



NSW Curriculum Framework for Children's Services

The Practice of Relationships

Essential Provisions for Children's Services



MINISTER'S FOREWORD



'The NSW Curriculum Framework, The Practice of Relationships', was developed in the interest of children. This document is a resource to support the important work of early childhood professionals. In it children are valued as citizens in their own right and not just for their future potential.

The document focuses on the crucial role of early childhood professionals in bringing their theoretical and practical knowledge of children together with the knowledge of parents and families to work collaboratively in the creation of the most beneficial programs possible for children.

Consultations with Early Childhood professionals were held across New South Wales, the content reflects the extensive feedback received.

This is not a prescriptive document describing a set of procedures for early childhood education; rather it is as the title suggests, a 'framework' to provide support for early childhood professionals in responding to the unique situations of the children in their care.

The Hon. Faye Lo Po' MP
 Minister for Community Services
 Minister for the Ageing
 Minister for Disability Services
 Minister for Women

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The development of this resource was guided by a Steering Committee chaired by Associate Professor June Wangmann, Manager Office of Childcare and consisting of the following representatives:

Greg Bubb	Quality Child Care Association of NSW Inc.
Dr Alan Rice	NSW Department of Education and Training
Dylis Nicolson	Early Learning Unit Department of Education and Training
Associate Professor Alma Fleet	Teacher Education Council
Julie Campbell	Early Childhood Intervention Australia (NSW Chapter)
Jo Pender/Louise Brennan	ATSIECSAG Inc. & AECSSU
Tonia Godhard	SDN Children's Services Inc
Vivi Germanos-Koutsounadis	Ethnic Child Care, Family & Community Services Co-operative
Leanne Murray/ Elizabeth Death	Uniting Church Children's Services
Neville Dwyer	Country Children's Services Association
Andrea Douglas	Ngaku Multipurpose Aboriginal Children's Centre
Karen Anstead	NSW Family Day Care Association
Ed Hughes	Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services
Michelle Perry	Awabakal Multipurpose Aboriginal Children's Services
Dr Phil Lambert	NSW Office of the Board of Studies
Belinda Adair	NSW Occasional Child Care Inc Association
Lynn Farrell	Lady Gowrie Child Centre
Tracey Simpson	Australian Early Childhood Association (NSW Branch)
Chris Legg	KU Children's Services
Julie Bojarski/ Lotta Jackson	Local Government Community Services Association
Frances Bardetta	Association of Child Care Centres of NSW
Megan Mendham	Mobile Resource Services Association
Nathalie Crane	NSW Department of Community Services
Jennifer Taaffe	NSW Department of Community Services

The work of the Steering Committee in the development of the document is gratefully acknowledged. We would like to mention Jo Pender who passed away during the working of the development. Her contribution is valued and she is greatly missed.

AUTHORS

Anne Stonehouse NSW Curriculum Framework for Children's Services – The Practice of Relationships, Essential Provisions for Children's Services

Jan Duffie *A Framework for Constructing Meaning – Rationale*

PILOT SERVICES

The document was piloted for a six month period in 2001, with the participating services providing vital information and feedback on the document, which led to important changes.

The services were:

Tathra Preschool

SDN Children's Services Hurstville

Frederick Street Kindergarten Co-operative

Peter Pan La Perouse

Colo Wilderness Mobile Resource Unit

Ashfield Infants Home – Family Day Care

Paddington Children's Centre

Dorothy Waide Early Learning Centre

Ngaku Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services

Cabonne- Blayney Family Day Care

Westmead Child Care Centre

Blinky's Corner Child Care Centre

Westfield Parramatta Occasional Care

Birchgrove Public School - Preschool

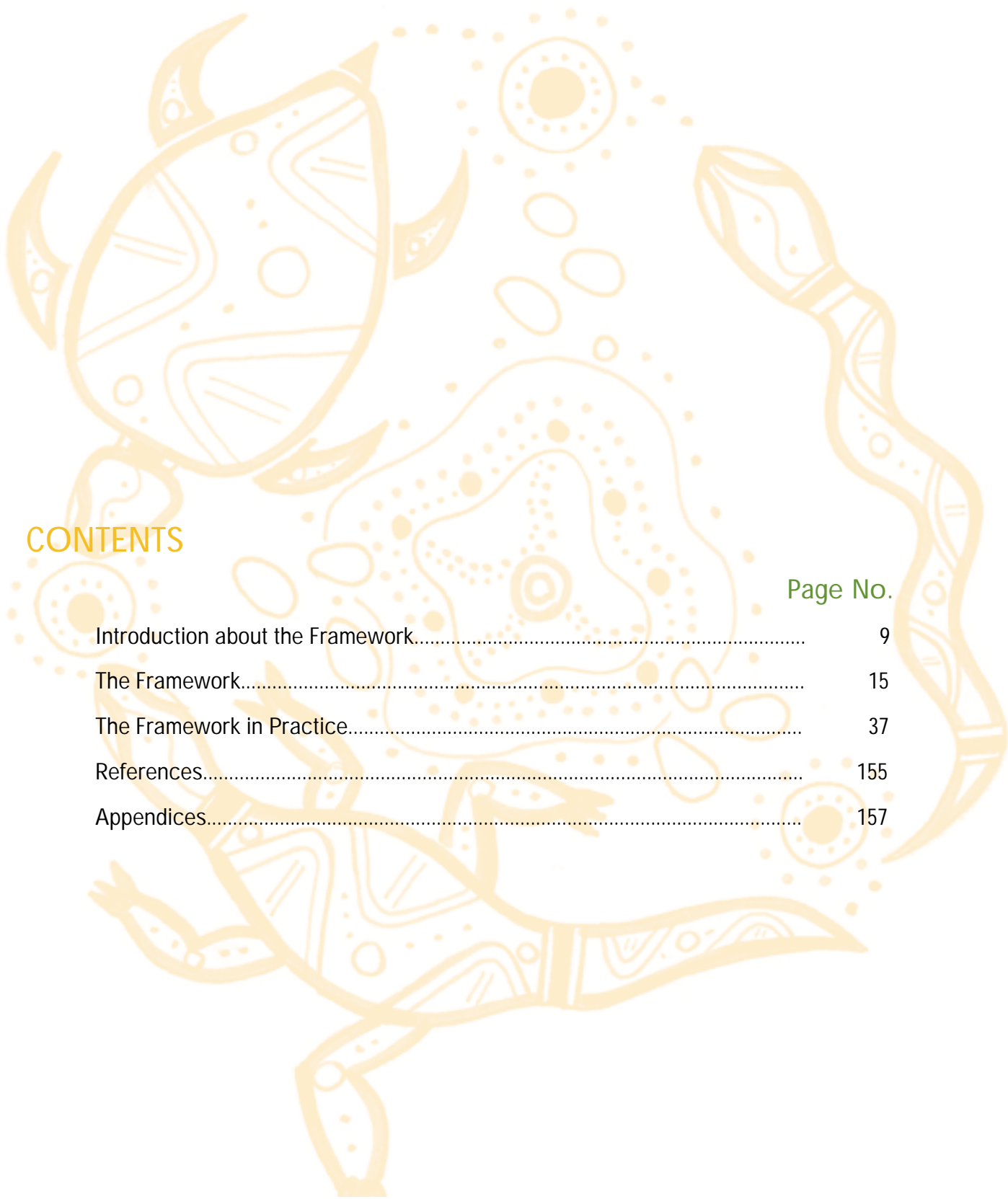
Farmhouse Montessori

Happy Days Preschool

At the conclusion of the pilot Dr Joy Goodfellow, Dr Catherine Patterson and Dr Jennifer Sumsion completed an Evaluation Report.

ARTWORK

Michelle Hamilton The images represent unity, a family and community working together for and with children.



CONTENTS

	Page No.
Introduction about the Framework.....	9
The Framework.....	15
The Framework in Practice.....	37
References.....	155
Appendices.....	157



INTRODUCTION: ABOUT THE FRAMEWORK

Contents	Page No.
Purposes.....	10
Basis.....	11
Scope.....	11
Structure and Format.....	12
How to Use the Document.....	12

This curriculum framework for a children's service is a foundation out of which come the daily experiences of children, their families and the professionals who work with them. It is not mainly about what professionals in children's services do or how they go about their practice; rather, most importantly, this curriculum framework is about why: a rationale for practice.

The document is meant to be neither prescriptive nor restrictive. It is not intended to constrain the way people think about what they do or their actual practice. Rather it is hoped that it will do the opposite – that is, open up new possibilities for thinking and action, encourage professionals to think creatively and innovatively, and empower them to take risks and seriously contemplate the unorthodox. The intent is to validate the complexity of practice in children's services and support reflection and improvement.

A Framework for a rich, vibrant, creative children's service needs to be organic, dynamic, living and open to

- change
- making sense and
- complementing the contexts of the lives of those involved in it, most particularly the lives of children
- the endless possibilities and potential of children.

It is hoped that through the exploration of this document, some aspects of current practice will be affirmed and at the same time people will be challenged to change. If taken seriously, this document is likely to generate some uncertainty and be unsettling. That is a good thing if it leads to critical thinking and improvement.

PURPOSES

The document has been written with three main purposes in mind:

- To validate and document excellent practice where it already exists in the field
- To clarify the common elements of good practice that exist across all program types, and those that are unique to particular types of programs
- To provide an endorsed framework that is a strong statement about the importance of the early years and the types of experiences that support children's learning and development appropriately, and consequently, the importance of children's services.

In the project leading to the document, the first purpose contributed to the emphasis on looking at what is happening, talking to practitioners and matching their stories about their practice with what the literature says about excellent practice.

All long day care centres, occasional care centres, preschools, family day care homes, multi-functional Aboriginal services and mobile services for children birth to school age have many characteristics in common. Regarding the second purpose of this document, this Framework has an explicit focus on what is common among services when practice is in the best interests of children and families. Consequently, there are very few places in the document where specific forms of services are mentioned.

A contemporary children's services professional has an obligation to advocate, and that requires not just engaging in excellent practice, but also being able to justify it, explain it, and promote it.

It must be acknowledged that each type of service and each individual service has unique characteristics. This document and the Framework itself are explicit about valuing difference. It is acknowledged that the implementation of the Framework in each service type and each individual service will and should be unique.

Similarly the children and families participating in these services both share some common characteristics and are also unique. This

Framework acknowledges that there are particular groups of children and families for whom there are considerations in addition to those that relate to all children and families.

These include:

- children with disabilities and their families
- children and families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

What is written about children and families in general applies to these children and families as well. Where there are issues relating particularly to each of these three groups in the context of the Framework, they are

highlighted. It must be said however, that the issues for these families and children are issues for all people involved in a children's service.

This document also emphasises commonalities across the age range of children before they start school. In other words, there are few places in the document, except in some examples, where a particular age group is specified or singled out. Users of this document will need to apply their knowledge of particular age groups to the information provided.

In relation to the third purpose, one aim of the document is to provide professionals with powerful, convincing and engaging language to assist them to communicate effectively with parents, professionals from other disciplines, and people in the broader community. A contemporary children's services professional has an obligation to advocate, and that requires not just engaging in excellent practice, but also being able to justify it, explain it, and promote it.

BASIS

The Framework is grounded in research, practical and theoretical literature. A literature review and rationale for the Framework is contained in an accompanying paper titled 'A Framework for Constructing Meaning'. The Framework combines contemporary and more traditional ways of thinking about children, childhood, and practice with children and families in children's services.

