia
Department of Education and
Children's Services

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DECS Early Learning and Curriculum team would like to acknowledge the participation of a range of early years educators in regions and sites across South Australia, and our external evaluator Robert Smith.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Early Years Learning Framework Implementation Leadership Project: Phase 1

This project has taken a leadership focus for the implementation of the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) across South Australia with participation from a range of early childhood services in each region. It has built on the foundations of practitioner research and inquiry that already exists in South Australia to provide and maintain high quality programs for children and families.

Leaders from thirty-four early childhood services were supported in constructing site-based inquiry projects designed *'to engage their staffs in ways that advance the implementation of the EYL Framework through building organisational conditions that sustain such implementation/improvement practices'* (project goal).

Early Childhood Educators participating in the project came from metropolitan and country child care centres, one family day care scheme, preschools, and integrated services including children's centres.

The project has involved Early Learning and Curriculum Officers (EL&C officers, centrally based) working with Early Childhood Consultants (ECCs, based in regions) to support site leaders and their staff to work through professional learning processes, apply the EYLF in their services, and to report on the implementation and changes made.

The outcomes of the project are testimony to the growing professionalism, scholarship and optimism of Early Years Education site leaders and staff who participated in the first year of this project. The overall positive impacts of their participation are the products of their endeavours to make quality improvements, as framed by the EYLF.

Site leaders clearly indicated that they found this inquiry process useful and purposeful in framing EYLF implementation activities in their sites. Leaders' comments consistently indicated that they want to continue using this approach to improve their skills and confidence in responding practically to the EYLF - that it is a powerful means to enabling team discussions, professional conversations and meetings, and opportunities for questioning and program innovation.

Although the evidence and analysis in this report is predominantly positive, there were some leaders and sites where difficulties were experienced, and some instances where participants struggled to form powerful partnerships at the site, regional and/or central office level. Analysis of reports and surveys identified differing accessibility and effects of support provided to project participants. This indicates a need to review the form and expectations for each of the layers of support in future project leadership and implementation.

A promising breadth of desired outcomes has resulted from site leaders' participation in this EYLF Implementation Leadership project. The outcomes reflect a journey which, for all active participants, is seen as a beginning. As we move towards implementation of the National Quality Agenda, it will be important to frame Phase 2 of this project as implementation of the EYLF in the context of the National Quality Standard.

The evaluation data have revealed that further refinements to the project are needed if optimal outcomes are to be achieved. As a formative evaluation, the most useful lessons learnt in this project (from a project management perspective) are encompassed in the recommendations.

Recommendation 1:

- a. That the dual goal of curriculum development and strengthened organisational improvement capacity, framed as pedagogical leadership, continues to be advocated in the EYLF Implementation Leadership project, Phase 2.
- b. That resource materials including case studies from project participants
 - be developed to demonstrate the rationale and practical translations of the dual project goal
 - continue to be distributed to early childhood services across South Australia.

Recommendation 2:

That Phase 2 of the EYLF Implementation Leadership Project builds on Phase 1, with the specific focus on transformational leadership, supported by

- a clear focussed statement of purpose and strategies that refine the rationale and processes of inquiry
- increased reflective practice being explicitly framed by both the EYLF and the National Quality Standard.

Recommendation 3:

a. That Phase 2 of the EYLF Implementation Leadership Project provides greater clarity regarding the roles of project participants and support personnel in order to

- build stronger working relationships between sites, regional staff and central officers
- support the development of productive partnerships and professional learning communities

b. Strategies are developed for Phase 2 of the project to further engage ECCs and gain commitment in Regions regarding their critical support in implementation of the EYLF and the National Quality Standard

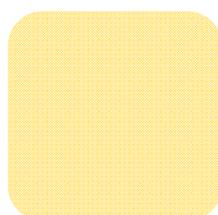
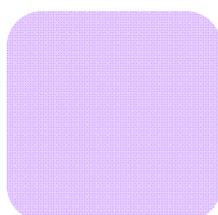
Recommendation 4:

That the methodology and processes of the EYLF Implementation Leadership Project be continued and further refined for the cohort of participants in 2011, with

- the addition of two central conference days for monitoring and sharing progress, and professional learning
- time for participants to develop resource materials illustrating professional practices and cultures (position papers, case studies, learning stories) that benefit early childhood educators across the state in implementing the EYLF and the National Quality Standard
- the extension of support to participants through materials and existing structures and processes in regions and central office.

Recommendation 5:

That materials and case studies produced during Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the EYLF Implementation Leadership Project provide a resource for assisting regional and central office staff to operationalise the National Quality Framework



PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Early Years Learning Framework Implementation Leadership Project: Phase 1

CONTEXT

In late 2009 the Council of Australia Governments agreed on a comprehensive reform agenda for early childhood education and care across the nation. Part of that agenda included the first national curriculum framework for early childhood education services: *Belonging, Being and Becoming - The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*.

This project was directed towards developing and monitoring a program of implementation of the framework in selected Early Years Education sites and settings across the state, in order to develop a critical mass of leadership and resources for broader use.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This project has taken a leadership focus for the implementation of the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) across South Australia with participation from the range of early childhood services in each Region. It has built on the foundations of practitioner research and inquiry that already exists in South Australia to provide and maintain high quality programs for children and families.

Leaders from 34 early childhood services were supported in constructing site-based inquiry projects designed 'to engage their staffs in ways that advance the implementation of the EYL Framework through building organisational conditions that sustain such implementation/improvement practices.' (to paraphrase the project goal). This dual goal of curriculum development and capacity building complements the educational leadership literature of the last decade. In the short term it was envisaged that the project would result in programs and practices in early childhood services that aligned with the EYLF. In the longer term it was envisaged to nurture the quality of the learning culture of participating sites and to support Early Years services across the state.

Beyond capacity building in their own sites, project participants were expected to provide curriculum leadership across the State. Case studies and artefacts have been collected about this work and will be used as reference sources for other services to assist more broadly in the implementation of the EYLF.

The project has involved Early Learning and Curriculum Officers (EL&C officers, centrally based) working with Early Childhood Consultants (ECCs, based in regions) to support site leaders and their staffs to work through professional learning processes, apply the EYLF in their services, and to report on the implementation and changes made. ECCs and EL&C officers have contributed to this project report; and will support the wider circulation of artefacts and case studies.

In order to select sites to participate in the project, a project outline was provided to regions through ECCs, and each region managed a selection process to provide the project team with five nominated sites. From this pool of potential participants, the project team made final selections of two sites for each ECC, based on achieving a balance and range of service types and profiles across the state.

The participating early childhood services were provided with project funding to support their work.

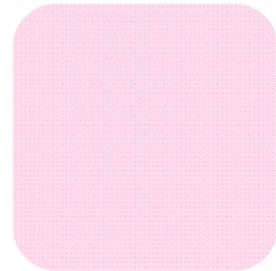
Of the thirty-four sites, seventeen were metropolitan and the other seventeen were country sites, comprising the following service types:

Children's Centre	Integrated Service	Kindergarten	Child Parent Centre	Long Day Care Centre	Family Day Care	Junior / Primary school
3	5	16 Including 2 part time; and 1 service offering rural care	4 Including 1 service offering rural care	3	1	2

Leaders of the participating sites came together for an initial project day, to provide information about the parameters of the project, to provide clarity around the project aims and expectations, and to begin collaborative planning between the project partners (site leaders, ECCs and EL&C officers). Focussed support was negotiated with project participants and included:

- EL&C officer and ECC visits/meetings with sites
- shared ongoing planning between project partners (EL&C officers, ECCs and sites) – negotiated and tailored by region and site
- tailored support for project participants, building structures, resources and materials sustaining practitioner inquiry
- ongoing review of project processes and progress toward project outcomes

Participating sites came together for a final project day, which was an opportunity to present and discuss their learning and findings to other participants in the project.



