



Discussion Paper:

2021 National Quality Framework Approved Learning Frameworks Update

August 2021

Section 3: Principles

3.1 Strengths

EYLF

The identification of value-based principles to inform educator practices and children’s learning outcomes is recognised as another strength in both Frameworks. These align with the guiding principles for the NQF which include: the rights and best interests of children are paramount; children are successful, competent, and capable learners; equity, inclusion and diversity underpin the NQF; Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are valued; the role of parents and families is respected and supported; and best practice is expected in the provision of education and care services. Focusing on the EYLF, there was overwhelming support (over 90%) for all five of the current EYLF Principles, as shown in **Table 4**.

Table 4: Per cent of stakeholders who rated EYLF Principles as extremely or very important

EYLF Principles	Educators /Approved Providers	Other Professionals	Families
Secure, respectful, and reciprocal relationships	97%	98%	98%
Partnerships with families and support professionals	95%	98%	91%
High expectations and equity for all children’s capacity to succeed	95%	97%	92%
Respect for diversity of cultures, values, practices and beliefs	97%	95%	93%
Ongoing learning and reflective practice	90%	91%	Not asked

Example comments from stakeholder feedback

The principles underpin everything I do with the team. It guides my decisions on a daily basis (ECEC Centre Director, Nominated Supervisor, Preschool/LDC).

Clarifying for ECEC services how they can apply the principles and practices as part of their planning...how the Practices, Principles and Learning Outcomes interact together in practical ways (Focus Group).

MTOP

Stakeholders' ratings for the importance of the Principles for MTOP were also strong, but with more variation, as shown in **Table 5**. The principle of *Partnerships* received higher ratings from families than from educators/providers and other professionals. Of note is that the principle of *Ongoing learning and reflective practice* received lower ratings for importance from educators, providers and other professionals (73%-74%) working in OSHC than those working in ECEC (90%-91%).

Table 5: Per cent of stakeholders who rated MTOP Principles as extremely or very important

MTOP Principles	Educators /Approved Providers	Other Professionals	Families
Secure, respectful, and reciprocal relationships	99%	96%	93%
Partnerships with families and support professionals	85%	82%	93%
High expectations and equity for all children's capacity to succeed	89%	93%	90%
Respect for diversity of cultures, values, practices and beliefs	95%	96%	93%
Ongoing learning and reflective practice	74%	73%	Not asked

Example comments from stakeholder feedback

Expand the descriptors with more specific examples enabling the principles to be more visible in practice to educators. Also, the relationship between principles and philosophies that could be strengthened (OSHC Nominated Supervisor, BSC/ASC/Vac).

Partnerships with families should be emphasised (OSHC Nominated Supervisor, Educational Leader, Educator, ASC/Vac).

3.2 Opportunities

Recognising the integral link between children and young people’s learning, educator practices and relationships in education and care, there is opportunity to clarify, expand and update principles in both ALFs. Informed by Stage 1 feedback, and current literature, the following principles are identified as priorities for updating.

3.2.1 Strengthening the principle of ongoing learning and reflective practice

The principle of ongoing learning and reflective practice is reflected in the NQS as well as in the current ALFs. In the NQS, critical reflection is recognised as a key component of the planning and assessment cycle, and educators are expected to critically reflect on children and young people’s learning and development, as individuals and in groups, to plan, implement and evaluate educational programs and practices. The ability to engage in critical reflection is core to the provision of high-quality education and care, and a priority for quality improvement (Brownlee et al., 2020; Harrison et al., 2020). Cartmel and Brannelly (2016) note the importance of critical reflection in the OSHC educators’ core competencies and knowledge. While promoted as a key principle in both ALFs, there is opportunity to further strengthen critical reflection as a principle to emphasise that reflection includes action, as well as including children and young people (i.e., children engage with and evaluate diverse and competing perspectives to inform their decisions and actions). Critical reflection was identified as an area for improved practice by stakeholders and focus groups to emphasise that reflection includes action and children and young people engaging with diverse views.

Example comments from stakeholder feedback

The role of critical reflection in everyday practice is important (OSHC, Other, Peak).

I feel as though "ongoing and reflective practice" is the principle that gets most overlooked. Could there be a way to strengthen this principle to showcase its significance for example further explanation and examples of ongoing learning and reflective practice? (ECEC, Educational Leader, Preschool/LDC).

Points of Discussion: Principle of ongoing learning and reflective practice

To what extent do you agree/disagree with updating the EYLF/MTOP by:

4. Expanding the principle of ongoing learning and reflective practice to further strengthen critical reflection as guiding professional practice.