SCOPE

The Framework incorporates all the major dimensions of practice, but does not cover them exhaustively. It does not duplicate the large body of information contained in the range of resource materials to which everyone working in children's services must have access. It is a seminal resource, but it does not supplant other resources. It is not a complete manual for practice. There is the assumption in the document that the professional brings substantial knowledge, skills, values and perspectives to the Framework. The intent is to consolidate and extend thinking and practice based on other resources. The choice of a binder format for the document is a deliberate statement to encourage the inclusion of additional resources, and over time to allow for the revision of parts of the document.

STRUCTURE AND FORMAT

This resource document consists of four major sections: information about the Framework and the document, the Framework itself, the application and implementation of the Framework (the Framework in Practice), and the Rationale paper.

There is intentional duplication of some information, in recognition of the connections that exist in practice. Some of the decisions about placement of material were in the end arbitrary, as there is so much overlap in practice. Each chapter in the Framework in Practice links closely with the Framework itself and presumes familiarity with it.

Each chapter includes some questions and suggestions that will help professionals to understand and apply the Framework. Users of the document will think of many more. In addition, a selected list of resources appears at the end of the document.

HOW TO USE THE DOCUMENT

The document has been written mainly for formally qualified professionals, although it is hoped that it will be accessible and relevant to all who work in children's services. People with relevant formal qualifications must play a key role in supporting understanding and use of the document.

Consideration of the document and its implementation require leadership from a skilled and knowledgeable professional who is very familiar with its contents and enthusiastic about its implementation. It is intended that the document be used collaboratively in a service. The content is challenging, sometimes confronting, and the document will be most useful if it is used as a basis for collective discussion and critical reflection.

Because of the emphasis on acting innovatively

and creatively there will be benefits in exploring the document collaboratively with professionals from other services, even other service types. It is suggested that the document be considered initially as a whole, ensuring that there is collective understanding of the major concepts that comprise the Framework.

Implementation of the Framework, or a considered look at practice within a service to assess the degree of match with the Framework, would best be undertaken by looking at one or two areas at a time.

Language

The language used in the Framework itself and in the discussions about the Framework is deliberately unorthodox. A conscious effort has been made to challenge and stimulate thinking through the language used, but without erecting barriers to understanding and embracing the ideas contained in these pages. Use of the document requires considerable serious thinking, as does good practice.

A glossary of terms and an abridged version of the Framework written in simplified language are included as Appendices to support the use of the document. The abridged version of the Framework is not a substitute for the original Framework, and is included to assist with the introduction of the document to everyone working in children's services.



THE FRAMEWORK

Contents	Page No.
Explanation of the Framework's components.....	15
Core Concepts.....	16
Major Obligations.....	20
Essential Qualities for Professionals.....	32

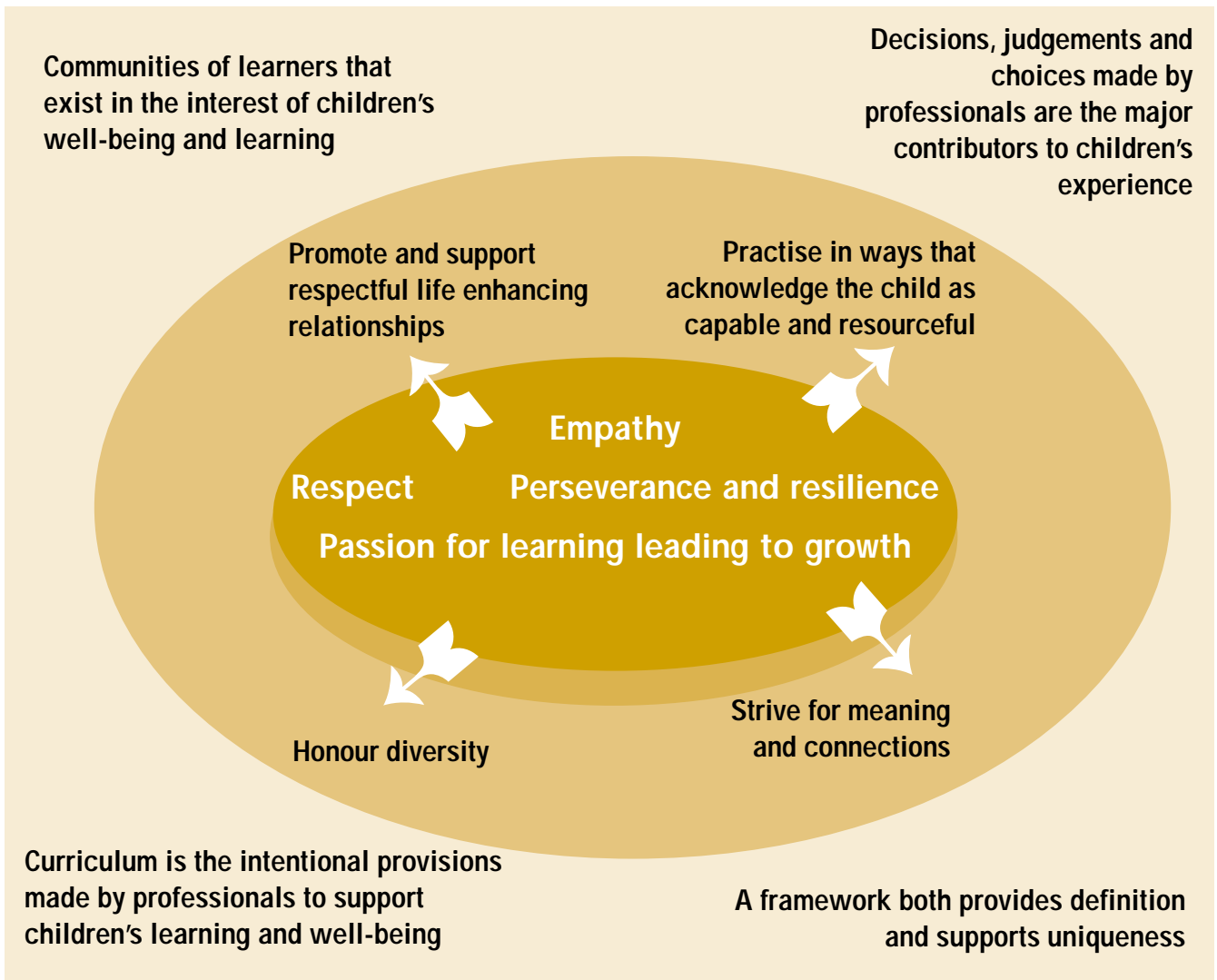
Explanation of the components of the Framework

The Framework is a collection of statements which forms a foundation for practice, a rationale for what professionals do in a children's service. It consists of

- four core concepts, or overarching understandings that inform desirable practice
- four major obligations of professionals, which are the aims of practice
- four essential qualities that professionals must bring to their practice.

Each of these intersects with the others, creating the richness and complexity that characterises practice in a children's service. The overlap and connections are just as important as the elements themselves.

In a particular service the "playing out" of each of these statements will be unique, as other factors will contribute to the shape or reality of each service.



There are certain philosophical beliefs that are implicit in the Framework, which have implications far beyond practice in children's services. These include the following:

- Children's services are critical institutions in the broader community
- Parents and the community share responsibility for all children
- The child is a citizen with rights and responsibilities
- Care and education are interwoven and inseparable, making it inappropriate to label some services, or even parts of the day in a program, as educational, and others as care
- The roles of professionals working with children and their families are complex and require depth and breadth in the skills, knowledge and attitudes required
- Collaboration in respectful relationships is superior to individualistic competition.

These beliefs have implications for a model of a democratic society.

Working in a children's service is a moral and ethical endeavour and as such is based on values. The values on which this Framework, and therefore practice in children's service, is based include the following:

- Openness
- Diversity
- Respect for others and for the physical world
- Service, commitment to others' well-being and to the good of the community
- Connection, relationship and collaboration
- Feelings, as well as thoughts and behaviour, as ways of understanding and communicating
- Resilience and perseverance

- Beauty
- Thoughtfulness and critical reflection
- Continuous pursuit of knowledge and understanding

These philosophical beliefs and values pervade the document.

Each of the Framework statements will be discussed in the pages that follow.

CORE CONCEPTS

CORE CONCEPT ABOUT CHILDREN'S SERVICES: Children's services are communities of learners that exist in the interest of children's well-being and learning.

Children's services play a significant role in the lives of many children and families. A children's service is an arena for childhood in which many families invest emotional energy, money, time and most importantly, trust to support their child's wellbeing. Children's services are also an essential part of any community that aims to be supportive of the lives of its citizens and as such are contributors to healthy communities. As institutions they promote social justice, access, and equity.

Healthy communities are characterised by

- commitment to a common purpose
- fostering of positive, productive, constructive relationships
- recognition of unity through diversity
- respect for the rights of each individual.

In these communities, people exist in relationships that encourage growth, creativity, innovation, problem solving, and progress, as people come together and pool their individual perspectives, wisdom, strengths, and skills. Children's services are places where people are in relationship with

each other on behalf of young children's learning. Through the collaboration that comes about through positive relationships, children's experience is enriched, and children in turn enrich the experience of others. Relationships of trust and respect enable everyone - children, parents, and professionals - to be truly open to what they see and hear, to change, to take risks, to meet challenges, and ultimately to grow and learn. In other words, children's services are communities for learning.

Children's services operate as microcosms of desirable larger communities, where children live with and are supported to adopt values, attitudes and ways of living that will enable them to be effective members of the broader communities in which they live now and will live in the future.

Children, no matter how young, are respected contributing members of the community.

In addition, children's services play a particular role alongside other institutions and organisations that support families. Parents and family are the most important people in children's lives and the most significant influence on their learning. A major role of children's services is to support the relationship between each child and his or her family by working in partnership with parents and families. Children's services also encourage families to use other support services in the community, and indeed to be part of their community.

The conceptualisation of children's services as learning communities places children solidly in the community, as current citizens. Investment is made in children's learning and lives because they matter in the present, rather than likely future benefits. At

the same time their learning is assumed to be a foundation for the rest of their life. A child's experiences are both life and preparation for life.

The notion of the *child as citizen* means that the child has rights and responsibilities. The Framework emphasises the child's right to be respected as a full human being and to be a full partner in relationships and interactions that respect the child. The child as citizen also implies that an important aim in children's services communities is to nurture the child's positive predisposition toward other human beings, the child's increasing ability to show respect and caring for other people and for the world around them. In other words, children's services are places where the child is assisted to live out human responsibility for self, others and the physical world.

Children, no matter how young, are respected contributing members of the community.

CORE CONCEPT ABOUT THE ROLE OF PROFESSIONALS: The decisions, judgments and choices made by professionals are the major contributors to children's experience.

The Framework is constructed around three areas: understandings that professionals need to embrace (Core Concepts), what they must aim to do (Major Obligations), and qualities they must possess (Essential Qualities). The structure of the Framework itself is therefore strong evidence of the importance placed on the adults who work with young children.

The term *professional* is used in this Framework for all adults working with children in children's services where practice reflects the Framework. The term is used regardless of the presence,

A child's experiences are both life and preparation for life.

absence, or level of formal qualifications held. This is done in recognition of the significance and complexity of working with young children and their families to support children's well-being and learning. In other words, the term has been chosen to reflect the nature of the work itself.

It is beyond a doubt the judgment and wisdom of the professional, more than any other factor, that shapes the experience of children and families in a children's service.