TERMS OF REFERENCE

The project aimed to engage the thirty-four participating site leaders in addressing the implementation of the EYLF across South Australia in a range of contexts and services.

The project was set up as a partnership model of practitioner inquiry between EL&C officers in Central Office, ECCs in Regions, and leaders and educators in sites.

The evaluation of the project was designed to generate data that examined 'implementation' pragmatically. The evaluation strategies were therefore referenced against the project's desired outcomes:

As a result of participation in this project:

- site leaders extend their confidence as transformational leaders
- programs and practices in sites are increasingly aligned with the EYLF
- educators in sites build on existing collegiality, collaboration, reflection and planning practices
- children have access to high quality, locally appropriate, planned learning programs, based on the key elements of the EYLF
- early childhood educators are confident and articulate about their research and curriculum implementation based on the EYLF, and can demonstrate curriculum leadership by sharing their learning and pedagogical approaches with other practitioners
- collaborative curriculum partnerships are strengthened between the EL&C team, ECCs in regions, and Early Childhood Educators in sites
- collection and collation of project reports and artefacts can be shared and promoted locally and nationally.



EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

EVALUATION DESIGN

The project evaluation design was formative in anticipation that 2010 would be the first year of a three year project. The purpose of the evaluation was to determine the extent to which the first year had met the desired outcomes and, as a consequence, where improvements could be made, and to inform future directions for Phase 2 of the project.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

Within the constraints of time and resources a combination of evaluation strategies were used to illuminate the perspectives of the active professional players in the project. These strategies were:

- a *Template inquiry report* written by project site leaders portraying the eight-month collaborative journey of sites around their inquiries, innovations and reflections
- *site leaders questionnaire* eliciting experiences and ratings about EYLF implementation and site improvement capacity developments
- *Early Childhood Consultants questionnaire* seeking regional support perspectives on site-based implementation efforts
- *Early Learning and Curriculum Team members' feedback* on the experience of the 'outside' support role addressing 'inside' implementation

The comprehensive contents of these instruments have ensured overall project evaluation judgements and recommendations in this report have been corroborated.

EVALUATION STRATEGY

In order to balance the formative value of the evaluation with evaluation credibility, a combination of internal and external evaluation agents was arranged. The external agent (from the University of South Australia) designed all four evaluation instruments. Refinements to instruments were negotiated with the internal agents (EL&C officers).

Being conscious of the ethical call of confidentiality and anonymity in program evaluations, and in order to optimise the number of 'returns' when questionnaires were distributed, the distribution took place within the schedule of the final conference presentation day where the purpose of the evaluation was explained, and invitations to complete questionnaires was done in the knowledge that anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed.

Size of data set

- 33/34 (97%) of template reports were received.
- 25/34 (74%) of site leaders questionnaires were received.
- 9/18 (50%) of ECC questionnaires were received.
- 5/6 (83%) of EL&C officer feedback reports were received.



FINDINGS

5.1 IMPLEMENTATION FOCUS

Sites involved in the project used a variety of processes to determine the particular area of focus for their inquiry, and to arrive at their inquiry questions. On the initial project day when site leaders were brought together, they were encouraged and supported to consider the current curriculum and leadership developments of their site, and to reflect upon practices and to identify potential concerns or issues. Leaders were guided to reflect on:

- recent concerns, experiences, interactions, observations, or wonderings, arising in their programs that they would like to better understand or address, *in relation to*
- the perceived relevance of selected concepts, principles, practices, or outcomes as defined in the EYLF.

Leaders were given a framework to guide their inquiry, and support from ECC and EL&C mentors to begin to plan their implementation journey. At the conclusion of the initial project day, most leaders had planned and prepared for processes of collaboration with their staff teams regarding the gathering and analysing of relevant evidence and information relating to their initial thinking, in order to collectively frame inquiry questions around the curriculum and leadership aspects of their EYLF implementation. Leaders were supported to make their own tentative plans around the inquiry template provided, including the development of inquiry action plans, collaborative strategies, monitoring and recording processes, improvement indicators and reporting mechanisms.

Whilst the inquiry had to be related to the implementation of the EYLF, site leaders reported three main ways that they arrived at their focus questions:

- exploring a 'niggle' or concern that was evoked by an aspect or element of the EYLF, leading to a defined inquiry focus;
- combining the focus for this inquiry with an existing focus, for example from a site learning plan priority or another concurrent project;
- the leader's suggested focus area (arising from reflection on the project day) being presented to staff for discussion and evaluation, leading to team agreement on the site focus for inquiry.

Some leaders reported that the process of arriving at a specific inquiry question (encompassing their implementation goal) was quite straightforward, while others reported that this process took a number of staff meetings. Some also indicated that their inquiry question changed at least once during the course of their inquiry.

Analysis of thirty-four site reports (comprising over 150 pages of project description and reflection), has indicated that the EYLF implementation focus areas can be categorised into:

- **'Big Ideas' from the EYLF** – in particular *Belonging* (which 6 sites had as an initial focus area), and *Becoming*
- **Principles and Practices from the EYLF** – including partnerships with families, play, pedagogy (several centres had these as focus areas), children's engagement in the learning environment (indoor and outdoor), child initiated curriculum, and transitions
- **Outcomes from the EYLF** – focusing on one outcome at a time
- **Learning areas** – literacy, numeracy and the Arts
- **Whole site improvement** – integration within the setting, linking learning with neuroscience, and re-focussing on 'what matters' in early childhood education.

The process of generating an EYLF implementation focused inquiry question was described by one leader:

'The inquiry questions were developed as a result of the 'niggles' that we discussed at a staff meeting. We looked at the 'niggles' we had in the kindergarten in relation to the outcomes of the Early Years Learning Framework, and then we determined and prioritised which ones challenged our principles in regard to our practices while maximising the learning outcomes of the children.'

(Site 25 – rural part time kindergarten)

In addition to the curriculum component of the EYLF implementation project, leaders were encouraged on the first project day to begin to develop a 'self-inquiry' question around their personal capacity to enable and support EYLF implementation in their site. This was an area that a small number of leaders found to be challenging, and not all leaders/sites developed and followed through a dual inquiry addressing their leadership for organisational improvement in conjunction with their leading of the implementation of selected aspects of the EYLF.

As corroborated in the site leaders' questionnaires when rating their leadership development on a 5-point scale (regarding how partially, moderately, or completely they agreed with a statement), their collective responses indicate a positive trend in leadership for organisational improvement with a small percentage directing their implementation efforts to educational programs and pedagogies in their sites:

	Rating	1	2	3	4	5
As a result of this EYLF Implementation project I have extended my capacity to lead program <i>and</i> organisational developments in my site.	-	-	28%	56%	16%	
Throughout this year I have consciously nurtured the dual development goals of EYLF alignment and staff collaboration for continuous improvement.	-	4%	4%	60%	32%	

An assumption underlying the leadership orientation to the project was that effective 'implementation' was conceived as a dual development goal by project organisers. There is a persuasive literature on educational leadership and curriculum change that argues for 'implementation' to be interpreted as a dual enterprise for educational leaders:

'Our experience has shown that change imposed from outside the school setting, by people other than those who work in the schools, is unlikely to succeed ... Without appropriate [school] structures and procedures to support it, the most inspiring vision will remain lofty and unrealised.'