3.2.2 Introducing a new principle promoting collaborative leadership

Collaborative leadership was a key theme that emerged from Stage 1 stakeholder consultations. The importance of effective leadership in ECEC and OSHC is well documented (Cartmel et al., 2020; Waniganyake et al., 2017) including the relationship between effective leadership and positive outcomes for children and young people. This connection is promoted and supported throughout the NQS, which identifies leadership as a quality area and key determinant of high quality provision. This goes beyond formal leadership positions, to include leadership by children and young people and

educators in a broad range of contexts. In this way leadership is viewed as, “an individual and collective responsibility” (Stamopoulos & Barblett, 2018, p.xix). How school leaders saw OSHC impacted the curriculum decisions available to OSHC professionals (Cartmel & Grieshaber, 2014; Cartmel & Hurst, 2021). It was noted that if principals viewed OSHC as a low priority it impacted the curriculum decisions available to OSHC professionals. The surveys and the focus group comments reflected this theme, and there is opportunity to add a principle that recognises, values and supports leadership in this broader context.

Example comments from stakeholder feedback

There’s nothing in the framework [EYLF] that talks about leadership, and I wonder if whether or not we need to... saying how does a leader lead pedagogy (Focus Group).

Points of Discussion: Principle of collaborative leadership (new)

To what extent do you agree/disagree with updating the EYLF/MTOP by:

- 5. Adding a principle that reflects contemporary research evidence concerning the role of collaborative leadership and teamwork.*

3.2.3 Strengthening the principle of high expectations and equity

Supporting children’s learning and development and enabling educators to assess achievement of the learning outcomes is a key focus of the ToR for the ALFs Updates. The ToR also require consideration of human rights perspectives, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, for inclusive quality education for all children and young people.

Aligned to antidiscrimination and disability legislation, the NQF is founded on the principles of equity, inclusion and diversity enabled by the National Law. There has been considerable growth in research and understanding relating to inclusive environments and practices for children and young people. Inclusion makes visible and celebrates the diversity of children’s lives. Inclusive environments ensure that all children have equitable and genuine opportunities to participate.

There is opportunity to draw on new knowledge and evidence-based practice to strengthen inclusion in ECEC, whereby educators are skilled in enacting inclusion for all children. For instance, research with children with additional needs found that while educators agree inclusion is important “the enactment and pedagogy around inclusion appear problematic” (Keary et al., 2020, npg). Additionally, recent research by Cloughessy et al., (2019) found in terms of equity it was critical for ECEC educators to be skilled in providing a welcoming environment for same-sex families and their children to build a sense of belonging.

Example comments from stakeholder feedback

The space around inclusive education has changed so much in the past ten years, and our responsibility around this (focus group).

Adding in concepts of gender dysphoria; inclusivity and diversity applies to all the stakeholders and not just the children and their families (OSHC, Educational Leader, Coordinator, BSC/ASC).

Just as much focus on inclusion of disability/'diff-ability' as there is on inclusion of different cultures within the ECEC sector (ECEC, Family Day Care Educator).

Points of Discussion: Principle of high expectations and equity

To what extent do you agree/disagree with updating the EYLF/MTOP by:

- 6. Expanding the principle of high expectations and equity to reflect modern understandings of diversity and inclusion.*

3.2.4 Introducing a new principle addressing sustainability

The NQF promotes the role of education and care services in building children's understanding of sustainability, with a strong focus on environmental responsibility. This is evident in the NQS and the current ALFs. Notably, this is also a strong focus in the Australian Curriculum. Introducing a new principle addressing sustainability responds to the ToR for the ALFs Update, in particular, strengthening coherent pathways between both ALFs and the Australian Curriculum and learning from equivalent Australian and international frameworks. Teaching children and young people about the natural environment and how to take care of it is central to education for sustainability. However, sustainability extends beyond environmental education. Contemporary research promotes a broader view of sustainability. For example, international organisations, such as UNESCO, now recognise three dimensions of sustainability; environmental, social and economic sustainability which are seen to be intertwined, not separate. This broader view of sustainability is a feature of several other early years curricula (e.g., Norway, Sweden, Japan, and Korea), positioning children and young people as competent problem-solvers, able to engage with complex problems and to enact positive change.

Recognising children and young people's interest in supporting a fair and sustainable world, there is an opportunity to add a new principle addressing sustainability and to strengthen concepts of sustainability throughout the two Frameworks. The benefits of children and young people playing outdoors and engaging with their natural environment is an historical and enduring principle in education and care, reinforced by all stakeholders in Stage 1. Notably, nature and animals were key themes in children and young people's drawings and writing.

Example comments from stakeholder feedback

I feel that the EYLF is missing content on understanding the world. Connection to nature, understanding of sustainable living, growth (ECEC, Family Day Care Coordinator, Approved Provider, Nominated Supervisor, Educational Leader).

I feel that children these days have less opportunities to experience & learn in nature (due to city life) (ECEC, Parent, Preschool).