Professionals work in a context that includes government policies and regulations, funding provisions, the local community, their role and position within the service, the philosophy and policies of the service, and a number of other factors. All of these impact on the service and on the enactment of its obligations. However, in the context of this Framework the assertion is that it is, in the final analysis, the decisions made by professionals that shape most directly the quality of the experience for children and families.

Making wise decisions about children's experiences is supported unquestionably by deep and broad knowledge in a range of areas.

Putting this knowledge into practice demands that professionals have complex skills and particular attitudes and sensitivities. These are acquired most comprehensively and substantially through obtaining a formal qualification in early childhood care and education. This knowledge is a platform or reference for understanding individual children and opening oneself up to the uniqueness and possibilities of each child. Unquestionably, provision of excellent children's services requires leadership from people with a breadth and depth of relevant knowledge and skills and appropriate attitudes. It is essential that a significant proportion of people working directly with young

children have formal qualifications. People working directly with young children who do not have formal qualifications must be supported and guided by people who do. Most importantly, everyone who calls themselves an early childhood professional must participate throughout their professional lives in a variety of experiences that increase knowledge and skills and assist them to reflect critically on their practice and to improve continuously. Continual reflection and growth is the essence of being a professional.

Desirable practice is underpinned by:

- thinking, questioning, reflection
 - discussion with others
 - spontaneity
 - openness to possibilities
 - looking to children for inspiration and guidance about the content of experiences
 - enlisting families, children and the community as partners
 - using the wisdom and skills of colleagues to inform practice
 - playful creative thinking
 - a culture of inquiry.

The term *professional* is used in this Framework for all adults working with children in children's services where practice reflects the Framework.

The professional observes openly, questions deeply, asks what is really going on, tests theories through practice, and encourages children to do the same.

Professionals are in a position of power themselves, and they control the power that parents and children have. In other words, they have a choice about the extent to which they will hand over power. Sharing power and empowering others is a characteristic of desirable healthy communities. If power is not shared, a true community of learners does not exist.

CORE CONCEPT ABOUT CURRICULUM:
Curriculum is the intentional provisions made by professionals to support children's learning and wellbeing.

It follows from the emphasis on the professional that the term *curriculum* in this document is used to focus on what professionals do more than on what children experience. The curriculum is everything professionals do to support children's well-being and learning, the intentional provisions and offerings they make in order to create possibilities and opportunities for children to engage with.

The conversion by children of these opportunities and possibilities into actual experiences and the meaning they make with them assumes a form that is sometimes expected and predictable, and often unexpected and unimagined.

The definition of *curriculum* is significant, in that it determines the focus of the Framework: attitudes, sensitivities, understandings and skills required of the professional. The emphasis significantly is on what the professional does for, with, and on behalf of children.

The term *curriculum* refers to all the provisions professionals make for the whole of the child's experience in the service. Provisions fit the various roles of professionals. These roles are the focus of the next part of this document, 'The Framework in Practice'. They include

- providing the physical environment, equipment and materials
- engaging directly in interactions with children
- facilitating children's engagement with other children

- structuring time and the ways in which opportunities are provided
- organising daily living experiences and routines
- communicating and relating to other adults in the children's service community, including colleagues and parents
- planning and providing special events or experiences.

The term *curriculum* is associated traditionally with statements about specific requirements for content or subject matter. The explicit aim in this document is that the content of children's experiences should relate to the context of the community, the service and the lives of children in the service. This aim and the reliance on professional judgment conflict with the common meaning of curriculum. The actual content of children's experiences cannot be prescribed apart from the context. Content can be just about

anything. An appropriate curriculum is a responsive and relevant collection of provisions. Content comes from serious engagement and openness to possibilities by the professional. The content is the medium for implementing the Framework.

Therefore, the Framework does not provide specific answers to the question: *What should happen tomorrow?* The Framework is premised on the answer to that question being:

It all depends. Making provisions for tomorrow requires you to reflect on your understanding of the past and present of the children and families you work with. It requires bringing to bear all of your own creativity, knowledge and skills and those of colleagues as well as the perspectives of parents and families of children in your service. You have to look at and listen to what is happening, really see and hear, and then use your professional judgment.

It is essential that a significant proportion of people working directly with young children have formal qualifications.

Children's learning in the years before school is often self-initiated, rather than occurring in response to formal instruction or adult initiation. That does not make it any less significant. Similarly the teaching by professionals that happens minute by minute as descriptions and explanations are given, demonstrations provided, questions invited, hypotheses raised, and suggestions made is just as much teaching as the type of instruction which takes place in more formal educational settings. Hence the curriculum in this Framework is a range of opportunities rather than prescribed requirements.

CORE CONCEPT ABOUT FRAMEWORKS: A framework both provides definition and supports uniqueness.

A curriculum *framework* is not the same thing as a curriculum. A framework provides a lens for viewing children and children's services, a way of making sense of what is happening and ensuring that what is happening makes sense. Another possible metaphor for a framework is that it is a sieve through which the professional "sifts" thinking as a means of reflecting critically on practice.

One useful way of thinking about a framework is to think about the frame for a building such as a house. Even a very minimal basic frame gives some definition: the location of the house and its overall size and shape, for example. It may indicate the number, shape and size of rooms, and their relation to one another. A more detailed frame provides evidence of the location of windows and doors, the likely position of plumbing, for example. However, even the most detailed frame does not give a full picture of what the house will look like when it is completed and occupied. This metaphor is apt in that the Framework provides some definition by detailing major values and concepts for practice in children's services. At the same time the Framework actively promotes diversity,

innovation and uniqueness, is not constraining, and provides plenty of "space" for inclusion of particular philosophies, emphases, and contexts.

As was stated at the beginning of this document:

The Framework is a foundation out of which the curriculum derives. The Framework is not what the professional does; rather it is a way of thinking about how and why.

This Framework does not promote homogeneity of practice. Rather it affirms that there are many different ways to enact the four major obligations in the Framework.

MAJOR OBLIGATIONS

The Major Obligations are the central focus of practice and provisions, that is, the key purposes of a children's service and therefore the prime responsibilities of professionals.

MAJOR OBLIGATION: TO PROMOTE AND SUPPORT RESPECTFUL LIFE-ENHANCING RELATIONSHIPS

The aim of children's services is to promote relationships that support children to:

- Feel a sense of belonging
- See themselves as constructive contributors to a community
- See themselves as valued, unique and powerful human beings
- Engage in relationships of caring and respect
- Appreciate the efficacy of communication, collaboration and working together as a means of generating new ideas, making progress, being creative and innovative, and solving problems.

To achieve these aims, these relationships are *life enhancing* – that is, constructive, expanding well-being and learning. *Life enhancing* contrasts with *life diminishing*.

The relationships within the service that are significant include those between:

- Children and other children
- Professionals and children
- Children and their families
- Professionals and parents/families
- Professionals
- Families and other families
- Managers/owners/sponsoring agencies and parents, professionals.

In addition, there are significant relationships that extend beyond the service itself. These include relationships between:

- Professionals and colleagues in other services and in related disciplines
- The service and relevant community agencies and organisations
- Children and the broader community
- The service as an institution and the broader geographic and professional communities.

It is through listening to, watching, speaking with, working and playing with, arguing and debating with others that solutions to problems are found, new discoveries made, and creative outcomes achieved. Promoting relationships is also promoting a sense of community, where each person has rights and responsibilities.

Babies are born predisposed to form relationships. Children enjoy being with other children, thinking together, working together, solving problems, and coming up with creative ideas and fresh approaches. Children are wonderful teachers of themselves and other children.

Promoting relationships does not interfere with children developing autonomy and containment, and the ability to enjoy solitude. Both independence and interdependence are valued in both adults and children. Throughout life the self is defined dynamically in relation to others. It is through relationships and interactions that human beings learn who they are and to value themselves.

The child who can be a comfortable and effective group member, who is good at forming and maintaining relationships, is also a child who is self contained and comfortable with him or herself.

An emphasis on relationships does not carry with it a vision of a conflict-free community. Conflict is inevitable wherever people engage in meaningful relationships. Conflict and tension brought about by different perspectives can be positive. If a constructive means of resolving conflict can be found, this can lead to progress and innovation.

Encouraging relationships requires encouraging open communication. The professional listens to children, parents and colleagues, and encourages others, particularly children, to do the same. In part this leads to talking with children continually about what is happening, what it means to them, how they think things could be better, and what concerns them.

Relationships in the children's service exist to promote the wellbeing of the child. Therefore, this Framework represents, rather than a traditional child-centred approach to children's services, a child-in-the-context-of-relationships centred approach. It also acknowledges that there are significant relationships on behalf of the child, ones that do not directly involve the child as a player, that impact significantly on the childhood provided to the child.

MAJOR OBLIGATION: TO PRACTISE IN WAYS THAT ACKNOWLEDGE THE CHILD AS CAPABLE AND RESOURCEFUL

The picture of the child in this Framework is one of strength, power, rights, competence, complexity, and possibility.

The child, no matter how young, is a human being with many skills and abilities, a thinking, feeling person who is a powerful and active contributor to his or her own learning. Children, along with the people around them, build their own experience, knowledge and understanding.

Children have many more theories, thoughts and ideas than adults teach them. Adults need to listen and watch carefully to understand children's experience and meaning.

Most children have many positive qualities in greater abundance than many adults: openness to the world around them, willingness to take risks, perseverance, a ready capacity for wonder, and the ability to immerse themselves totally in an experience and be fully in the moment. A sensitive and wise professional acknowledges these as genuine strengths and builds on them.

Young children have the right to have their potential supported. Young children are held back more by adults insensitivity and inability to "read" what they are telling them and to see their strengths than they are by their own limitations. Children, even very young children, are often more competent, more intelligent, more capable than they are perceived or understood to be.

The professional's picture of the child shapes practice, and it is important for professionals to understand the links between image and practice.

Children's services are built around profound respect for the child as a human being in the present, a thinking, communicating, acting, creating, feeling person. Working well with young children requires belief in their ability and competence. This respect and belief in children, when communicated in ways that they can "read", forms the basis for their identity and self-esteem.

A picture of oneself as an active contributor and initiator is an essential dimension of being a citizen in a learning community. Children's pre-disposition to see themselves as powerful in their own learning, if nurtured, contributes to lifelong competence.

Supportive provisions by professionals start with recognition of and responding to a child's strengths. A respectful stance that acknowledges that children are worth listening to and considering seriously is the foundation of this Framework. When a professional sees children as capable and resourceful it means that he or she is able to see the world through the child's eyes, to take their perspective in order to discover the meaning the child has made rather than imposing their own meaning, thereby distorting it. Finding deeper meaning in children's behaviour requires that the professional truly attends: is reflective, takes time to think about the child's perspective, looks and listens for what is really happening, and resists obvious or superficial explanations and quick judgments.

Acknowledging children as capable and resourceful may require a re-orientation. Often descriptions of children are little more than comparisons with mature competent adults. And of course that comparison means that children are seen as "in deficit", and may be described in an unfavourable way in terms of their limitations. When the professional's attention is on deficits or what a child lacks, the image shifts away from the child as capable and resourceful. The practice that follows is likely to focus on giving the child what he or she is lacking. This denies the reality of the

child as contributing positively to his or her own personal experience.

Some people may have particular difficulty seeing children with a disability as capable and resourceful. Sometimes the disability actually masks ability. For example, lack of clear speech can result in a child's insights and understandings being rendered inaccessible to others. Often a disability results in a child being exceptionally capable and resourceful in other areas. Professionals go beyond seeing only the disability to seeing strengths, to seeing a child with the same rights and desires for joy in life as other children.

This Framework represents, rather than a traditional child-centred approach to children's services, a child-in-the-context-of-relationships centred approach.