(Davidoff, 1997)

'It is simply unrealistic to expect that introducing reforms ... even major ones, in a situation which is basically not organised to engage in change, will do anything but give reform a bad name.'

(Fullan, 1993)

'... without an equal focus on the internal conditions of the school, innovative work quickly becomes marginalised. These supportive conditions have to be worked on at the same time as the curriculum or other priorities the school has set itself.'

(Hopkins and Jackson, 2003)

This literature informed the leadership orientation on the dual interests of *curriculum improvement* and *improvement capacity*.

In their template reports, site leaders were asked to comment on the 'meaning of implementation' as it related to their EYLF experiences, innovations and actions throughout the project. Prominent in their written responses were references to nurturing professional collaboration *as they* advanced inquiries and innovations around curriculum and pedagogies. That is to say, the dual goal of curriculum development and capacity building was taken as a conscious feature of most implementation leadership efforts in this project:

'Reflecting on my weekly record on the meaning of Implementation, I was interested to note that it made me take stock of the risks around the process of implementation. First Order change, even when it is viewed as desirable and necessary by staff, will not happen or be sustainable if the facilitator or leader is not providing clear pathways for the process.Facilitating these discussions, I realised that Second Order change needed strong leadership and the creation of a culture that nurtures and values team members (Belonging) and their professional growth.'

(Site 20 - rural long day care)

'The research project has allowed us to look beyond 'just doing' a new curriculum to engaging with the resource to explore the meaning of the key domains and our pedagogical approaches in a way that has met the needs of our teaching staff, children and families, and general site context.'

(Site 13 - metropolitan Children's Centre)

'I think that the real meaning of implementation is not so much as what we did to find an answer to our question but more of providing staff with the opportunity to look at children's learning in different ways. It also means being prepared to ask harder questions that maybe we cannot answer ourselves but urges us to seek answers in other ways.'

(Site 8 - rural Integrated Centre)

The dual focus of a curriculum and a leadership inquiry question was seen as being integral to implementation of the EYLF. The reality expressed by site leaders validates the inclusion of the second inquiry question addressing leadership ('improvement capacity/conditions').

When asked to indicate the 'barriers' to implementation efforts, 64% of leaders wrestled with *'competing priorities from sites, regions, or the system'*. Another 32% were hampered by *'habitual ways of working at our site'*. Another 32% were challenged by the existing *'professional knowledge of staff'*.

As a few leaders reported when asked what they found to be surprises about their project journeys:

- One leader talked about the *'the diversity of staff's learning dispositions'*:
'In a sense a surprise is that our staff, while having many years of hands-on experience, have demonstrated a low baseline of knowledge or 'dated' knowledge.'
(Site leader C)

- Two other leaders talked about redressing such 'barriers' through their leadership interests in growing the calibre of their site's improvement capacity as they developed curriculum responses to the EYLF:
'Yes! We were surprised at how many more questions we are asking of each other and how many staff have become really involved - the inquiry will never end!'
(Site leader V)

'Several members (some of whom were initially reluctant to participate) have promoted their continued professional dialogue and reflective practice.'
(Site leader G)

From those sites where the leadership for improvement capacity interest was overtly defined, leaders reported inquiry questions relating to:

- **the leader's role in inquiry** – building a culture for change, shared leadership
- **building reflective practice** – sustained engagement in reflective practice, team building, a focus on improvement, and a strength-based approach to professional development.

A final example, this time from the collection of template reports, is the following site leader's description of the decision-making processes around the dual focus in their site:

'After brain storming the many ideas we all brought to our initial inquiry based project meetings, we finally found a pattern in our wonderings. That is, it became evident that we all had concerns about our art program. This was surprising to us because we have always promoted and valued the arts as an important part of our integrated curriculum Yet we all still felt, had 'niggles', that the overall quality of the art program delivered by our staff teams was not of the standard we believed it should or could be. Remembering that the place of encounter is often in the area of doubt, we felt we had arrived at our initial focus for the staff teams.

The second focus considered by the leadership group, was how to create a supportive culture for organisation-wide change. Further, the catalyst for that change would be reflections and research which resulted in a growing understanding of the EYLF and the accompanying resources, such as Reflect Respect Relate and, eventually, the National Quality Standards. In other words, we wanted to create an organisation that supported

quality improvement, where change is generated by the staff teams brought about by evidence of need and reflective practice, rather than 'more stuff to do.'

(Site 20 – rural long day care)

Further reflections on meaning of 'implementation' are discussed later in this report.

In summary, assumptions about educational leadership and site-based improvement practices have encompassed this implementation project. They have arisen from a long history of contentions about centrally inspired educational change initiatives. They have been advocated in this project in the form of a dual goal of inquiry - a notion that has been empowering for some and a struggle for others.

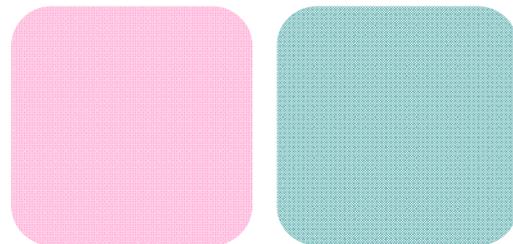
Analysis and reflection by EL&C project officers following final project reports and site presentations has led to a greater clarity that pedagogical leadership*, encompassing curriculum development and organisational improvement capacity, warrants further investigation.

* Pedagogical leaders take an active role in promoting early childhood professional practice, especially those aspects that involve building and nurturing relationships, curriculum decision-making teaching and learning.

Educators Belonging, Being and Becoming: Resources CD, Document 1, p1

Recommendation 1:

- a. That the dual goal of curriculum development and strengthened organisational improvement capacity, framed as pedagogical leadership, continues to be advocated in the EYLF Implementation Leadership project, Phase 2.
- b. That resource materials including case studies from project participants
 - be developed to demonstrate the rationale and practical translations of the dual project goal
 - continue to be developed and distributed to early childhood services across South Australia.



5.2 IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES

Once sites had decided upon their implementation focus, they went about setting up structures and activities to operationalise their inquiry. Highlighted in project reports was the importance of setting up dedicated time when staff individually or collectively were released from their normal duties to enable a range of development and implementation activities.

Review of the 'implementation activities' in template reports reveals the wide variety that is represented, including:

- **developing and enacting strategic action plans**
- a variety of **regular meeting arrangements** – teams within sites, whole of site staff meetings, local and regional cluster meetings, and with critical friends and mentors
- **development of materials** – surveys of educators, children and families, learning stories, program evaluations, planning formats
- **professional development activities** – workshops, readings, visits to other sites
- **observation techniques** (for reflection and data gathering) – video, photos, using self-designed proformas, time sampling, activity mapping, anecdotal observations, interviews and work samples
- **inquiry techniques** - journaling, mind mapping, reflective conversations
- **informing and involving families** – newsletters, workshops, surveys, displays, Governing Council meetings

Taking an inquiry approach to implementation becomes as much observation, reflection and dialogue, as it does innovation, experimentation and trialling.

Among the examples of the sequence of some activities undertaken during the inquiry process were the following:

1 - Our first step in implementing this project was to set aside part of our team meeting, where I posed the questions 'What gets you out of bed in the morning?', 'What is it that you love about your job?' We then looked at 'if there was one thing you would like the time to do more of what would it be?', each team member's answers were noted and discussed. The staff highlighted relationships, language, thinking skills, the environment and time with children as being some of their highest priorities in working.

