

DIRECTORATE FOR EDUCATION AND SKILLS  
EDUCATION POLICY COMMITTEE

## Network on Early Childhood Education and Care

## Thematic Working Group on Early Learning and Development Framework and Considerations on the Development of Early Learning and Development Outcomes

## Thematic Working Group on Outcomes

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**THEMATIC WORKING GROUP ON EARLY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT  
FRAMEWORK AND CONSIDERATIONS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF EARLY LEARNING  
AND DEVELOPMENT: OUTCOMES**

(Version 1.1)

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## OECD EARLY LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

### INTRODUCTION

1. The OECD Early Learning and Development Framework (The Framework) provides strategic policy direction to the early years sector by establishing shared goals for early childhood professionals, partners and communities – all of whom are working to provide children with the best possible start in life.

2. The Thematic Working Group on the OECD Early Learning and Development Framework and Outcomes received valuable input from each of the following OECD Network members on the development of this draft document:

- Australia
- Belgium (French)
- Canada
- Croatia
- Denmark
- European Union
- Germany
- Japan
- New Zealand
- Norway
- Portugal
- Sweden
- UNESCO
- United Kingdom

3. In addition to the input provided by the above Network members, this framework was also significantly informed by the content and language as expressed within the following international early learning frameworks:

- *Belonging, Being & Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia, Commonwealth of Australia, 2009*
- *Ontario Early Years Policy Framework 2013, Queen's Printer for Ontario, Canada, 2013*

- TeWhāriki, Early Childhood Curriculum, Ministry of Education, New Zealand, 1996.

Moderator: Jim Grieve

June, 2013

### Why Are the Early Years Important?

4. Children's experiences early in life have a profound and long-lasting impact on their future development and well-being.

5. The early years are a period of intense learning and development, when tremendous changes occur in the brain over a short period of time. In the first year of life, the architecture of the brain takes shape at an astounding rate –approximately 700 new neural connections are being built *per second*. Scientists now know that this process is not entirely genetically predetermined, but rather is dramatically influenced by children's early experiences with people and their surroundings.<sup>[1]</sup>

6. This influential period is also characterized by the unprecedented growth of physical, social, emotional, cognitive, language and communication capacities. Experts know that the foundation for lifelong learning is rooted firmly in a child's experiences in the early years of life. The only way to dramatically decrease gaps in achievement later in life is to provide enriching learning experiences to children well before they enter school.<sup>[2]</sup>

7. But beyond academic achievement, the ability to achieve social, health and economic success, as well as the ability to contribute constructively to the community, hinges on the early years. Studies show that positive early experiences lead to improved determinants of health, resulting in fewer instances of depression and better health outcomes, throughout the life cycle. For this reason, the economic benefits of investments in the early years are well-documented. Economist and Nobel laureate James Heckman, for example, calculates a seven-to-one return on public investment in programs for young children.<sup>[3]</sup>

8. The view of the child should be central to any framework that deals with the early years, enriched by the concepts of interdependence, relationships and physical, social, emotional, cultural and intellectual growth. In one such framework this view of the child is characterized by *belonging, being* and *becoming*:

- **Belonging:** Acknowledges children's interdependence with others and the basis of relationships in defining identities. In early childhood, and throughout life, relationships are crucial to a sense of belonging.
- **Being:** Recognizes the significance of the here and now in children's lives. It is about the present and them knowing themselves, building and maintaining relationships with others, engaging with life's joys and complexities, and meeting challenges in everyday life. The early childhood years are not solely preparation for the future but also about the present.
- **Becoming:** Children's identities, knowledge, understandings, capacities, skills and relationships change during childhood. They are shaped by many different events and circumstances. Becoming reflects this process of rapid and significant change that occurs in the early years as

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<sup>[1]</sup>Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2009). In Brief: The Science of Early Childhood Development. Cambridge, Ma.: Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. Retrieved from <http://developingchild.harvard.edu/>.

<sup>[2]</sup>Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2007). A Science-Based Framework for Early Childhood Policy: Using Evidence to Improve Outcomes in Learning, Behaviour, and Health for Vulnerable Children. Retrieved from <http://www.developingchild.harvard.edu>

<sup>[3]</sup>Heckman, J. (2008). The case for investing in disadvantaged young children. In First Focus (Ed.), *Big Ideas for Children: Investing in Our Nation's Future*. Washington, DC: In Focus. pp. 49–58.

young children learn and grow. It emphasizes learning to participate fully and actively in society<sup>[4]</sup>.