This Framework requires that professionals look at all children as people with a certain collection of characteristics who are learning, becoming, developing, and adding new knowledge, skills and understandings all the time. This perspective is especially important with children with disabilities, where it is easy to put an “immovable ceiling” on expectations of capabilities, thereby causing professionals to miss out on seeing behaviour that

exceeds expectations. Lack of acknowledgment and support for children’s abilities then can create a self-fulfilling prophecy. Children mostly live up to or down to the expectations of the adults around them.

Toddlers are a good age group to illustrate the power of perspectives on the child. Toddlers are commonly described in some or all of the ways listed below.

Toddlers:

- Are dependent
- Are clumsy
- Have no idea of what is safe
- Cannot share
- Cannot wait for things
- Cannot take turns
- Do not sit still
- Cannot keep their hands off things
- Have short attention spans
- Cannot talk well
- Have temper tantrums
- Have mood swings
- Have no self control
- Are defiant and unco-operative
- Are cute.

An orientation to focus on the strengths and capabilities of toddlers results in a different description:

Toddlers:

- Are energetic explorers, tireless experimenters, dedicated scientists
- Are passionate about finding out how things work
- Understand much of what they hear
- Have good non-verbal communication skills
- Have “exploding” verbal communication skills and use language creatively
- Are learning what it means to be a human being in relationship with other human beings
- Have a sense of wonder and curiosity about the world
- Are constantly developing new skills
- Are moving from dependence to independence
- Are figuring out how to control their behaviour and look after themselves, others, and the world around them
- Are eager to learn from every experience and interaction they have
- Are learning more and at a faster rate than any adult
- Are competent and capable human beings worthy of our admiration.

The perspective adopted is profoundly important in shaping the provisions made by the professional, the nature of the relationships engaged in and the power handed over.

Viewing children as capable and resourceful requires recognition that there are many different ways to demonstrate capabilities and resourcefulness. Some children do it socially and interpersonally, that is they are very good at interacting and communicating with others. Some children are very well co-ordinated physically, very skilled at using their bodies.

Some children are verbally very expressive. Some children show great ability with thinking and problem solving. Some children are excellent drawers and painters. One of the challenges is to identify the strengths of each child and nurture them.

The child comes into the world pre-disposed to form relationships and ready to learn. The role of significant adults is to preserve, protect, nurture and support those predispositions. This requires a great deal of trust as well as skill on the part of the professional — trust in the child's ability to know what they need to know and do. At the same time it does not mean that the professional stands back passively. Wise and sensitive professionals play a vital role in maintaining and strengthening children's capabilities and resourcefulness.

The picture of the child as capable and resourceful is tied closely to the idea of the child as a complete human being, childhood as a meaningful period in a human being's life, not a kind of apprenticeship for adulthood. Each segment of life brings with it certain characteristics, limitations, and special challenges, and the relationships, experiences, environments, and opportunities offered to a child at

any time are responsive to the child as he or she is now. It is through that matching that children are prepared best for their future lives.

MAJOR OBLIGATION: TO STRIVE FOR MEANING AND CONNECTIONS

Children learn best when they engage deeply and in an unhurried way in authentic experiences that reflect their interests and their lives.

The term *connections* refers to some of the many processes, both mental and tangible, of gaining understanding and making meaning, processes through which a child explores, experiments, combines, takes apart, reflects, imagines, hypothesises and considers possibilities in order to make sense of the world. Many of the complex processes whereby children (and adults for that matter) make sense of their world are captured in the concept of *making connections*. Competence is in large part about making links and connections. These connections sometimes happen when the child works alone, but more often come about through interactions and relationships.

One kind of connection that needs to have prominence in the experience of children who spend long hours in a children's service is the child's connection to the community. Getting children out into the community and bringing the community into the service in ways that are appropriate for children nurtures a sense of comfort, familiarity, belonging and connection.

Connecting children to their past and likely future is also part of supporting children to make meaning in the present.

Connection applies also to the practice of being a children's services professional. Excellent provision occurs when the professional is able to make

Children, even very young children, are often more competent, more intelligent, more capable than they are perceived or understood to be.

connections: for example, linking past experience with the present situation, combining various areas of knowledge and expertise and bring them to bear on the situation, bringing together the strengths, interests and rights of each child into a coherent provision for a number of children.

Striving for meaning applies at many levels. Meaning is made or constructed through engagement with the physical world, interactions with others, and reflection. While no one can determine or even know fully the meaning another person makes, professionals in children's services can be sensitive interpreters who practise in ways that optimise the possibilities for children to make desirable meanings.

Making meaning is discussed briefly in three broad areas: interactions and relationships, opportunities and possibilities, and environments.

Interactions and relationships

At its most general level, contributing to children's making meaning is about genuine responsiveness, being open to their meaning. It is about providing an individualised experience to each child, rather than a generic, one-size-fits-all experience.

It means respecting children as human beings who, when it comes to fundamental human feelings, are more like adults than they are different from adults. It is also about engaging genuinely with children, avoiding treating them as somewhat less than human by seeing their trials, hurts, disappointments, struggles and sadnesses as trivial or humourous. This also implies avoiding "cute" and disrespectful images of children in the physical environment, any depictions of them that are largely for the amusement of adults.

Striving for meaning and connections means looking beyond behaviour itself and reflecting on the messages or meanings behind the behaviour.

In interactions with children, parents and colleagues making meaning is about communicating respectfully and honestly, reflecting

real concerns and true feelings. It is also about being open to alternative perspectives. Professionals who are striving for meaning and connections take seriously the expectations of parents, their concerns about their child's future and their beliefs about the best way to prepare their child for the future. These professionals engage with the expectations and demands of people and organisations outside the children's services field, rather than ignoring them or staying in the comfort zone of assumed superiority of judgment. In other words, community expectations form part of the context for practice, and professionals both take them into account respectfully and strive to influence them.

Opportunities and possibilities

Making meaning is also about the relevance of the opportunities and possibilities offered to children. Meaning is enhanced when new

experiences build on others that the child has had in the past or is having in the present. Similarly meaning is enhanced when experiences in a children's service connect with those outside the children's service. This does not mean that the experience in the children's service mimics or replicates experiences elsewhere, but rather that it takes them into account, refers to them, and builds on them. Taking this notion seriously challenges the professional, in that what is relevant and of interest to children and what parents may suggest will not always match what professionals see as appropriate or ideologically sound. However, if the child's experience in the children's service is too discrepant with and totally unlinked to the child's world outside the service, then it may be for the child like a day in Disneyland: very pleasant, but a day out from reality. If the expectation is that children will learn "lessons for life" in the children's service, then links are essential.

Acknowledging the power of linkages does not imply staying with the familiar. It does not mean

that no totally novel opportunities and possibilities are offered in the children's service. The community that is the children's service can expand children's horizons, introduce as yet not experienced opportunities and possibilities. A range of opportunities and possibilities respects the child's right to choose among those that are totally comfortable and familiar and others that are challenging, novel, and unfamiliar.

Making meaning does not mean being prosaic, unimaginative, pedestrian, or literal. Playfulness, fantasy, fun, humour, silliness and occasionally even the ridiculous or absurd have a place in children's services. Children's services should be places of laughter and joy.

Making meaning is about the professional asking the question in making provisions for children's experience: What is worth doing? What is worth having? What is worth celebrating?

Competence is in large part about making links and connections.

The physical environment

In this Framework the environment is seen as a teacher, as an active contributor, not a backdrop, to the experiences of children. Children are assisted to make constructive meaning of their experiences when there is attention to the organisation and aesthetics of the environment. The setting provides opportunities and possibilities, but it is certainly not a case of the more the better. A constant barrage of colour, noise and activity interferes with making meaning.

Provision for moments of peace and quiet, harmony, and comfort support making meaning. The children's service is a place where children can be exposed to the rich range of beautiful things in the world — in nature, music, language, dance, story, poetry, painting, sculpture, and all the visual arts, craft of many kinds.

Wherever possible and appropriate, "real" objects rather than imitations provide children opportunities to engage and make connections

with the world around them. Pictures and visual displays both reflect and provoke children's interests and acknowledge children as respected members of the children's services community.

The physical environment itself affords opportunities to link different dimensions of the children's and families' worlds. It can acknowledge and incorporate the surrounding environment, the community, the cultures, and the events that are impacting on children.

Setting up an environment that gives children choices about what they do is acknowledging that they are capable and resourceful and also empowers them to make meaning by choosing what is meaningful to them. If children are genuinely engaged then it can be assumed that there is meaning. Children's concentration is a good guide to interest, but the professional has to make the judgement about the value of the experience.

MAJOR OBLIGATION: TO HONOUR DIVERSITY

Children's services, as communities that mirror a desirable larger community, are composed of people who are diverse in many ways. Diversity attributable to cultural and linguistic background perhaps comes to mind first when the term *diversity* is used. However, gender, lifestyle, socio-economic status, family composition, abilities, and personal beliefs and values among professionals and families using the service are all forms of diversity that impact daily on children's services. In fact, some of the most complex tensions that exist within children's services have to do with lifestyle and class differences among professionals and families.

In addition there is individuality, the uniqueness of each human being — each child, each parent, each family, each professional, each service, each community, each encounter.

Playfulness, fantasy, fun, humour, silliness and occasionally even the ridiculous or absurd have a place in children's services.

Diversity also refers to the different perspectives that come together to create a community of learners. There are many ways of knowing about children, and the richest picture is built when all these ways are recognised.

Competence itself embodies notions about diverse ways of solving problems, being clever in different ways.

The term *honouring diversity* is used deliberately, instead of the more frequently used term *celebrating diversity*. Diversity in its many manifestations in children's services often gives rise to struggles, conflicts, tensions, and differences in perspective that may at first seem impossible to resolve. Dealing with diversity in a constructive way often raises complex ethical and professional dilemmas. *Celebration* is an appropriate term for the many ways that children's services can acknowledge the richness that cultural and other differences can bring to the daily lives of people, for example, in food, music, art and craft, festivals

and holidays, clothing. Celebrations are an important part of the life of the larger community and the life of the children's services community. However, the concept of celebration does not encompass the serious questioning by professionals that is necessary to expose and examine biases, prejudice, ethnocentrism, misunderstanding, fear of difference, the hard struggle it sometimes is to truly incorporate diversity into individual and collective thinking and practice in children's services. Honouring begins with respect and moves to respect in action, in practice. Honouring diversity requires that difference rather than uniformity is not only expected, but also is seen as desirable.

Diversity, in its many manifestations, is sometimes enriching, sometimes threatening, and almost always challenging. Children deserve to be

supported to be comfortable with diversity, and to respond to it with openness and confidence. Children who stand out because of their difference deserve respect and acceptance. There are in children's services a number of children who challenge professionals and disrupt other children. These children are usually loosely labeled as "difficult", "challenging", or "behaviour problems". It is important for professionals working in children's services to maintain a healthy awareness of the vast diversity in behaviours that lie within the category of "normal" and to resist the temptation to label children.

In the contemporary Australian context, it is particularly important to give careful consideration to issues of cultural, linguistic and religious diversity as they impact on children's services. Many Australians live currently in culturally diverse communities, and all Australians not only live in a culturally diverse society but are also exposed to diversity and portrayals of other cultures in the media. As children today grow up, they are increasingly likely to live with, work with, be friends, colleagues, work mates, and family members with people from cultures other than their own. Those children who do not currently live in culturally diverse communities need especially to have experiences that familiarise them with similarities and differences and support them to react with interest and comfort rather than fear and discomfort when they are exposed to the multicultural nature of Australian society.