2 - Each of the children attending the kindergarten in term two 2010 were asked to draw a picture about what they like about kindergarten. Their verbal responses were noted on their drawings and their answers collated into different categories. Forty nine percent of children highlighted social reasons for why they came to kindergarten? Forty two percent of children highlighted free play, with construction / play-dough and socio dramatic play being the most common choices of play. Nine percent of children mentioned the environment being of importance for them.

3 - A survey was sent home to parents to ask for their point of view as to what was important within the kindergarten curriculum. The top responses focusing on social skills, listening, developmentally appropriate activities, persistence / concentration, problem solving and having fun. It was interesting to note that the least valued areas within the curriculum were; learning about world / difference, the arts, having fun, reading / writing / counting and persistence / concentration. Having fun and learning to be more persistent / build concentration appeared as both sections when collated.

4 - The staff met and listed down all the documents that have been mandated or recommended for use and over the next few staff meetings we set about looking into what it was that each document focused on in relation to curriculum. These things were noted and links were made.

5 - A site closure day was planned. This day was instrumental in being able to work as a staff team to look through research and note down major curriculum themes focused on and look at the links between everything that we had collected thus far (children, parents, staff, documents, research). The staff commented at the end of this day that they now clearly understood how the documents were linked and that the day was the best training and development they had done in years.

(Site 9 – metropolitan kindergarten)

The implementation activities undertaken by participants in this project were inquiry-minded (as evidenced above). Participating site leaders were asked to rate the instrumental value of their inquiry-led implementation activities in this project. The distribution of responses follows:

	Rating 1	2	3	4	5
a) I see inquiry as a purposeful way to improve the quality of learning in our site.	-	-	-	20%	80%
b) Our EYLF project work has added to staff's collective confidence about undertaking an inquiry approach to our continuing improvement work.	4%	-	12%	48%	36%
c) A powerful inquiry question has guided and sustained our improvement practices throughout this EYLF project.	4%	-	8%	52%	36%
d) Our inquiry meetings support us to reflect on the value of the progress we are making with our improvement efforts.	-	4%	8%	40%	48%

Site leaders clearly indicated that they found this inquiry process useful and purposeful in framing implementation activities in their sites. There was one exception (in the table above) to the strong support for the inquiry approach and this was from a site where other priorities and team dynamics prevented their full engagement in the project. Whilst the responses to all of these statements are at the high end of the scale, leaders' comments consistently indicated that they want to continue using this approach to improve their skills and confidence in responding practically to the EYLF - that it is a powerful means to enabling team discussions, professional conversations and meetings, and opportunities for questioning and program innovation.

Another perspective on the power of the inquiry approach was provided by four EL&C officers. In their written feedback two of the EL&C officers found that *'there was some exciting and innovative inquiry at the site level'* in the sites they were supporting. Two others found a few sites where the level of understanding of inquiry-improvement practices were not strong and not explicitly bound by the EYLF:

'From my personal involvement with ECCs and sites, the sites who really examined their thinking and implementation of EYLF were those who had a good understanding of and experience with reflective inquiry. For some of the sites, they really had either no experience with this type of inquiry or I think a rather narrow understanding of inquiry (eg, trying to answer a question).'

One EL&C officer thought that the way that the inquiry planning guidelines tried to blend site leadership and implementation interests around the language (and dual goal) of 1st and 2nd order changes, rendered the process too technical.

By combining 1) the distribution of ratings by site leaders in how they valued the inquiry approach, with 2) the detail about inquiry methodologies and questions described in sites' template reports, and 3) the EL&C concerns about the language and technicality of the project inquiry planning guidelines, there is a case for reviewing the inquiry planning approach, in terms of leadership and implementation.

Recommendation 2:

That Phase 2 of the EYLF Implementation Leadership Project builds on Phase 1, with the specific focus on transformational leadership, supported by

- A clear focussed statement of purpose and strategies that refine the rationale and processes of inquiry
- Increased reflective practice being explicitly framed by both the EYLF and the National Quality Standard.

5.3 IMPLEMENTATION SUPPORT

This EYLF Leadership Implementation Project was designed around a number of interrelated forms of support:

- pre-conference familiarisation sessions about the EYLF, followed by a full conference day introducing the parameters of EYLF leadership implementation
- funding allocation for each site for use in ways that assisted with implementation activities
- printed materials, particularly copies of the EYLF document, the draft Educators' Guide, DECS Respect, Reflect, Relate observation scales, and inquiry-improvement planning guidelines
- regional ECC and central EL&C Officer 'mentor' support over the year. This support came in negotiated forms of site visits, telephone conversations, and email exchanges

Support from ECCs and EL&C officers was deliberately offered in a flexible manner, to cater for the individual and specific needs of sites, and to enable people in support roles to manage this along with their other workloads. Whilst a very small number of sites reported difficulty in accessing central project officer or regional consultant support, the vast majority expressed appreciation for the flexible and tailored support provided by these personnel. The tyranny of distance was a difficulty for some as indicated in one of the site leader's questionnaire responses:

'This region is complicated due to distance and us being a school setting. Electronic support and questions were valued as was the face to face connections with Adelaide team. Most support came from own networks with local preschools.'

(Site leader O)

Contrast this with the comments of a site leader in a metropolitan region:

'The support from the ECC has been critical in the implementation of EYLF. Even if we had not been involved in the project, I believe we would have made significant progress implementing EYLF because the region has provided a series of excellent workshops which our staff team has attended and found most helpful. We value opportunities for team training and development with lots of shared reflection time built in. The ECC has been most supportive and responsive during the project and this has really helped and encouraged us!'

(Site leader P)

In the site leaders' questionnaires, participants were asked to rate (on a 5-point scale) how partially, moderately or completely they agreed with statements about the value of support available during the project. For example, in relation to project documents, they were asked to respond to the statement: *Our inquiry, dialogue and subsequent developments have been positively influenced by our careful consideration of such documents as:*

	Rating	1	2	3	4	5
a) <i>The Early Years Learning Framework</i>		-	-	4%	40%	56%
b) <i>The EYLF Educator's Guide</i>		-	16%	36%	40%	4%
c) <i>The Reflect, Respect, Relate Observation Scales</i>		-	8%	20%	52%	20%
d) <i>The EYLF Inquiry-Improvement Planning Guidelines</i>		4%	8%	40%	44%	4%

By taking the combined percentage of leaders who rated the support value of the documents at 4 or 5 on the scale, both the EYLF and the RRR stand out as highly influential. In contrast, the Educators Guide and the Inquiry Guidelines were found to be supportive for less than half the leaders/sites. No qualifying comments by leaders can be used to help explain these differences. Could it be that the less influential were useful at the beginning as 'reference documents', whereas the most favoured were more regularly consulted to inform dialogue, developments and activities?

The following comment from one of the ECCs is telling:

'The EYLF has probably been the most integral. Our copies are well worn, marked and tattered – not sure what else I can say - the battered state of the EYLF speaks for itself.'
(ECC H)

The leaders' questionnaire also sought ratings on the human support potentially accessible or negotiable from regional offices. Leaders were asked to respond to the statement: *The project support I/we have received from our Regional Early Childhood Consultant (ECC) has:*

	Rating 1	2	3	4	5
a) Contributed to us maintaining momentum with our EYLF implementation activities.	8%	12%	16%	36%	28%
b) Constructively challenged us to explore the justifications for what we believe and do.	8%	8%	28%	24%	32%
c) Supported us with additional information and resources.	8%	4%	16%	40%	32%
d) Encouraged us to take the lead in shaping our inquiry and development work.	-	4%	12%	36%	48%

This distribution of responses reflects positively on the nature of the support enjoyed by 2/3rds of site leaders. And, as qualified by some, this support was not only from ECCs, but also EL&C officers, with Gowrie SA staff providing support for one centre.