Sustainability and diversity and how as educators we can promote this to children families and the community (OSHC, Educational Leader, BSC/ASC/Vac).

Points of Discussion: Principle of sustainability (new)

To what extent do you agree/disagree with updating the EYLF/MTOP by:

- 7. Adding a principle of sustainability to include environmental, social and economic sustainability.*

3.2.5 Updating the principle of secure, respectful and reciprocal relationship to include relational pedagogy

The ToR require the Updates to focus on contemporary research, in particular brain development in the context of early learning and foundations for lifelong health and representation of socially and culturally diverse perspectives. The importance of relationships between educators and children is a cornerstone of the NQF and a central theme in the NQS and the ALFs.

Under the NQS, educators are expected to engage in responsive and meaningful interactions with children that build children's trust, confidence and security. This draws on attachment theory and research demonstrating links between security and trust in relationships with important adults. Furthermore, such relationships build and strengthen children's positive sense of self, confidence, and self-worth. Recent critiques have highlighted the need to move beyond the idea of relationships as 'emotionally supportive' (Cheeseman, 2017), to think about "new possibilities for understanding and enacting relational pedagogies" (Degotardi et al., 2017, p. 358) that promote learning and wellbeing.

Contemporary research also highlights the importance of educators understanding of how trauma and complex family lives and circumstances can impact the ways children behave and learn in ECEC and OSHC (Howard, 2020). Relational pedagogy incorporates being responsive to the children's lives and applying trauma informed practices to create safe spaces for children and young people (Barfield et al., 2012). There was overwhelming support for this principle from all stakeholders. Children and young people reinforced the importance of their relationships with educators.

Example comments from stakeholder feedback

How can we support educators through the framework to see the importance of acknowledging and greeting families by their names, role modelling connection and a sense of security and trust to the children? (ECEC, Other, Peak).

The focus for MTOP should be on relationship building and cohesion, as you cannot identify where children, families, educators, and communities lie with respect to the other Principles until you have developed strong, mutual relationships (OSHC, Nominated Supervisor, Educational Leader, BSC/ASC/Vac).

Enthusiastic leaders that care about the kids. (Parent, BSC/ASC/Vac).

I like talking and hanging out with OSHC carers (OSHC, Child 9 years).

Points of Discussion: Principle of secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships

To what extent do you agree/disagree with updating the EYLF/MTOP by:

- 8. Revising the principle of secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships to include children and young people's connections with educators and their peers to underpin learning and teaching practices?*

3.2.6 Strengthening partnerships to include other professionals

Acknowledging the diversity of children and families, and holistic and integrated nature of children's learning, development, and wellbeing, the NQF promotes collaborative partnerships to achieve and sustain the best outcomes for children. This is a key theme in the NQS and current ALFs.

The ToR for the ALFs Update encourage consideration of opportunities to strengthen these partnerships, including ways to strengthen coherent pathways between both ALFs and insights from contemporary research regarding continuity of learning; multidisciplinary relationships with professionals; parental partnerships and the home and community learning environment. While relationships are seen as a hallmark of quality education and care there has been some inconsistency noted in 'meanings' attached to relationships as described in the EYLF.

There is no consensus on what is meant by partnerships and Hadley and Rouse (2018) found differences in how partnerships are understood and enacted by families and educators. Partnerships between OSHC professionals and school principals and management are vital in providing high quality care, play and educational environments for children and young people (Cartmel & Hayes, 2016; Westoby et al., 2021). Hadley's et al., (2021) research noted there was often a gap between schools and the OSHC service, especially when dealing with child protection matters. In culturally safe spaces educator's address: issues of power, actively counteract issues of racism or discrimination, adapt programs to be responsive to families' priorities and lived realities, integrate Indigenous perspectives into program design and delivery, and privilege the views of families in determining if a service is culturally safe (Gerlach et al., 2017).

The essence of true partnerships was raised in the focus groups. Reflective of a holistic approach to children and young people's learning, development and wellbeing, there is opportunity to expand on

partnerships with professionals and schools. Survey respondents also noted the importance of understanding diversity within the partnership.

Example comments from stakeholder feedback

I would tier the principles, whereby partnerships, expectations, diversity, and ongoing learning can be built from a base of secure, respectful, and reciprocal relationships. (OSHC, Nominated Supervisor, Educational Leader, BSC/ASC/Vac).

I believe we need to have consistent partnerships with allied health professionals to support the ever-increasing level of additional needs children in our care (ECEC, ECT, preschool).

Points of Discussion: Principle of partnerships

To what extent do you agree/disagree with updating the EYLF/MTOP by:

9. Strengthening the principle of partnerships to include working with diverse families, creating culturally safe spaces and strengthening connections with child and family professionals and school communities.