It is imperative that all Australian children are assisted to be comfortable with difference, to avoid developing biases and prejudices, to appreciate the fundamental commonalities and similarities that lie behind many differences, and to understand truly the notion of unity through diversity. The children's services community as a just and equitable community supports children to hold the vision for the larger community and gives them strategies for bringing that about.

Children and families from groups that are not afforded power or sometimes even acceptance in the larger community can find in a children's service a place where they can be powerful and respected, a place where they can be themselves, and where they along with others can be effective advocates for democracy, justice and equity.

Often people from the dominant culture are less aware of their own culture than those from cultural groups lacking in power, who are constantly confronted with difference.

Honouring diversity requires people to look at themselves and examine the ideas, customs, and beliefs that shape their own existence. They can eventually appreciate that their way of doing things represents *only one way, not the only way or the right way*. While they may hold their beliefs very strongly, they accept the fact that others believe with equal conviction in the "rightness" of their beliefs.

Professionals and other children may disadvantage children and families who are not as familiar as they are with the ways of the dominant culture. Most importantly, they may be unaware that their own ignorance of the language and culture of these children and families and their inability to recognise the richness that these people bring to the service is a major contributor to the disadvantage.

Culture and language are part of identity. Children will suffer if their culture and language are ignored or demeaned, or dismissed as unworthy.

The aim is that the children's service is a place where concepts of democracy, equity and social justice are not only talked about but more importantly are enacted in practice.

Addressing diversity

There is a lot of misunderstanding about the meaning of culture and the appropriateness of focusing on culture in children's services. Culture is dynamic and evolving, not static, and definitions of culture are varied. Culture as it is lived is inextricably intertwined with individual and family lifestyles, preferences and tastes, making it difficult to determine what is culturally determined and what is not. Talking about particular cultures or attempting to represent them in some way carries with it the risk of stereotyping, being trite, focusing on the obvious, or even misrepresentation.

Honouring diversity is not mainly about including tangible symbols of cultures, although they are important. Much more importantly, honouring diversity is about relationships, sharing and openness. The material manifestations of diversity are meaningless unless they are authentic symbols of deeper and more fundamental respect for difference and acknowledgment of commonalities among human beings.

In general it is not appropriate to "do cultures" in children's services, that is, to single out a particular culture for attention at a specific time outside the normal context of what goes on. Often "doing cultures" translates into a superficial collection of materials and experiences that do not reflect the lives and interests of the people using the service or in the local community. These can in fact reinforce stereotypes and bias rather than diminish them, and separating out a particular culture for attention can re-inforce the idea of it sitting apart from the normal everyday lives of everyone. What is more appropriate is to integrate cultural diversity into every aspect of the children's experience: music, art, language, home corner equipment, books and stories, pictures, food, for example.

Sensitive practice requires acceptance of individual differences in children and a commitment to support the emerging self of each child.

There is tremendous diversity within cultures. The fact that people typically have much more difficulty talking about the distinct features of their own culture than those of cultures other than their own is in part due to their greater awareness of diversity and differences that exist among groups and individuals within their own cultural group. What is a more appropriate aim is to incorporate relevant manifestations of the various ways people live their lives in the near and the broader community into the experience of children and families in the children's service. Cultural appropriateness is achieved through responsiveness, openness to the lives of the families in the service and in the community.

All professionals take responsibility for honouring diversity in a variety of ways, rather than delegating responsibility to people from "other" cultures in the service.

True openness to and respect for diverse perspectives and views, willingness to take the perspective of the other, is an essential characteristic of a children's services professional. However, honouring diversity does not mean condoning or adopting practices or offering experiences uncritically and non-reflectively simply because they are perceived to be culturally based. Just as there may be a tendency for some professionals to be ethnocentric and not acknowledge that many, in fact most, of the practices in a children's service are based on Western Anglo culture, other well-meaning professionals may tend toward the opposite. They may have a tendency to be uncritically accepting of child rearing practices or even experiences that are identified as coming from a particular culture. Honouring diversity means that any request is considered thoughtfully and that there is genuine openness to its possibility. Some of the most demanding professional dilemmas faced by children's services professionals have to do with decisions about "bottom lines" when it comes to practice.

Children with disabilities or high support needs

Children with disabilities or high support needs are singled out minimally in this Framework for special treatment and attention. This mirrors the position taken about what should happen to them in practice. A children's service can be a place where a child as a child is the focus rather than the disability or condition.

Children may not see themselves as having a disability until someone tells them. They may simply see that they are different. In a context where differences are acknowledged, accepted, and appreciated, the child may simply see himself or herself as being "one kind of different".

Differences are interesting to children, and they notice them at a surprisingly early age. Fear, discomfort and shame associated with differences however, is usually learned from people around the child who display those feelings.

Honouring diversity is closely *aligned to inclusion* in its truest sense. Inclusion is a term used often when a child with a disability comes to a children's service. Inclusion in its best sense is not about altering the provisions for other children to suit a child with a disability so that that child has a version of what the other children are offered. True inclusion is something much more holistic and requires that the professional make provisions that allow each child, including a child with a disability, to use the provision if they wish in ways that are engaging, interesting, and constructive. Inclusion means thinking always about each child and all the children in a group and what will match and extend their abilities, strengths, and interests.

Children with disabilities can be included fully in the ordinary daily experience of the service. The objective is the same for all children: to support

and extend strengths and interests. Like other children, children with disabilities want to be contributing members of the community. Their full inclusion in the service may require the professional to re-think provisions, but the efforts are worth it not only for the child with the disability but for the whole children's service community.

Their full inclusion in the service may be part of an individualised Family Service Plan. This Plan is established collaboratively with the service, other professionals, and the family, with family priorities leading the process.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families

The lives and well-being of all members of the Australian community, including young children, are affected by the history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, their present circumstances, and the need to

acknowledge their situation and work together to move forward constructively.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have experienced a great deal of hurt and significant disadvantage. There is tremendous strength within that community, strength that has enabled it to survive to the present.

It is essential that every children's service, as a microcosm of a desirable community, acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage that all Australians share and contributes to reconciliation. Doing this means rejecting de-contextualised gestures that are tokenistic and represent no more than dabbling in the stereotypes of traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. These gestures often contribute to misunderstanding and prejudice rather than diminishing them. Rather racism at

The aim is that the children's service is a place where concepts of democracy, equity and social justice are not only talked about but more importantly are enacted in practice.

both institutional and individual levels, so damaging the all members of the community, is actively countered.

An additional significant implication of the Framework is that where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are present in a service, particular efforts are made in collaboration with families and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to support those children to identify with and be proud of their cultural background.

Honouring diversity is a fundamental concern in every children's service, regardless of the composition of the children's service community. In other words, it is not something that is an issue only if people from diverse cultures are represented in the service, it is not something that is "tacked on" or inserted artificially into the children's experience. It is not a set of activities and concerns that focus on the child or family who is "different" in some way. Rather, it is a state of heart and mind, a fundamental dimension of every aspect of the operation of all children's services.

It makes no sense for professionals in children's services to assert that "there is not enough time to do multiculturalism, cultural diversity or tolerance of difference".

A children's service can be a place where a child as a child is the focus rather than the disability or condition.

Honouring diversity is a fundamental concern in every children's service

Diversity attributable to cultural, religious or language background, or disability is not a problem to be solved, or an undesirable complexity. Rather it brings richness to the children's service and the lives of all the people within it.

Sometimes people assert that children do not want to be different. That may be true in a context where everyone else appears to be the same. A desirable community is one where being different is valued, because everyone knows that everyone is different from everyone else in some ways, because everyone understand that each person is different from everyone else in some ways, different from some in some ways, and like everyone else in many ways. True inclusion means that differences are so accepted that they are "no big deal". This is quite different to a perspective that says "we are all the same", a denial of difference. Rather, the assertion is the opposite: "We are all different". At the same time fundamental similarities that make everyone human are acknowledged.

When diversity is truly honoured, ethnicity and various levels of ability within the group become less visible. They are there, but they are not made a big fuss of. People feel safe to be their best unique selves where difference is accepted.

ESSENTIAL QUALITIES FOR PROFESSIONALS

The professional brings to practice four fundamental essential personal qualities. These qualities, closely related to each other, can be supported and enhanced by education and through experience, but the potential for these qualities must reside within the person. These essential qualities are among those that the professional enacts in practice and also actively nurtures in young children.

EMPATHY

Empathy is the ability to see things from the perspective of others. In relation to children, it requires refraining from prejudging what they need, what they should be doing, and opening up to what they are indicating about interests and needs. It is appreciation of the fact that sharing different perspectives results in a richness of understanding.

RESPECT

Respect entails belief in the worth of all human beings and in the validity of alternative perspectives, and acting on those beliefs. This requires the ability to listen to others, openness to new possibilities and perspectives, and the courage to act.

PERSEVERANCE AND RESILLIANCE

Perseverance or tenacity is about commitment and conviction that enable the professional to continue on in the face of obstacles, adversity and apparent lack of progress and to encourage others to do so. Of course, an equally important quality is perceptiveness about when to change course or compromise, and indeed judgment about when to give up.

Resilience is a disposition to remain strong and positive in oppressive and difficult situations in the belief that they can be resolved in a positive way. Resilience in children's services embodies optimism, a belief in the positive potential of human beings, a belief that positive change is possible.

PASSION FOR LEARNING THAT LEADS TO GROWTH

Working with young children and their families is demanding intellectually when it is done well. Professionals working in children's services must have a strong drive to know more, regardless of experience or current knowledge and skills. In other words, they must see themselves as lifelong learners.

Openness to new perspectives and ones that are different to their own is important, and that must be balanced with conviction about beliefs.

New learning leads to growth, which often leads to change. The courage to embrace complexity, to take reasonable risks and to change is essential.

The Framework is built not around absolutes but around complementary notions that co-exist in constructive productive tension. These tensions are testimony to the dynamic complexity of professional practice in children's services. Some of these tensions include:

- difference...sameness
- subjectivity ...objectivity
- power...handing over of power
- community responsibility for children...family responsibility for children
- present orientation...future orientation
- child at the centre...relationships at the centre
- similarity among services...uniqueness of services
- similarity among children...uniqueness of children
- universals...relativities
- predictability...flexibility
- stability...change
- preparation and planning...spontaneity
- independence...interdependence
- conviction...openness
- child focus...family focus
- conflict... consensus
- thinking...feeling.

THE FRAMEWORK

CORE CONCEPTS

ABOUT CHILDREN'S SERVICES: CHILDREN'S SERVICES ARE COMMUNITIES OF LEARNERS THAT EXIST IN THE INTEREST OF CHILDREN'S WELL-BEING AND LEARNING.

ABOUT THE ROLE OF PROFESSIONALS: THE DECISIONS, JUDGMENTS AND CHOICES MADE BY PROFESSIONALS ARE THE MAJOR CONTRIBUTORS TO CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCE .

ABOUT CURRICULUM: CURRICULUM IS THE INTENTIONAL PROVISIONS MADE BY PROFESSIONALS TO SUPPORT CHILDREN'S LEARNING AND WELL-BEING.

ABOUT FRAMEWORKS: A FRAMEWORK BOTH PROVIDES DEFINITION AND SUPPORTS UNIQUENESS.