'I believe that support that has made a difference has been multi-faceted. I believe that the design of the project by central office staff, support, encouragement and accountability built in by regional office staff, together with the focus of EYLF & RRR, have all worked together to produce a productive environment for inquiry.'
(Site leader W)

'I would have 'given up' on the project had it not been for the strategic intervention from ECC and with their support I feel the ground work for EYLF implementation has been laid and I can confidently look at developing this further in 2011.'
(Site leader F)

'One of the support highlights was an informal meeting we had with the Project Officer and staff from another site in our region who were also involved in the Project. Meeting half way, we shared our journeys together and really enjoyed the conversations, sharing of ideas and different perspectives we had each taken for the research project. As our Inquiry progressed, we turned frequently to the Early Years Learning Framework and the Educator's Guide; staff were asked to bring their copies to staff meetings; it was the catalyst for sustained conversations and the guide for more questions to our questions.'
(Site 8 – rural integrated centre)

In contrast, approximately 1/3rd of the site leaders rated the four modes of possible ECC support lowly. Two of these leaders made comments about this:

'We found we were left to our own most of the time. It appeared that the view was that we were a highly capable team with a very capable leader but we would have appreciated more regular phone calls at least initiated by the EYLF team to check our progress. We found publications by the Gowrie and ECA to be highly valuable for our project as a guide and validation of our efforts.'
(Site leader D)

'Once again accessing support, being able to attend PD was problematic. Despite this we knew support was available if required.'
(Site leader I)

This spread of ratings and qualifying comments by site leaders suggest that although overall ECC / EL&C officer support is recognised and celebrated, what stands as optimal 'outside' support is debatable. Multiple layers of participation (promoted as a partnership) between the centre, regions and sites, were built into the project design. The degree of understanding of the form and expectations for these layers of support by participants is unclear.

Some insights about the way support partnerships were conceived and experienced can be gleaned from the questionnaire distributed to ECCs. Half the ECCs (9 out of 18) accepted the invitation to respond to a range of questions about their support roles and activities throughout the first year of the project.

In sum, more ECCs saw their role in the form of ‘critical friend’ rather than, for example, problem solver, mentor, or quality assurer. Characteristic of this critical friend role were regular contacts between ECCs and sites (via telephone, email, site visits, and more) where they engaged in conversations, and “posed extra questions”, “gave frank feedback”, and “helped clarify understandings of the EYLF”.

Although many ECCs saw the need to tailor their support role in relation to site context and circumstances, there remained some hesitancy about what counts as ‘effective support’. As three ECCs commented:

‘[The nature of support was] very dependent on the sites in the project, their needs and the relationship they had with their support person. I think the support person needs to be available and ‘touch base’ frequently but needs to be led by the site.’

(ECC E)

‘It was an opportunity to learn with others – joint reflection, new ideas & perspectives – not be an expert but a fellow researcher. Promoting good practice to all sites in the region and having the evidence from project sites to share.’

(ECC D)

‘I feel we needed a co-ordinated approach across the 3 ECCs [in our region]. Each one of us did our own thing with their specific sites, so input varied a lot. We also had a focus ECC who liaised with our Project Officer. I felt not everyone was ‘on board’. I would have liked explicit instructions and expectations, eg, “You will meet with sites at least once per term”. A bit like the NQS Inquiry Project that expected site meetings, and weekly journal entries that showed an expectation to meet and discuss.’

(ECC C)

Related to this, ECCs were asked, in their questionnaire, to rate and comment on the overall project design which envisaged relationships between EL&C officers, ECCs and site leaders, as ‘productive partnerships’: The questionnaire stated: *Productive partnerships ideally comprise shared goals, complementary responsibilities, mutual respect and reciprocal relations. To what extent*

	Rating	1	2	3	4	5
<i>a) has the overall organisation of your project support role <u>felt like</u> a partnership?</i>	-	-	**	***	***	
<i>b) has your project support role been <u>refined through</u> your professional relationships with Central Office EL&C officers?</i>	-	*	*	***	***	
<i>c) has your project support role been <u>refined through</u> your professional relationships with Leaders in Early Years Education settings?</i>	-	*	-	***	****	
<i>d) has two-way <u>communication</u> between ECCs and EL&C officers contributed to progress in this project?</i>	-	*	*	**	****	
<i>e) have you been able to <u>connect</u> with fellow ECCs as partners in this project?</i>	*	**	**	*	**	

Although only 8 ECCs responded to these statements, the spread of ratings suggests productive partnerships existed for the majority (approx. 75%) but not all. Two ECCs who did enjoy productive partnerships wrote:

‘Fabulous, fabulous, fabulous!!! Our central office support person was always available to both me and the sites and really value added to the site project. Very lucky to have close relationship with ECCs in my region and received support and shared ideas etc, with them and ECC in neighbouring region.’

(ECC E)

'The partnership has provided for me a plethora of info, perspectives, ideas to build my own understandings so that I can confidently share with others/those I support. The exchange of information from CO to RO and sites has been timely, provocative and supportive. The project has encouraged a 'community of learners' to evolve.'

(ECC D)

In contrast, one ECC who did not enjoy productive partnerships wrote:

*'I developed **strong links with my sites**, their leaders and staff teams. My sites included me in their discussions. I felt included, informed and valued. I had limited contact with our Project Officer but they were quality opportunities when we did. I recognise that the Project Officers were busy and in demand. We need to become better at being comprehensive but on task. Work smarter not harder (or with the need for more frequent visits). I felt fragmented in our provision of support across the region as the 3 ECCs do not work in a co-ordinated manner. We seem to have **different priorities**. It could be our beliefs are not aligned or that we have little opportunity to come together and discuss progress.'*

(ECC C)

As stated above, although this feedback was supplied by only 8 of the 18 ECCs supporting project sites, it paints a positive picture of productive partnerships for 75% of the ECCs who responded. There are some instances of 'partnerships' that may not have encompassed the attributes of 'productivity'. There is room, therefore, for revisiting how productive partnerships are conceived, resourced and nurtured.

The written feedback from the EL&C officers complements this contention.

Five of a possible six EL&C officers provided written feedback on how they saw and executed their project roles in relation to ECCs and site leaders. The feedback was uniform in relation to the 'theory' that productive partnerships across the three spheres of potential influence was ideal. But the feedback was not uniform in what was actually experienced. As one EL&C officer observed:

'One of the sources of frustration has been what I have perceived to be a lack of clarity and consistency in EL&C project officers' commitment and capacity in the project.'

Examples of differences in commitment and capacity are evident in feedback from two other EL&C officers. One of these saw her involvement in the project very positively as '*working in partnership with three ECCs*', to provide current information and resources, and to '*respectfully affirm and challenge*':

'It was motivating to work with the sites and ECCs and to feel in touch with those who work directly with children ... I think a great deal of the success of the project has resulted from the systematic connection between state office and regional personnel.'