The Framework endorses this view of the child, and keeps it in mind throughout the rest of this document.

### ***Guiding Principles -OECD Early Learning and Development Framework***

9. The OECD Framework is driven by the following guiding principles:

#### *Child and family-centred*

10. Children and families always come first. Programs and services should be easy for parents to access and transitions between programs and services should be seamless. Early identification and intervention should be available for children in need of supports. Programs and services need to be culturally responsive and adaptable to local needs. Parents should have the information they need to make decisions about programs and services.

#### *The view of the child*

11. The view of the child is crucial to the realization of a child and family centered early learning system. When children are recognized as intelligent, capable and curious, then programs and services that value and build on children's strengths and abilities are more likely to be developed.

12. OECD Network partners describe children as: active learners; creative; curious; natural explorers; playful; competent; expressive; knowledgeable; joyful; capable of complex thinking; and rich in potential as contributors to society. Children grow up in families with diverse social, cultural and linguistic perspectives. Every child should feel as though she or he belongs and is a valuable contributor to the family and surroundings.

#### *The view of the family*

13. Parents, broadly defined, are the child's first and most important teachers. Parents are responsible for the health and well-being of the child. They nurture the balanced development of the child's mind and body and the foster a spirit of independence.

14. Parents have the right to participate fully in all aspects of the care and education of their child and, without regard to language, socio-economic status or culture.

#### *OECD commitment to quality programs and services*

15. The extraordinary and long-lasting impact of optimal development in the early years requires access to high quality programs and services that are provided consistently across early years settings. Program approaches must cater to children's development, value children as active, capable learners and demonstrate respect for diversity, equity and inclusion.

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<sup>[4]</sup>Belonging, Being & Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia, Commonwealth of Australia, 2009, pp3-4.

16. This Framework serves as a guide to support policy and curriculum development in ECEC programs for children 0-8 years old. The following shared language and understandings of children's learning and development serve as guiding principles<sup>[5]</sup>:

1. Early childhood sets the foundation for lifelong learning, behaviour, health and well-being.
  - The path for lifelong learning, behaviour, health, and well-being is shaped by day-to-day experiences in early life;
  - The basic structure of the brain is determined by genetics. Its neural architecture, however, is shaped by a child's interactions and relationships with parents and other significant people in their lives;
  - Early brain development is stimulated through experiences and interactions with responsive adults;
  - A child's ability to regulate emotions, behaviours and attention increases over time, in step with maturity, experience, and responsive relationships.

2. An intentional, planned program supports learning and smooth transitions

A planned program:

- Begins with an informed understanding of what children are capable of learning and how they learn;
  - Is based on ongoing collaboration, considers multiple perspectives and reflects the unique strengths, needs and interests of participating children;
  - Sets specific goals to benefit all children's enjoyment, learning and development, and full participation;
  - Includes goals to support the development of identity, social inclusion, health and well-being, self-regulation, physical skills, language and thinking skills, and goals to set the foundations for literacy and numeracy;
  - Supports learning through active engagement, observation, experimentation, and social interaction;
  - Organizes the physical space, materials, time, and experiences that support the learning process.
3. Play and inquiry are learning approaches that capitalize on children's natural curiosity and exuberance.
- Children make sense of the world through play. As children investigate and experiment with materials and interact with one another through play they establish skills in problem-solving, social competence, self-regulation, and communication;

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<sup>[5]</sup>Adapted from Ontario Early Years Policy Framework 2013, Queen's Printer for Ontario, Canada, 2013

- “Imitating” and “exploring” during the infant and toddler years evolves into “pretend” play. In pretend play, children use language and thinking skills to refine their ability to plan, negotiate, resolve conflicts, regulate emotions and behaviour, initiate friendships, and understand the perspective of others;
- Through these experiences, adults can build children's emerging literacy, numeracy, and scientific reasoning skills;
- Children's learning builds on their existing understanding of ideas and concepts. Their natural curiosity inspires them to solve problems and overcome challenges;
- Children also need opportunities for contemplation, exploration and experience.

4. Authentic partnerships with families and communities are essential.

- Family and community form the foundation for a child's early development. Families know their children best, and are the first and most powerful influence on learning and development;
- The needs of each child should be considered in the context of their family composition, values, culture, and language. This approach enriches relationships between early childhood settings, families, and their communities;
- Involving parents and other important adults in activities connects them to their children's early development, and enhances the child's learning;
- Children in early childhood settings benefit when they interact with local environments and community members are part of their daily experiences.