MAJOR OBLIGATIONS

TO PROMOTE AND SUPPORT RESPECTFUL LIFE-ENHANCING RELATIONSHIPS

TO PRACTISE IN WAYS THAT ACKNOWLEDGE THE CHILD AS CAPABLE AND RESOURCEFUL

TO STRIVE FOR MEANING AND CONNECTIONS

TO HONOUR DIVERSITY

ESSENTIAL QUALITIES FOR PROFESSIONALS

EMPATHY

RESPECT

PERSEVERANCE AND RESILLIANCE

PASSION FOR LEARNING THAT LEADS TO GROWTH

QUESTIONS AND ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION AND DISCUSSION

1. How different is this Framework from the way you and your service operate currently?
2. Talk about notions of a desirable community and how that fits with values and ways of working in a children's service.
3. What are the points of greatest similarity between the Framework and your practice? In which areas are the two most discrepant?
4. How do the various statements in the Framework fit together in practice? Give some examples.
5. Discuss actual examples of your own practice that you view as working well and match them with the Framework. Where do they fit?
6. What are the advantages and disadvantages of having a prescribed curriculum to follow?
7. What are the major categories of diversity that exist in your service? How does your practice and your environment reflect this diversity?
8. Provide some examples of children surprising you with their competence.
9. Discuss each major obligation. Do you agree? Why or why not? What is left out?

THE FRAMEWORK IN PRACTICE

THE PROFESSIONAL

Content	Page No.
Characteristics.....	37
Personal Qualities that Influence Practice.....	38
Respectful Interactions.....	40
Additional Roles.....	45
Questions and Issues for Consideration and Discussion.....	47



THE PROFESSIONAL

The Framework puts the actions of the professional at the centre of desirable practice, which means that the entire document is about the professional. This chapter will highlight some qualities of the professional and some of the roles played.

CHARACTERISTICS

A commitment to excellence

Striving for excellence requires a commitment to commonly shared professional standards of practice. Within the context of this Framework, this requires a commitment to meeting the Major Obligations.

Empowered and empowering

There is no question that the professional is in a position of power in a children's service. To deny that power is to abrogate responsibility. The decision for the professional is about how to use that power, and indeed how much power to share. What is required is that professionals recognise their power and use it on behalf of children, families and colleagues.

Children can only be capable and resourceful when they are actively encouraged and supported to be so. The effective professional sometimes leads children, sometimes follows, and sometimes is simply a participant in their experience, but always displays wisdom about which role is appropriate. Professionals set the stage and construct opportunities for children to think, act and create.

Parents and families will operate in partnership only if they are encouraged to do so. Sharing power and empowering parents and other family members in the service means encouraging shared decision making about the child's experience, engaging in true partnership.

When the professional is in a position of authority and leadership in the service, an additional decision is about the extent to which power is shared among colleagues. Sharing power with colleagues involves encouraging and valuing multiple perspectives on children, identifying strengths and supporting people to use their strengths for the common good of the community.

Professionals who enable children and parents, as well as colleagues, to be powerful partners in the process of constructing the child's experience in a children's service create a genuine learning community.

Innovation and diversity

A children's service where this Framework is implemented empowers professionals to be their "real best selves" and to bring their unique strengths to bear on their practice. It also encourages diversity, a collection of professionals using different though complementary strengths and perspectives. In other words, the attitude toward professionals mirrors the approach professionals adopt with children and families. Professionals will vary in which age group they prefer to work with, and indeed which one they are most effective in working with. They will have different life interests and talents, which they can bring to their work. Wherever possible, the children's service as an organisation should help professionals identify what they enjoy and are good at, and support them to use those strengths and interests to benefit the service. Professionals are empowered to have sufficient confidence and self-knowledge to use their talents and strengths, which may include personal qualities, hobbies and interests as well as professional expertise.

The professional needs to be confident and open to change and new ideas at the same time. In this Framework the professional is also a fellow learner working collaboratively with children, colleagues, and parents.

Professional relationships

The professional's relationships with colleagues, children and parents embody warmth and caring. However, a professional relationship is different to a friendship. Although friendships and professional relationships in children's services share some characteristics, understanding the distinction is important. Friendships are based usually on similar or complementary interests and styles, have an element of personal liking or attraction, are mutual, exist at varying levels of intensity and if they are close have few limits. Professional relationships exist equally with all children and all parents in the service. They have boundaries, and exist on behalf of the wellbeing of the child in the service. When personal friendships exist outside the children's service with children and/or their families, professionals have to be vigilant that they are not showing favouritism and are not perceived to be doing so.

Recognising limits

Operating as a professional also means being aware of the limits of roles and abilities. If they feel safe and comfortable with the relationship, parents will often approach children's service professionals about concerns or problems that they are having. These problems may be in areas of their family life other than the experience of the child in the service. For example, they may want to talk about marital problems, health issues, or concerns about another member of the family or themselves. Practising as a professional involves knowing when to refer children or families to other professionals for assistance and support that the children's service cannot provide. Professionals know about other resources, and ideally have links with other organisations in order to assist families to access them.

A professional relationship is different to a friendship.

PERSONAL QUALITIES THAT INFLUENCE PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

The children's services professional brings to practice essential personal qualities. These qualities can be enhanced by education, through experience and through working in a learning culture characterised by reflection, ongoing evaluation, openness to change, openness to diversity, and a focus on continuous improvement. Some of the qualities that follow are part of the actual Framework.

Empathy

The professional working with other people's young children has the capacity to see things from the perspective of others, to walk in their shoes. There are so many occasions when children test the professional's competence by doing such things as pushing the limits, being unco-operative, being disruptive, interfering with other children, hurting others, or putting themselves at risk. In order to respond in a helpful and constructive way professionals first try to understand the situation from the child's point of view.

There are inevitably times when parents disagree with professionals, appear to be insensitive to their child, appear to have inappropriate priorities for their child's experience, appear to have unreasonable expectations for the child and/or for the service, make requests that are unreasonable and cannot be met, seem to see their child in a negative way, are unco-operative, appear to have other priorities than their child, are critical, and do not meet commitments. Similarly, colleagues at times may disagree, not take their share of responsibility, be critical, or dig their heels in and refuse to change. To find a constructive way through these situations, professionals must first try to understand the situation from the point of

view of the other person, act in a respectful way, and be firm and clear.

Empathy prevents the professional from pre-judging what is best or “right”, and encourages collaboration with colleagues, parents and children. Conflicts are not eliminated, but they are more likely to be resolved constructively when there is greater appreciation of the views of others.

Respect

Respect is believing deeply that all people deserve to be treated with dignity, listened to, and have their views considered. Respect is not the same as liking or agreeing with or even feeling comfortable with someone or something.

It has been said that respect is not a feeling but an action, and putting respect into action in children's services, especially in adult relationships, is a significant professional challenge.

An optimistic outlook and perseverance

Optimism is not meant to suggest that professionals working in children's services should be smiling, happy ‘Pollyannas’ who always look on the bright side. Optimism refers to something much deeper, which fuels perseverance in the face of adversity, which helps a frustrated professional to persist with a difficult demanding situation with a child, parent, or colleague.

Most importantly, optimism and a positive outlook apply to perspectives about children. Working within this Framework is incompatible with a belief that children are fundamentally selfish or “naughty”, and that what they need is firm limits imposed by people more powerful than they are and threats of dire repercussions if they violate those limits.

Perseverance alludes to the deep commitment that professionals bring to their practice.

Thoughtfulness

All professional practice is based on knowledge. That knowledge ranges from the general, such as knowledge about contemporary Australian culture or child development, to local knowledge of a particular community, through to particular knowledge about the families and children who participate in the service. Using the totality of this knowledge as a base, professionals make thoughtful provisions for children, reflect on their own experience, and evaluate constructively. Professionals observe, openly, question deeply, test theories through practice and continually modify the knowledge that underpins their practice.

Trust

Children's services professionals trust themselves, colleagues, parents, and most importantly, children.

In order to work in ways that are compatible with this Framework, the professional trusts his or her ability to cope effectively with almost any situation that arises. Trust leads to sufficient courage to take reasonable risks and meet challenges, the resilience to not be devastated by failure and to bounce back when things do not go well. Trust in self allows the professional to deal with any situation, any expression of strong feeling, and any behaviour from a child.

Professionals trust in their creativity, knowledge and judgements in order to be a creative constructive supporter of children rather than a non-reflective conformer to formulae or the way things have always been done. Professionals have confidence in their own practice in order to expose it to the scrutiny of colleagues and parents.

The professional trusts children to know what they need to be doing, trusts their competence, and believes strongly in their drive to actualise their positive potential. Trust in this sense brings about an optimistic perspective on children. Trust in children and themselves is an essential pre-

requisite for the professional to be able to share power and control.

The professional trusts colleagues and family members, which allows openness to their ideas, reactions, and criticism. That is, to support a culture of reflection, constructive critique and openness, the professional trusts that others working in that culture will also be constructive and ultimately supportive and affirming.

The professional trusts that parents have their children's well-being at heart, and that mostly they are doing the best that they can to rear their children, given their circumstances, their understanding, and the competing priorities in their lives. The professional acknowledges that family members enrich and expand their own image of the child because the family's knowledge of the child is developed over time and in a variety of contexts. Mutual trust between the professional and the family is fundamental to a collaborative relationship.

There is trust and confidence in the entire children's service community, trust that allows the service to be creative and even unorthodox.

RESPECTFUL INTERACTIONS

This Framework is premised on the power of interactions. The professional's own interactions are pivotal. Many of the features of interactions that support constructive relationships are the same whether the interactions are with other adults or children. Given that modelling is a very powerful way for children to learn, by interacting with children, families, and colleagues in a respectful way, the professional is setting a tone for the entire community and is helping children to learn constructive ways of interacting. Respectful

interpersonal interactions are supported when professionals are guided by the following:

- Being available, accessible and approachable so that if someone has something to say, they feel as though they can.
- Giving complete attention when communicating, focusing eyes, body and mind.
- Giving space and time to reply in communication.
- Acknowledging and responding to different forms of communication: verbal, sign language, gestures, written, behaviour, facial expressions, creative endeavours, and play.
- Engaging in respectful interactions which are characterised by using the person's name, making eye contact (if culturally appropriate), physically moving down to their level, and using gentle physical touch and non judgmental voice tones.
- Acknowledging, validating, and responding to feelings, whether expressed or unexpressed.

Respect is believing deeply that all people deserve to be treated with dignity, listened to, and have their views considered.

It is important for professionals to recognise that expectations of communication are likely to be different in different contexts and settings. Awareness of the different expectations that children especially are likely to live with in the other arenas of their lives will help professionals try to find some common ground to minimise major inconsistencies in the child's experience.

Co-operative behaviour is often regarded as a hallmark of effective interactions and is a goal that parents and professionals often set for children. Co-operating with others is challenging, as it requires seeing other people's points of view, compromising one's own position and collaborating to achieve something. Children under school age are likely to find this difficult at times.

The focus in a children's service is children's learning, development, and well being. Therefore at the heart of the professional's concerns are interactions with children. The two sections that follow focus on interactions with children in two overlapping important areas: supporting their learning and helping them guide their behaviour.

Interacting with children: Acknowledging the child as capable and resourceful

A view of the child as a capable and self-motivated learner and constructor of experience does not mean that the professional's role is simply to respond rather than initiate. The emphasis on relationships in this Framework means that the professional plays a key role, an active role, in supporting children's growth and learning.

