

Everyday Outcomes: Working with the Early Years Learning Framework Learning Outcomes

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For many early childhood educators the *Early Years Learning Framework* is their first experience of mandated learning outcomes. This can be daunting – particularly if the outcomes are seen as being yet another imposition on our time. Yet the outcomes also have the potential to give a valuable sense of direction to what we do. Importantly, they focus our attention on long-term learning.

As early childhood educators we are typically very good at thinking about the short-term. We plan for this afternoon, tomorrow or next week – but rarely for longer periods. Partly this is because we recognise the importance of being responsive and flexible; partly it is because the children we work with are at a stage of life where they are growing and changing so quickly that long-term planning of anything specific is usually difficult, if not impossible.

Yet in taking a purely short-term approach we may be missing the opportunity to make a long-term difference to children's learning.

The big picture

This is where the outcomes give us pause to consider the bigger picture. None of the five outcomes will be achieved quickly or easily. None are going to be achieved as the result of a

The outcomes of the *Early Years Learning Framework*

- **Children have a strong sense of identity**
- **Children are connected with and contribute to their world**
- **Children have a strong sense of wellbeing**
- **Children are confident and involved learners**
- **Children are effective communicators**

single experience. Rather, all will be the product of many experiences over time. And even when an outcome has been achieved, or established, there is no guarantee that it will necessarily be maintained. For a child with a strong sense of identity at two there is nothing to say that they will always feel as confident and self-assured. Similarly, a child who communicates effectively at age one may not necessarily do so at age five.

The process of working with the outcomes is therefore an ongoing one. It is not a matter of simply helping children to reach them at a particular point and then imagining that we

have finished the job. Instead it is a process not only of helping children to reach them but also of helping to maintain and develop them into the future.

Thinking long-term

This process means that we need to take a complex and long term-approach to what we are doing. We can't point to our program and say 'We did identity last week, communication was this week and we're doing wellbeing on Friday.' We may well have done something related to identity last week, something related to communication this morning, and be planning something related to wellbeing for Friday. But, on their own, such experiences cannot be more than a step toward any of the outcomes. Without a range of experiences that will continue, extend and consolidate the relevant learning, such 'one-off' experiences are of only limited value.

Yet our approaches to planning and programming typically elevate such 'one-off' learning to being the focus of what we do. In fact, as the outcomes help us to realise, effective learning is rarely about 'one-offs'.

Effective learning tends to occur over time as children become familiar with ideas, concepts and learning materials and develop the skills needed to successfully use and/or apply them.

If we think of something as complex as learning to read, we instinctively realise that this is a process that takes time; that it is made up of many intermediate stages that bridge the gap between a non-reader and a reader; and, that acquiring, maintaining and developing reading skills, requires ongoing practice over considerable time. Teaching a child to read is never going to be about a single 'reading' experience; rather it is about many experiences that ultimately lead to successful reading. This doesn't mean that individual experiences are irrelevant but it does highlight the importance of these experiences linking to each other as part of a bigger process, rather than being seen as isolated 'one-offs'.



It's more than 'one-offs'

We would do well to see achievement of the EYLF's learning outcomes as a similar kind of process. Recognising this has significant implications for how we plan such learning.

If we attempt to individually plan for all of the different experiences that will go into achieving each outcome, we will quickly find ourselves overwhelmed. The temptation from this point of view, is therefore, to see the outcomes as just something else that needs to be done – an additional set of experiences on top of everything else that we are already doing. The outcomes, though, should not be separate from our everyday program. Rather, they should be the result of it.

Effective planning for the outcomes will embed them into our everyday practice rather than separating them out.

As an example, think of the sub-outcomes under Outcome Two. One talks about children developing an appreciation and respect for the environment as well as an understanding of sustainable environmental practices. Now we could easily plan a number of specific lessons or experiences to convey these messages. But to be effective how many would we need?

Alternatively, by simply introducing a recycling and composting system at meal times every child would have a daily experience of environmentalism and sustainability in action.

By using a routine that we can easily take for granted – the scraping of plates or emptying of lunch boxes at the end of a meal – and consciously making it a learning experience, we can ensure that every child not only participates in it but participates in it over and over again.

In this, way such an approach is likely to be far more successful than any individual learning experiences we might plan.

Everyday learning

Therefore, how we plan and program for the outcomes needs to consider all of the things we do that contribute to the achievement of each. Some of these will be the planned experiences or activities that appear on our programs but many, such as the recycling example above, will not fit so easily into a planning format. Instead, they will be about the interactions



and relationships we have with children or the ways that the routine and structure of the day supports the development of the kind of dispositions for learning and character traits that are inherent in the outcomes.

We know that learning happens most effectively when it is repeated. As the EYLF notes, '*connections and continuity between learning experiences ... make learning more meaningful*' (p.33). We also know that each of the outcomes will be the product of many related learning experiences over time.

If we are able to effectively integrate learning and teaching strategies that will support the outcomes into our daily routines, then we will have a way to offer meaningful learning on an ongoing basis without the need to plan every detail of the day.

This doesn't mean we discard our planning formats, or imagine that all learning can occur in this way. But it gives us another way to think about 'planning'; a way that frees us from feeling the need to plan and document each of the hundreds of experiences that will contribute to each outcome.

The very everyday-ness of routines makes them extremely valuable learning experiences if that is how we choose to see them.

Not only is such learning likely to be more effective than a single 'one-off' experience but, in terms of planning, it is something that can be planned and documented once rather than having to be constantly redone. We can treat such experiences more like a policy or procedure – something that we think about and plan once, but then implement over and over again. In doing so we can help to ensure that we are planning effectively for long-term learning and for the meaningful achievement of the learning outcomes.

References

Commonwealth of Australia, 2009, *Belonging, Being and Becoming – The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*, Canberra.