5. Respect for diversity, equity and inclusion are vital.

Equitable outcomes for all children are supported when early childhood settings:

- Recognize each child as a citizen with equal rights to live and learn in society;
- Build programs based on the distinct early learning and child care needs of the community;
- Recognize and respect the unique qualities of each child and family, including ancestry, culture, ethnicity, race, language, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, socio-economic status, family environment, and developmental abilities and needs;
- Create strategies that value the culture and first language of all children;
- Establish programming strategies to foster an inclusive learning environment in which every child can participate;
- Provide for each child’s physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual and creative potential.

6. Knowledgeable, responsive and reflective educators are essential.

Knowledgeable and responsive adults:

- Recognize that responding to the unique abilities, needs, and characteristics of each child, family, and community is central to supporting learning and development;
- Engage with children as co-learners as they explore their environments;
- Provoke children's thinking, create meaningful programs, and guide interactions with children and their families;
- Use a warm and positive approach to support children's developing ability to express emotions and take other perspectives;
- Know when to stand back and observe and when to enter children's play to stimulate thinking;
- Make a commitment to build self-awareness, regularly reflect on practices and engage in new learning experiences, both individually and with colleagues.

***How will OECD Network member nations benefit from the Framework?***

17. The Framework provides a shared vision and common language to guide the ECEC sector's approach to policy and program development, service delivery and the development and tracking of child outcomes. A shared vision and approach will have far-reaching benefits for children, parents and families, municipalities as well as other partners.

*Benefits for Children*

18. High quality programs and services promote children's future well-being when:

- Children are stimulated in healthy and nurturing environments from the earliest stages of life, and are better equipped to navigate key life transitions successfully, more likely to excel in school, and more apt to develop into confident and capable adults;
- Children receive screening, assessment and intervention services, as needed;
- Children's developmental progress is better monitored and programs are adapted to meet their needs.

*Benefits for Parents and Families*

19. An integrated, accessible and coordinated ECEC system supports parents and families by making programs and services more accessible when:

- Parents and families know how to access programs and services and have the tools they need to make informed decisions;
- Accessible and high-quality early years programs provide valuable information to help support parents in their role as primary care givers;

- Programs and services are delivered by qualified staff and leaders who help to reassure parents that children are safe, they are learning and they are in trusted care.

*Benefits for Municipalities, Schools and Community Partners:*

20. An integrated ECEC service approach better supports partners in their roles as system managers and program and service providers when:

- Strong local/municipal leadership ensure programs and services are more responsive and adaptable to local needs;
- Greater coordination and collaboration among partners eliminates duplication and redundancy, increases integration of services and expands networks – making it easier to reach families and improve children’s outcomes;
- Strong and purposeful partnerships help maximize financial and human resources and reduce duplication;
- Investments in the early years yield significant returns over time and help to ensure sustainability and growth of the economy as well as the general health and well-being of the population;
- Coordinated investments and planning maximize public spending;
- Better data collection improves accountability and ensures decision-making is informed by evidence, experience and research.

**CONCLUSION**

21. The Framework is designed to inspire conversations, foster communication and provide a common language about young children’s learning among children themselves, their families, the broader community, early childhood educators and other professionals.

22. This Framework is a living document that will evolve as new research and practices are developed and shared.

## CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF EARLY LEARNING OUTCOMES

### Background

23. The OECD Early Learning and Development Framework conveys the highest expectations for all children's learning from birth to eight years old, through the transitions to formal, compulsory school. The consensus from the Thematic Group members is that standards-based measurement of specific (academic) learning outcomes for developing young children is not advisable. The members are more in favour of tracking the positive gains in social and academic development of each child. In almost all submissions members reported that each child's learning and development is regularly and systematically documented in a variety of ways by educators and reported to parents on a very regular basis.

24. The working group members point to the fact that the wide age range when so called 'expected' outcomes may emerge renders assessment of outcomes for young children against external standards extremely challenging and even unwise. For example, it is quite within the developmentally appropriate range to observe some 3 or 4 year old children already reading with confidence. At the same time, it is also developmentally appropriate for some 5 year old children to be demonstrating emergent reading skills. This same developmental pattern is true for children's understanding of number sense and numeration.

25. The principles embedded in the OECD Early Learning and Development Framework place the emphasis on assessment for learning and focus our attention on what a child has learned (formative) and not on the identification of learning deficits (summative).