The professional's involvement in children's learning ranges along a continuum from interested onlooker to active participant and collaborator, to suggesting new directions and possibilities, and even directing children at times. Sometimes the role of the professional is to make a direct contribution: add an idea, propose a solution, make a suggestion, add a piece of equipment and

sometimes give a direction. Again, this is done in a way that still allows the child to "own" the experience and the meaning rather than having it imposed. In most situations, except where there is an issue of safety, there is little value in the professional taking over. While he or she may be demonstrating skills and strategies for the child, the more powerful message to the child is that he or she lacks competence.

The younger the child, the more effort the professional makes to find the meaning of children's behaviour and communication, especially before children can communicate clearly with language.

The ways in which the professional is involved in children's learning arise out of knowledge and understanding about children. The professional needs to know when to step in and how, how to influence without taking over or distracting when a child is frustrated, struggling with a challenge or a problem, or about to give up. This applies to social challenges as well. When children are having a conflict or disagreement, the professional balances the value of children working things out themselves with getting involved.

The effective use of questioning is one important way to assist children to solve their own problems and generate their own ideas. Authentic open questions that invite the child to think, to consider, and to come up with fresh ideas encourage learning. Questions can be used to focus or remind a child of something he or she already knows but has momentarily forgotten. Artificial questions, the answers to which are obvious or known to the adult, have limited value. Artificial questions often come out of the professional's desire to be seen to be "teaching", and these questions often pertain to colours, shapes, numbers of things.

Authentic questioning comes directly from the main aim of a children's service being for children to be empowered as learners and problem solvers. Authentic questions arise typically out of seeing real dilemmas or problems that arise as a means of exploring possibilities and engaging in collaborative problem solving. In other words, the problem or dilemma becomes a medium for learning about collaboration and problem solving. The professional may hold back on contributing her or his ideas because of a genuine belief that children may come up with better solutions. Asking children "What if ...?" questions encourages them to think of new possibilities and consequences.

In the current community context of concern about children's futures in school and in the workforce, it may be tempting for professionals to be overly concerned about making everything into a "lesson", feeling as though every encounter has to involve some "teaching" in order to be worthwhile. Trusting children as learners means avoiding that pre-occupation and sometimes just enjoying the encounter and having fun.

Interacting with children: Helping them learn to guide their own behaviour

One of the most complex areas of learning for a

child in the early years is figuring out what is considered appropriate or acceptable behaviour. This would be challenging even if the child always received consistent messages, but every child is exposed to confusing messages about appropriate behaviour. An additional complication is that appropriate behaviour depends on the situation and the expectations and priorities of different adults.

Helping children learn to respect and take care of themselves, the world around them, and other people is what discipline or behavioural guidance boils down to. It is one of the most challenging roles for the professional.

Discipline is all the ways professionals teach children about what appropriate

behaviours are and how to control their behaviour themselves. It follows then that many of the ways that adults support children's learning in general can be used to help children learn discipline.

Some key understandings follow:

- It is expected that children will behave at times in ways that are not acceptable and make mistakes. This is part of childhood and of growing up, and is one of the main reasons that children need adults to support and guide them. Much behaviour that is labeled as inappropriate occurs simply because children are children and are acting their age.
- Conflict is inevitable in any group of people where meaningful interactions take place. Conflict is not always undesirable; if resolved constructively it can lead to growth and positive outcomes.
- Setting and enforcing limits and encouraging desirable behaviour are approached with firmness as well as empathy, gentleness and even appropriate humour on occasions.
- Children teasing and excluding other children

Bilingualism and biculturalism demonstrate capability and resourcefulness.

may reflect the beginning of bias and discomfort with difference. Professionals challenge these behaviours and the attitudes they represent in a direct way.

- Giving encouragement and support, repeating the same message again and again, offering alternatives, providing explanations, making the situation easier, demonstrating ways of doing things, and validating and affirming effort and success are all common teaching strategies that can be used effectively to help children learn appropriate behaviour.
- Discipline often involves firmness, but it is very different to punishment, or simply doing something unpleasant to a child after he or she has done something wrong. Discipline is much more pro-active and positive, and relies less on power and more on the strength of the positive relationship between the professional and the child.
- Knowing what is expected, what you should do, is not the same thing as being able to do it. Controlling ones own behaviour, exercising the will power to do what is expected, is very hard. Sometimes children need an adult to step in and help them to do what they do not have sufficient self control to do by themselves. Professionals empower children to take responsibility where they are capable of doing so. They are also astute at deciding when they need to take responsibility for enforcing rules and limits and ensuring appropriate behaviour when children cannot or will not do so.
- Consistency is about ensuring that by and large the messages that children receive about desirable, respectful ways to behave are similar. Consistency has to be tempered with an appreciation of the complexity of human behaviour, and the fact that children need to learn to “read” situations and people, and adjust their behaviour accordingly. In other words, as is the case with all matters related to living in a diverse community with others, learning appropriate ways to behave is not simple, and cannot be reduced to a set of straightforward “do this, don’t do that” rules.
- The aim of the approach taken to discipline is rightly to help the child become self disciplined; that is to ultimately have the capacity to control behaviour from within and to be motivated primarily by care and respect for self, others and the environment rather than by fear of being caught and punished.

- The key components of effective discipline are similar whatever the setting and the age of the child: empathy, warmth and nurturing, firmness, and consistency. When professionals in warm caring relationships are firm and confident in their interactions with children, children feel secure.

Some guidelines for helping children learn to manage their own behaviour follow:

- Ensure that expectations are reasonable for the child.
- React to inappropriate or undesirable behaviour in ways that help children to appreciate the difference between a minor annoyance and a major serious incident. In other words, respond more strongly to serious matters, less strongly to minor annoyances and behaviour that do not matter so much. Strongest, most powerful responses are saved for occasions when children have hurt someone else or put themselves at risk.
- When a child behaves in an inappropriate way, look at the environment and the situation for guidance about what might have caused or contributed to the behaviour and change that if possible.
- Try to prevent undesirable behaviour before it occurs.
- Build in choices and decision making for children, but ensure that giving a choice is genuine, that is, that whatever choice the child makes can be accepted.
- Always give brief explanations when enforcing limits or re-directing a child.
- Let children know when they are acting in a caring and considerate way. Avoid letting undesirable behaviour be the best way or the only way to get attention.
- Keep in mind that children believe the messages given to them by adults. They need many successful experiences and positive messages to build a positive self-image.

Additional roles in relationships with children

Some additional roles of professionals in relation to children are summarised briefly below and are covered in other chapters of this document.

Model: Professionals always keep in mind the power of modelling, so that they communicate and interact with children in ways that they want children to adopt themselves.

Facilitator of play: Play is a wonderful medium for children to explore their world, engage in relationships, develop in every dimension of their being, express feelings, and nurture a sense of their own unique being. The professional plays a variety of important roles in children's play. One of the most important is as the provider of the context for play; that is, the professional makes basic decisions about what materials are available in the environment, how much choice and control children will have, what they will have access to, how materials are arranged, how much time and space is allocated for play, what sort of encouragement and support are given. Sometimes the professional is simply a fellow player, demonstrating the sheer pleasure of being fully engaged in play but not dominating.

Encourager of interactions and relationships: The professional plays a major role in determining the quality of interactions and relationships among children. Discouraging competition and acknowledging the achievements and efforts of each child builds appreciation of each other. Constructing situations where children share diverse perspectives and work together to solve a problem helps them to see the value of collaboration. Sometimes the professional helps a child to figure out a way to make a contribution. Collaboration and a positive predisposition to relationships are strengthened by not forcing children to work together, but by giving choices and opportunities to be alone.

ADDITIONAL ROLES

Some additional roles that the professional plays are described briefly below.

Decision maker

The professional continually makes decisions about what to take note of, comment on, and respond to. The knowledge, experience and perspective of professionals affect what they see and hear, and what meaning is made. The professional is predisposed to see learning, relationships, capability, resourcefulness, and meaning and to think of these as possibilities and opportunities for children.

Architect of the environment

The physical environment provides the opportunities to get involved, to combine materials and equipment – it provides the material ingredients from which to learn. The way the professional constructs the environment suggests possibilities and opportunities to the child.

Constructor of the structure of the day, caretaker of the timetable

Enabling children to have a rich and meaningful experience involves more than getting children together with a lot of materials and equipment and a few skilled and wise professionals. A major contributor to the quality of the experience is the way time is organised, and indeed the priority placed on time, the way the day flows, what segments follow each other, what opportunities are offered simultaneously, how movement from one part of the day to the next transpires, and the degree of flexibility to respond to the moment.

Monitor of children's well-being

In addition to observing children carefully in order to make wise provisions for their experience, the

professional also monitors children's well-being in general. In the children's service children's health is monitored in a general way, sound health and hygiene practices are carried out, and healthy eating habits encouraged. Children's services can play a role in supporting parents to access health and welfare support in the community.

Planner and documenter

Planning is a matter of making a "considered best guess", being prepared and then being flexible, paying close attention to what happens, what children do, what they say, how they respond. Planning requires time and resources.

Sharing plans and documenting experiences enables families to participate in the child's life at the children's service. An experience for children that emerges from collaboration grounded in children's interests will be a coherent collection of experiences and opportunities. Many of these experiences and opportunities will be connected in natural ways.

Professionals observe continually. They observe not just children, but experiences, relationships, interactions, processes. Documenting these provides insights into their meaning and a basis for reflection about practice and future provisions. Documenting with children and collaborating with other professionals is more fruitful and is much more likely to be useful in establishing the meaning of experiences for children than if the professional documents using only her or his own perspective.

Planning incorporates continual evaluation, looking critically at what is happening, at how children are feeling in the service, and using those insights in future planning. Such on-going evaluation emerges out of a culture of reflection, discussion, questioning, and openness.

Communicator with other adults

The professional in a children's service is not simply a practitioner with children, but also very much a collaborator with other adults on behalf of children. Professionals work effectively not only

with children, but also with other adults. Professionals implementing this Framework are articulators of their own practice and the perspectives on which it is based, not only to parents and colleagues in their service and in related services, but also in the broader community.

Such communication requires transcending language and cultural barriers as well as potential obstacles coming from different professional perspectives. Acceptance of the appropriate lack of objectivity of parents because they care so much about their child is basic to effective communication. It requires a deep belief in the concept of the learning community; that is, that better solutions, greater progress, and more exciting outcomes arise from collaboration than from solitary efforts.

Supporter of families' sense of belonging

The importance of the children's service as a place for families is emphasised in this Framework. Each individual professional plays a key role in engendering a feeling of being welcomed, a feeling of belonging on the part of parents and other family members.

This sense of belonging is nurtured in a variety of ways, but the most important contributor undoubtedly will be the nature of the daily interactions between professionals and parents. However brief they might be on occasion, the message is always that partnership is essential and valued.

Advocate

Professionals in children's services, by the very nature of their work, become advocates for children. This may take the form of being an advocate within the service for a child, for example, if consideration is being given to moving the child to another group. There may need to be

advocacy outside the service for a child, for example if discussions are taking place about whether or not a child should go to school or delay entry. While the child's best interests are the main concern, in complex situations what is in the child's best interests is often not obvious, especially when the family and cultural context is taken into account.

In addition, an essential role of the professional is as an advocate for children in the broader community, and as such also an advocate for children's services.

Sharing plans and documenting experiences enables families to participate in the child's life at the children's service.

Learner

In engaging with children the professional is a learner along with the child. In order to truly acknowledge children as capable and resourceful, professionals are capable and resourceful themselves. Where do they get a new perspective, support for their judgment, ideas about how to cater for what the children already know and bring to the service? Families already know a great deal about their

children, but they may not know how useful that information is. The community context may contribute priorities for children's lives that professionals may not initially understand.