In contrast, another EL&C was perplexed by the experience of the project:

'A challenge! Upon reflection of myself I thought about: 'What understandings, beliefs and experience do I have as a new project officer to support an inquiry? What understandings, beliefs and experiences do the ECCs have to work in partnership with me and to provide support to our sites? In my job it was never just about the inquiry, my first concern was how was I, with others (ECCs and Educators), going to build positive relationships with people I don't know and have never worked with let alone develop respectful, reciprocal relationships from a distance! How do I manage time, how do I support sites without the inquiry becoming 'my inquiry', my intention was to guide them in their own wonderings. Contact was hit and miss with the ECCs and rarely did I hear from our sites unless I contacted them. I was never sure how much support I should be giving and on the other hand the support I gave could have been seen as 'surveillance' or 'interrogation' – I struggled with the notion of 'what was appropriate support'? Another challenge was during the presentations – Again upon reflection: How do I interrupt or distract what educators promote as good practice if it's not inclusive of children's voice, without devaluing where the educators are in their inquiry journey? How do you guide a leader? In some ways it is a double loop question because it takes into account leading others and

being led by others as well as having leadership in knowing what is 'quality curriculum' and how do we build capacity?'

Strategic efforts by project managers to build clarity, consistency and conviction in relation to the coordinated support of EYLF implementation appear to have produced as much frustration as they have light. As noted by another EL&C officer:

'I felt frustrated when the meetings that were booked (well in advance) specifically to share and update progress in this project were not prioritised by other EL&C project officers – I'm not sure why these meetings seemed to be not attended or used for their intended purpose. This was probably reflected in some sites and ECCs taking a direction not in line with the purpose of the project (eg, implementation of EYLF) and this not becoming evident until the final celebration days.'

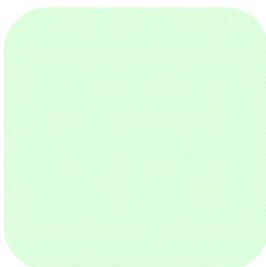
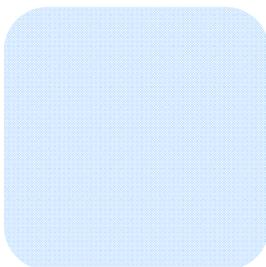
(EL&C officer)

Feedback from some EL&C officers and ECCs alluded to competing priorities and commitments; some determined centrally, some peculiar to regions. So the setting of EYLF Implementation as a priority development area was not made by, nor shared by, some individuals or regions. As clarified by two EL&C officers, in some regions improvement and accountability priorities that were viewed as unrelated (eg, literacy, comprehension, or DIAF compliance) effectively marginalised the potential of productive partnerships around EYLF implementation. In regions where EYLF had been a recognised priority, this was less of an issue.

As a continuing central commitment then, the first year of the EYLF Implementation Leadership project has been instructive in regard to how an ethos of partnership support can enable optimal outcomes.

Recommendation 3:

- a. That Phase 2 of the EYLF Implementation Leadership Project provides greater clarity regarding the roles of project participants and support personnel in order to
 - build stronger working relationships between sites, regional staff and central officers
 - Support the development of productive partnerships and professional learning communities
- b. Strategies are developed for Phase 2 of the project to further engage ECCs and gain commitment in Regions regarding their critical support in implementation of the EYLF and the National Quality Standard



5.4 IMPLEMENTATION OUTCOMES

To optimise desired outcomes, this project combines layers of leadership growth around professional learning and culture building framed by the 'big ideas', and the principles and practices of the EYLF. This is a well justified but complex project goal. With what we know about organisational culture building, a realistic time line for optimal outcome development will be 3-5 years.

Despite the limited time-frame of Phase 1 of this project, sites were clearly able to articulate positive outcomes for children, families and staff teams. All sites reported that as a result of this project their curriculum more closely aligned with the EYLF. There were a wide range of examples demonstrating the ways in which sites or staff teams had reflected upon and made changes to their curriculum practices in the light of the EYLF. Most sites also indicated that their inquiry was seen as the beginning of longer-term inquiry into curriculum, pedagogy and culture building, and that the outcomes reported upon are the beginnings of longer-term changes and effects.

Among the outcomes articulated in template site reports and site leaders' questionnaires were:

1) Increased alignment with aspects of EYLF

As an overall assessment, site leaders were asked to rate their level of EYLF alignment on a 5-point scale:

	Rating 1	2	3	4	5
<i>As my staff and I have worked with selected elements of the EYLF over the year, I have become more certain that our practices are better aligned than when we started.</i>	-	-	20%	48%	28%

All ratings were recorded in the 'moderate to complete' range of the scale. It can be extrapolated that 2/3^{ths} of sites are productively moving toward complete alignment. 1/3rd of leaders consider their site aligned. As summarised from site leaders template reports, alignment was reported in two forms; in relation to:

- principles – increased awareness of educator's role, richer views of children as capable learners, shared understandings and common language
- practice – alignment of assessment of learning and documentation of learning with EYLF, improved quality learning environments, heightened awareness of play in children's learning, more sustained interactions, and better articulation of principles and pedagogy.

As commented upon by one of the site leaders:

'The 'Belonging, Being and Becoming : The EYLF' 'Vision for Children's Learning' (pp7-8) - "all children experience learning that is engaging and builds success for life" - has become central to our teaching and learning environment. Throughout the time of the Implementation Project, our site has striven to provide experiences that have enabled collection of evidence of Belonging, Being & Becoming.'

(Site 18 – metropolitan child parent centre)

2) Enacting Belonging, Being & Becoming with children and families – children and families becoming more active participants in decision making and curriculum, building stronger connections with community.

'There has always been an atmosphere for many educators and families of being, becoming and belonging ... and now through the 'EYLF' it has now been given a name. The biggest change that has occurred is the outcome for children; educators are now providing current interest based programmes for children, based on information received from families about their children's lives.'

(Site 4 – metropolitan long day care)

3) Enacting Belonging, Being & Becoming with staff – invigorated interest in inquiry and teaching, staff willingness to challenge and be challenged, more collaborative networks and partnerships, deeper engagement in professional development leading to greater confidence and skill as educators.

'All Staff have indicated that they feel the staff team is working more closely together especially for determining curriculum focus and they have more opportunity to interact with individual children now the timetable and responsibilities have been altered. The experience has brought our team closer together. Staff feel their ideas are valued and their opinions listened to.'

(Site 17 – metropolitan kindergarten)

In the EYLF Educators Guide, the 'big ideas' - Belonging, Being, Becoming - are said to characterise the lives of Early Years Educators as reflective practitioners. Through this implementation project, by taking an inquiry approach, one desired outcome was to see the staff extending their sense of belonging, their state of professional being, and their continuing journey of becoming.

Site leaders were asked to rate the degree to which the characteristics of the big ideas were extended through staff participation in their site-based implementation project:

	Rating	1	2	3	4	5
<i>a) <u>Belonging</u> - the degree to which staff are recognised and self-identify as valued educators.</i>	-	1-	4%	52%	44%	
<i>b) <u>Being</u> - the degree to which staff are living our shared beliefs and values through their work.</i>	-	4%	16%	56%	24%	
<i>c) <u>Becoming</u> - the degree to which staff feel comfortably disposed to reflect, learn and improve.</i>	4%	-	4%	60%	32%	

Combining the percentages at rating levels 4 and 5 for each item, there is overwhelming endorsement of the proposition that participation in this project has advanced the professional identities and sense of place of the majority of participants in project sites. In large part, this outcome must reflect the commitment, conviction and compassion of site leaders as well as ECC and EL&C mentors. This determination and sensitivity is captured in the following comments by two site leaders:

'The challenge of getting the part-time staff together for discussion and planning was a huge issue this year as more staff were working across more than one site. We now have a regular meeting time which staff value. Moving this team from planning an 'activities' approach to reflective EYLF implementation was another challenge! Involving the teacher in trialling planning formats has led to using a program planning format which, while arranged around outcomes, does reflect the 'big ideas'. As staff are now using BBB language, there seems to be a shared understanding of the importance of 'big ideas'.'