26. Members of the working group strongly supported investigating methods of assessing development of a wide range of expected social and developmental outcomes from high quality ECEC programs under the following six priority headings:

- Communication – language and cognition, language and communication, communication and general knowledge;
- Cooperation and collaboration – social competence, social skills, approaches to learning;
- Critical thinking and problem solving – cooperative skills, language, cognition;
- Creativity and imagination;
- Character – awareness of self and the environment, emotional maturity self-regulation;
- Community and citizenship – social skills.

27. The working group members see assessment of young children being focused on assessment for learning which occurs on a daily basis by the professional educator working in partnership with the parent/caregiver.

28. *Te Whāriki*, the New Zealand Early Childhood Curriculum outlines assessment for learning in the following manner: “Effective assessment is an everyday practice that involves noticing, recognising and

responding to children's learning. It is formative in that it effects learning and teaching. It requires knowledgeable practitioners that understand children's learning. It includes and actively involves children and their families"<sup>6</sup>.

### **Current outcome measurement instruments and philosophy within some OECD member nations.**

1. **Canada:** Early Development Index: (EDI) Population measure of vulnerabilities identified in five critical developmental domains:

- Physical Health and Well-being;
- Social Competence;
- Emotional Maturity;
- Language and Cognitive Development;
- Communication Skills and General Knowledge.

Method: Educator observation and assessment of children's developmental progress immediately prior to the child moving to formal compulsory schooling at age 6. The EDI is administered on a two or three year cycle in various Canadian provinces.

2. **Portugal:** Quarterly formative assessment of children. Key areas include:

- Personal and Social development;
- Expression and communication;
- Awareness of the world and surroundings.

Method: Assessment made by pre-school teachers who use direct observation, check lists, rating scales, journals and portfolios

3. (a) **Australia:** National Quality Standard – assessment of the following early learning outcomes:

- Children have a strong sense of identity;
- Children are connected with and contribute to their world;
- Children have a strong sense of well-being;
- Children are confident and involved learners;
- Children are effective communicators.

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<sup>6</sup> Te Whāriki, Early Childhood Curriculum, Ministry of Education, New Zealand, 1996.

3.(b) **Australia:** Australian Early Development Index(AEDI) – community level data to identify areas where family and child supports need to be strengthened to address the early childhood vulnerability indicators. (Presented to the Network in December 2012)

4. **Germany:** No systematic assessment/monitoring of child outcomes at the National level. Within each land there are language assessments and school entry examinations prior to entry to compulsory school entry.

5. **Sweden:** Child outcomes are not measured or assessed. Each child's learning and development is regularly and systematically documented in a variety of ways and reported to parents.

6. **Norway:** Individual child outcomes are not measured in Norway. Each child's learning and development is regularly and systematically documented in a variety of ways and reported to parents.

### **Considerations for the development of Early Learning Outcomes:**

#### **Focused Conversation**

#### ***Background***

29. The thematic working group on the development of an OECD Early Learning and Development Framework and Considerations for the development of Early Learning Outcomes will present the main findings of the group's work. The findings will include:

1. A draft of a proposed OECD Early Learning and Development Framework.
2. A focused discussion on the development of early learning outcomes

30. Outcomes are highly relevant to both Strands 1 and 2. Examples of early learning and development instruments currently in use will be shared along with the associated policy challenges and lessons learned.

31. This session will culminate with small group focused conversations to provide feedback on the draft Framework and on the important considerations for the development of early learning outcomes. These facilitated discussions will serve as preparation for the more in-depth discussions related to Strands 1 and 2 on June 18, 2013.

Guiding questions for the small group discussions include:

1. The draft Early Learning and Development Framework is designed to provide a guideline which Network members may use to build their own frameworks and to guide the discussions about outcomes, quality and monitoring in ECEC programs.

What observations, additions and alterations can you suggest that will improve this draft OECD Framework?

2. How can the information provided on the The National Quality and the Early Development Instrument be used to inform the Network members thinking on child outcomes from ECEC programs?
3. What are the key pieces of advice on outcome measures and data collection the ECEC Network can deliver to the INES Working Group and other international assessment and data collection

organizations for their consideration? (How to move beyond 'input and output' data while at the same time avoiding "schoolification" testing of young children?)

4. What accountability mechanisms can the ECEC Network recommend to be assured that its advice is actively considered and included in the outcome measures and data collection proposed by these international agencies?