(Site leader P)

'Once the dialogue began around our inquiry question we began as a group to see connections, and answers to questions to what we were exploring in a variety of places. Some of these places were the ECA Code of Ethics, the RRR document, the Reggio Emilia philosophy, the NQS and papers that focused on an integrated service approach such as the Virtual Village paper. In fact for us the EYLF worked as cohesive glue for all these resources and made clear to us their combined value. As a consequence, we decided to review our own centre philosophy and in the process it became clear from the sentiments espoused, and language used, that we were aligning ourselves closely with the EYLF.'

(Site leader B)

4) Broader EYLF implementation effects – an encapsulation of the broader effects (outcomes) of the project is provided in the list of ratings provided by site leaders:

An opportunity to elicit site leaders' ratings on a list of 8 specific desired outcomes was provided in the questionnaire. Again, the distribution of responses is positively weighted with one or two sites

(see 4% and 8% ratings) with continuing challenges around programs, practices and environments.

As we have worked on the EYLF, we have:

	Rating	1	2	3	4	5
a) Strengthened our collective knowledge about Early Years Education.	-	-	8%	56%	36%	
b) Refined staff roles as Early Years Educators.	-	4%	12%	52%	32%	
c) Established a common language for talking about our work.	-	4%	12%	52%	32%	
d) Consolidated our collaborative ways of planning and improving what we do.	-	4%	8%	56%	32%	
e) Enriched our learning environment	-	8%	8%	40%	44%	
f) Become more conscious of promoting equity in all we do.	-	8%	20%	40%	32%	
g) Fostered a greater focus by staff on children's learning and wellbeing.	-	4%	4%	44%	48%	
h) Been rewarded by seeing our efforts (developments and innovations) make a difference to children's learning.	4%	-	4%	52%	40%	

The continuing challenges in some sites are recognised in the following two comments made by two site leaders:

'The project enabled us to connect many aspects of our work. This was both a strategic decision but also one that supported staff to see beyond discrete projects and ideas. It has given us a common language and purpose and this is the foundation on which I can further move the team forward on a number of ongoing issues. Importantly, staff who had never heard of inquiry now understand the intent behind it and are beginning to use it in their day to day practice.'

(Site leader I)

'The whole centre is planning using the BBB. We now share themes and ideas and the biggest development of all is we are beginning to use the same language.'

(Site leader S)

In summary, a promising breadth of desired outcomes has resulted from site leaders' participation in this EYLF Implementation Leadership project. This speaks positively for the way the project has been conceived, managed and received. But the outcomes reflect a journey which, for all active participants, is seen as a beginning. The need for continuing support in a range of ways is therefore critical.

Recommendation 4:

That the methodology and processes of the EYLF Implementation Leadership Project be continued and further refined for the cohort of participants in 2011, with

- the addition of two central conference days for monitoring and sharing progress, and professional learning;
- time for participants to develop resource materials illustrating professional practices and cultures (position papers, case studies, learning stories) that benefit early childhood educators across the state in implementing the EYLF and the National Quality Standard
- the extension of support to participants through materials and existing structures and processes in regions and central office.

Apart from the analysis of evaluation data above that has informed this recommendation; complementary recommendations were made in the evaluation feedback by a number of participants:

'For support people (regional / central office) to 'touch base' a little more often. Outside of organised meetings we had one group meeting with everyone in the region in the project and one site visit.'

(Site Leader R)

'In hindsight we could have met with colleagues in other sites during the duration of the project and taken part in some information and resource sharing. I think a mid project meeting could have been useful – certainly the brief session we held at our district Directors meeting gave us the opportunity to hear about the work of our colleagues in other centres.'

(Site Leader X)

'Appreciate Project Mangers coming to facilitate a training day in our region – they were brilliant (as indicated by the feedback). I would love for them to come again to be involved in other parts of our region as I don't believe that I can deliver the session with the same gusto.'

(ECC A)

'Great to involve ECCs – maybe us meeting with central office before it started and during maybe to check progress at an ECC network day. If ECCs are part of central strategies they need to be funded too and allowed for in budget especially for travel/accommodation. Great to have ECCs leading learning though. Thanks.'

(ECC B)

'EL&C team needs to have opportunities to discuss, debate and come to agreement about the concepts and terminology in EYLF (maybe this might happen through the development of position papers) to ensure strong guidance and leadership in the field.'

(EL&C officer)

'Further develop relationships with ECCs – continue aligning EL&C team members with specific regions. Do joint PD together (eg, the 2 day retreat/conference idea with a focus on early childhood pedagogical leadership). Place curriculum dialogue high on the agenda in joint meetings between EL&C & ECCs. It would be great to see the role of ECC (in the new climate) elevated to that of a 'pedagogista' in a region with a real focus on curriculum and pedagogy.'

(EL&C officer)



5.5 REFLECTIONS AND LEARNING

5.5.1 IMPLEMENTATION

In template reports, site leaders reflected upon the way in which they had implemented EYLF and to what degree they had answered their inquiry question. Overall the reports indicated that most people were able to quickly and readily engage with higher order thinking in regards to EYLF implementation. This is evidenced in many examples of sites engaging with the principles, pedagogy, practices, as well as the 'big ideas' contained in the EYLF.

- **Big ideas** –such as linking educator philosophy and practice, examining all aspects of work through the lens of EYLF, improving curriculum consistency in an integrated site, seeing curriculum implementation as ongoing learning, applying the big ideas to educators as well as children.
- **Principles** – for example, the importance of inclusion & equity, critical reflection, working in partnership with families.
- **Practices** – taking a holistic approach to children's learning, reprioritising outdoor learning, revisiting educator's role in play, critical use of data, refocusing on children's learning and rights.

As illustrated in one of the template reports:

'It has been evident throughout our journey that the meaning of implementation at our site has been a collaborative, enthusiastic and insightful journey. As the weeks progressed from when we first started this project, it was evident that children's engagement levels were increasing within the outdoor learning environment. As engagement levels increased and children's involvement within the preschool program improved, staff became aware of more changes that needed to be implemented in order for the curriculum content and delivery methods to be refined. Furthermore families of children attending the centre began to notice and praise the changes that were being made at the site.'

(Site 15 – rural kindergarten)

A number of sites provided evidence that they had gone beyond the level of implementation that was about seeking the formula or recipe for implementation of curriculum, and clearly articulated that implementation for them was a process of interpreting and enacting the principles and intent of the EYLF collaboratively, as evidenced in the following:

'Our actions and evidence have revealed to us that implementation of the EYLF involves a holistic approach that incorporates a thorough understanding of all elements of the framework and their interrelatedness. Implementation means embedding within daily practice, incorporating it into educator philosophy. To truly "implement" the framework continual reflection on how your practices reflect the elements is required.'

(Site 7 – rural Family Day Care)

It is the enabling organisational conditions, or the improvement capacity (which facilitates continual reflection), that has emerged as integral to the meaning of 'implementation'.

5.5.2 IMPROVEMENT CAPACITY

The way leaders were encouraged to design a change oriented question meant that they were focussing upon changes and improvements to curriculum implementation throughout this project. Elements of improvement capacity that were identified by sites include:

- **Staff Readiness** – willingness to share perspectives and new ideas, being a reflective learning community, seeing selves as life long learners, commitment to ongoing review of practice
- **Innovative Culture** – strong leadership, clear roles and responsibilities, common goals, shared decision making and responsibility for outcomes, strengths-based performance management
- **Supportive Organisational Structures** – time, strategies/processes in place to sustain self-review and improvement, systems that allow reflective practice.

One leader said:

‘that any site’s capacity to support continual improvement is only as good as its reflective practice. It is about building a culture of reflectiveness within a site, putting in to place systems that check, remind, encourage and allow educators to develop these skills. Allowing educators the time to discuss, providing the questions that challenge their thoughts and practice, and by ensuring educators have regular opportunities to meet. Allowing time for reflection and program evaluation, I believe is vital in a site capacity to improve. I also believe strong leadership is crucial.’

(Site 4 – metropolitan long day care)

A recurring theme in the template project reports was the critical value of funding to sites in enabling time for reflection, conversation and engagement with inquiry as illustrated by the following:

‘Continuous improvement practices relating to concepts, theories and exploration through practice, is time consuming, contextual, complicated by a staff team with different employment arrangements, knowledge, skills and experience. But the additional resources support this activity.’

(Site 29 – metropolitan integrated site)

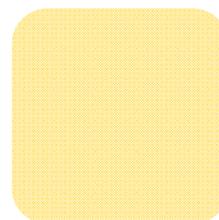
5.5.3 TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Project reports have identified that transformational leadership requires certain attributes as a leader, strategic planning and thinking, and then the provision of structures and opportunities to enable improvement. Whilst many leaders had difficulty in developing a leadership inquiry question, the reports described or reflected significant understanding of leadership for improvement.

- **Attributes of the leader** – flexibility, energy & enthusiasm, cultural competence, commitment, perseverance despite obstacles, being available & attuned to staff, supporting teamwork, modelling reflective practice, encouraging critical conversations, acknowledging staff achievements and individual strengths.
- **Strategic planning & thinking** of the leader – visionary, having long term plans, early childhood education expertise, filtering & prioritising information and initiatives, planning & monitoring inquiry, having achievable goals, networking with other leaders/ mentors / critical friends.
- **Provision of structures & opportunities to enable improvement** – time and resourcing to innovate and critically reflect, effective and continuous communication, timely & relevant professional development, sharing leadership, keeping the inquiry on track.

‘This project more than any other I have been involved with in the past has opened my eyes to how a leader needs to be attuned to what it is that team members are struggling with ... Improvement needs to be planned for, time needs to be set aside to make it a priority and reflecting on these times as a leader is vital. Building on the team’s strengths gives them the confidence to want to participate and this approach is something that I, as a leader, want to delve into and work at developing in the future.’

(Site 9 – metropolitan kindergarten)



5.6 WHERE TO NEXT

Without exception sites indicated that their inquiry was ongoing and identified a wide range of aspects of pedagogy, practice and the framework itself that they will continue to explore. The project report asked them to frame their future directions into 3 areas: what's beginning to matter now; new challenges in relation to implementation; and structures in place to ensure EYLF alignment stays on the improvement agenda:

What's beginning to matter now:

- Ongoing reflective practice
- Embedding EYLF in daily practice
- Ongoing partnerships with families
- Connecting EYLF with other documents and initiatives
- Staff development in teams and as individuals – especially working collaboratively, including support and part-time staff in team development, clearly articulating roles
- Increased recognition of and response to children's individuality

New challenges:

- Exploring particular aspects and elements of the framework
- Tensions between data collection for learning and for accountability
- Continuing to use an inquiry approach
- Linking EYLF with the National Quality Standard
- Linking EYLF with Australian Curriculum
- Supporting, engaging and developing staff
- Developing leadership capacity within the site

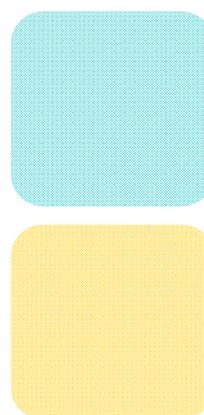
Structures that are in place to ensure EYLF alignment remains on the improvement agenda:

- Developing site philosophy and policies that reflect EYLF
- Including EYLF in site improvement plan
- Making budget allocations to support EYLF implementation
- Reviewing documents and processes to better reflect EYLF
- Including EYLF in meeting structures & processes
- Prioritising critical reflection upon EYLF within the site, professional development and performance management

Project template reports and site presentations at the final project celebration have provided a rich and diverse source of material for case studies and exemplars. The sections 'Reflections and Learning' and 'Where to next' featured above in this report are derived directly from leaders' template reports, and provide indications of the potential for the work done by participants in informing future directions and support for EYLF implementation in South Australia.

Recommendation 5:

That materials and case studies produced during Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the EYLF Implementation Leadership Project provide a resource for assisting Regional and Central office staff to operationalise the National Quality Framework



RECOMMENDATIONS

Analysis of the detailed information gathered through the evaluation of the EYLF Implementation Leadership Project has informed the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1:

- a. That the dual goal of curriculum development and strengthened organisational improvement capacity, framed as pedagogical leadership, continues to be advocated in the EYLF Implementation Leadership project, Phase 2.
 - be developed to demonstrate the rationale and practical translations of the dual project goal
 - continue to be distributed to early childhood services across South Australia.
- b. That resource materials including case studies from project participants

Recommendation 2:

That Phase 2 of the EYLF Implementation Leadership Project builds on Phase 1, with the specific focus on transformational leadership, supported by

- a clear statement of purpose and strategies that refine the rationale and processes of inquiry
- increased reflective practice being explicitly framed by the EYLF and the National Quality Standard.

Recommendation 3:

- a. That Phase 2 of the EYLF Implementation Leadership Project provides greater clarity regarding the roles of project participants and support personnel in order to
 - build stronger working relationships between sites, regional staff and central officers
 - support the development of productive partnerships and professional learning communities
- b. Strategies are developed for Phase 2 of the project to further engage ECCs and gain commitment in Regions regarding their critical support in implementation of the EYLF and the National Quality Standard

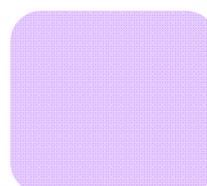
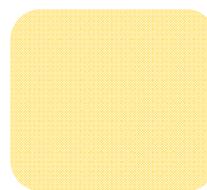
Recommendation 4:

That the methodology and processes of the EYLF Implementation Leadership Project be continued and further refined for the cohort of participants in 2011, with

- the addition of two central conference days for monitoring and sharing progress, and professional learning;
- time for participants to develop resource materials illustrating professional practices and cultures (position papers, case studies, learning stories) that benefit early childhood educators across the state in implementing the EYLF and the National Quality Standard
- the extension of support to participants through materials and existing structures and processes in Regions and Central Office

Recommendation 5:

That materials and case studies produced during Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the EYLF Implementation Leadership Project provide a resource for assisting Regional and Central office staff to operationalise the National Quality Framework



APPENDICES

(available on request)

Attachment 1:

Project Evaluation Strategy

- a. Evaluation plan
- b. Evaluation Report templates
- c. Project update proformas

Attachment 2:

Project Newsletters

- a. Newsletter updates
- b. Resource Sheets

Attachment 3:

Project Day support materials

- a. Agendas
- b. Resource handouts

Attachment 4:

Project Site Service Agreement