In summary, the professional in a children's service:

- Draws upon complexity and depth in the knowledge, skills and attitudes they bring to their work
- Engages in collaborative relationships
- Works to establish and maintain a children's service as a learning community
- Is a major player in the effort to bring about a shared vision for children's services and therefore to contribute to desirable communities where children are valued as current citizens and families are supported to nurture them.

QUESTIONS AND ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION AND DISCUSSION

1. In what ways does the service you work in help professionals to identify and use their strengths to benefit the service? Think of some examples of this.
2. Are there or have there been situations in your service where personal friendships have interfered with having a professional relationship? How could this have been avoided?
3. Is empathy something that people are born with, or can they learn to be empathetic?
4. What sorts of “discipline” problems or situations are most common in your group? Which of the understandings and guidelines in the chapter apply most directly to each situation?
5. What roles in addition to those listed do professionals in your service play?
6. What kinds of advocacy take place in your service?
7. Instigate a process whereby people identify each others’ strengths and talents.
8. Examine the service’s philosophy statements, job descriptions and other documents that give insights into what is valued in professionals. Compare these statements with those in this chapter and discuss the degree of it.
9. Think of real examples in your service where professionals have displayed one or more of the characteristics listed.
10. Think of occasions when you took a risk, tried something different. What happened? Are you glad you took the risk? What did you learn?
11. Monitor your use of questioning as a learning tool for children. Think about when you ask questions, how often, and what kinds of questions you ask. Discuss these with colleagues.
12. Collect examples from your own practice and that of your colleagues that illustrate the main points of this chapter.

THE CHILD

Contents

Page No.

Theories of Child Development.....	51
Diversity in Children and Childhood.....	52
Areas of Development.....	54
The Communicating Child.....	57
The Thinking, Investigating, Exploring, Problem Solving Child.....	60
The Healthy, Physical, Active Child.....	66
The Social Child.....	68
The Feeling Child.....	70
The Creative Child.....	71
The Spiritual and Moral Child.....	72
Questions and Issues for Consideration and Discussion.....	75

THE CHILD

The object of this Framework is to support professionals to provide children with experiences and opportunities that encourage them to acquire skills, knowledge, attitudes and sensitivities that will allow them to make the most of their potential. This will enable them to be constructive members of their family, the children's service community, their local community and the larger community.

All human beings are in the process of becoming for all their lives, but this is never so true as in the early years of life, when so much learning and development are occurring. Early learning is particularly significant as it lays the foundation for all learning. Although children are resilient and later learning is also very important, the first five years is therefore a time of great vulnerability and special significance.

The child, even a very young baby, is an active contributor to his or her own development and learning. Empowering children is a cornerstone of this Framework, trusting in their own momentum and priorities and at the same time offering them new opportunities to engage with the world.

Learning in childhood happens largely through engagement with others and with the physical world. Learning and development influence each other. Learning happens most effectively when it is motivated from within, that is, when the child is curious and eager. Learning does not occur in segmented ways or in a linear or orderly fashion. Children construct meaning through collaboration and communication with other children and adults and interacting with the environment.

THEORIES OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Numerous theories exist about how children learn and develop. Professionals who are knowledgeable about a variety of theories and perspectives and

who can bring them to their practice are best able to open themselves up to children as capable and resourceful and to support children's learning. Adherence to a single theory can constrain or "fix" the image held of the child. Multiple perspectives also help professionals to avoid holding an image of the ideal or perfect child, which can also interfere with being open to the strengths and capabilities of each child.

Acknowledging the child as capable and resourceful requires a deep understanding of theories about development and appreciation of signs of development and learning and what they mean for the child. An uninformed predisposition to see the child as capable and resourceful may lead to an attitude of respect, but that attitude cannot be translated into effective practice without knowledge and understanding of the meaning of the child's behaviour. As an example, seeing a baby transfer an object from one hand to the other may mean little to someone who does not appreciate the significance of that ability. Acquiring that ability opens up the possibility of examining objects from different perspectives, holding two objects at once, and using them together. These are important steps in the baby's exploration of the world. Some developmental achievements are obvious ones, such as walking, but many are subtle and can be missed easily by the uninformed.

Deep interest in and knowledge of typical interests, characteristics, behaviour, challenges, and issues that are present in most children at different times in their development will increase the professional's ability to make provisions that match and cater for each child. Information about child development has for many years been the explicit foundation for guidelines about practice with specific age groups in children's services. Information about child development is invaluable as a reference point for understanding individual children, for highlighting particular achievements, for looking carefully and with an open mind at the individual child, and for alerting professionals to individual differences which are outside expectation and experience.

However, this information about typical development must not limit the capacity to see the child's capabilities and strengths. Strongly held views about how children develop, how they make sense of the world, and at what age particular skills, understandings and abilities appear can interfere with seeing what is actually happening. In other words, they can "put a lid on" expectations, so that what is seen is largely what fits with the theories adhered to and the knowledge held rather than seeing the child as he or she is.

A view of children's capabilities derived totally from notions of a 'linear' pattern or sequential stages of development across specific developmental domains lends itself to focusing on what children can and cannot do at any age or stage. In fact, the focus is often more on what they cannot do, leading to an image of the child based on deficits.

Contemporary theories have evolved beyond stage theories. There is also increasing recognition that children's learning is affected by many factors, and that children are capable of more advanced behaviour and thinking than has previously been recognised. The impact of social and cultural contexts on children's development is also increasingly recognised both within and outside of developmental psychology. Along with this is the idea of the child as an active contributor to and constructor of his or her own learning.

This Framework encourages professionals to look for signs of competence and to practise in ways that acknowledge the child as capable and resourceful. They look beyond traditional developmental milestones and skills traditionally identified as those that demonstrate readiness for school. Professionals do this with all children, and particularly so with children who have an identified disability, as it is tempting to over-focus on what the child cannot do and ignore their capabilities.

Early learning is particularly significant as it lays the foundation for all learning.

DIVERSITY IN CHILDREN AND CHILDHOOD

Development and learning are life long processes that increase the diversity and complexity of ways of engaging with and making meaning of the human and physical worlds. The perspective taken in this Framework is that development and learning is an endless path, a path with many twists and turns. The process of development is to some extent internally driven, and to a large extent influenced by interactions and relationships with others and the opportunities and possibilities provided for the child.

What is normal?

What is considered to be appropriate or normal behaviour is influenced by the setting or situation, by cultural expectations, and by the individual priorities and expectations of adults. In assisting children to develop frameworks for life and learning, professionals make decisions and judgments based only on their knowledge of child development, but also their understandings about the child's cultural background, appreciation of the family context of the child's life, and the current situation in which the child and adult find themselves.

It is important to understand the following points about development:

- Every child has strengths in some areas of development. These strengths may be more obvious in some children than in others.
- While the path of development is somewhat predictable in a very general way, and while there is an identifiable age range in which most children first demonstrate specific skills and understandings, each child's pattern of development is unique. There is wide variation in what is normal.

- Development is affected by the combination of genetic background, or heredity, and experience or environment. Generally, the older a child is, the greater the extent of the impact of environment and experience.
- Cultural background affects development. Child rearing practices and priorities in different cultural groups result in different experiences for children and therefore influence the skills and knowledge that children develop.
- Development is not a race in which the sooner the child demonstrates skills and abilities the more capable he or she is or will turn out to be.
- Developmental delay worthy of concern usually is indicated when the acquisition of skills and abilities is significantly behind what is considered normal in several areas of a child's development rather than just one.

Uniqueness

Each child is a unique individual. Children, like adults, have different temperaments. Some are very active, others are quiet. Some are outgoing, others are shy. Some adapt easily to change, others resist and react negatively to change. Some give clear signals about what they want and need, others are harder to read. Some are very predictable and regular in their habits, others are much more unpredictable. Some move into new situations readily and easily, others need to stand back, wait a while, and then become involved gradually. Some are very even tempered, others are changeable. Some are almost always happy, others are often upset or unhappy. In addition, there are children with conditions that may limit their development and restrict their functioning in particular areas. These characteristics affect learning.

The differences in children are no different to those that exist in adults, and yet there is a tendency to think in terms of a kind of ideal child and then to

believe that any child can be molded into that ideal. Sensitive practice requires acceptance of individual differences in children and a commitment to support the uniqueness of each child.

Health

The child who is living with a chronic illness will experience varying states of well-being, which will influence development. Just as is the case with adults, stress can affect children's health, and professionals need to be sensitive to situations and circumstances in the child's life that may cause stress over a period of time. In addition to caring for the child in ways that are negotiated with the family in consultation with the child's physician, the professional needs to be aware of the ways in which the child's state of wellbeing will influence his or her ability to participate. Provisions may need to be adapted to support the child's full participation.

Disability

Children who have disabilities benefit immensely from experiences where they are viewed first of all as children who are unique individuals, where their disability is taken into account but is not highlighted. It is damaging and enormously restricting when experience and the perspectives of others cause a child to identify him or herself mainly in terms of their disability. Professionals who work with children with disabilities interact in ways that demonstrate respect. Labels can contribute to a narrow view of a child. A common example is the use of the term "a Down syndrome child", rather than "a child with Down syndrome". Similarly, the term *disabled* child itself defines the child through the disability. A preferable term to use is a *child with* a disability. Professionals in children's services may need to access information and support from specialists in order to feel confident about providing well for a child with a disability. They must keep in mind the child they

are working with, no matter how pronounced the disability, will benefit from interactions, relationships and provisions that are based on the same understandings that apply to any child.

The importance of culture and context

Increasingly over the past few years child development and developmental psychology research and theory have recognised that context and culture are significant influences on development and learning. In other words, different social, cultural and community contexts lead to diversity in childhood as it is lived and consequently to different patterns of learning and development. In many ways, these contemporary theories highlight the contribution the professional makes to children's development and learning.

An example discussed in a later section of this chapter is the variation in different cultural groups in the valuing of independence and autonomy on the one hand, and connection to and responsibility for others, or interdependence, on the other.

AREAS OF DEVELOPMENT

Children's services consider the child holistically, in an inclusive way, taking full account of the inter-related nature of development and learning and the impossibility of impacting on one aspect of development in isolation from others. However, for purposes of organisation what follows is a brief discussion of areas of development about which it is essential for professionals to have awareness. For each, some of the major trends in the first five years are highlighted, with an emphasis on relationships, the child as capable and resourceful, and making meaning, and diversity. The information about areas of development is very brief, as there are a number of excellent resource materials available elsewhere.

The areas considered are:

- The child's sense of self
- The communicating child
- The thinking child
- The healthy, physically active child
- The social child
- The feeling child
- The creative child
- The spiritual and moral child.

The child's sense of self

The sense of self reflects the child's understandings and capabilities across all areas of development. It is important for children to see themselves as powerful, valued, and as constructive contributors to their community.

Over the early years children develop a sense of identity, of who they are, what defines them and makes them unique. This sense of self informs their relationships and the way they function in the communities in which they live their lives. Sense of self also derives from relationships and engagement with other people. This picture of self is dynamic and is altered throughout life. However, the initial sense of self is the foundation for self-concept for whole of life.

Developing a sense of self

Over the first few years of life there emerges a sense of self as separate and at the same time connected with others. Balancing the needs for both separateness and connection, which exist in some degree of tension, is a challenge. This challenge characterises toddlerhood particularly, as children struggle with separateness and identity in the second and third years of life.

The child through daily experience is building answers to the questions

- Who am I?
- What defines me and makes me distinct?
- How am I like others and different to others?

At the same time, while moving away from a relationship of total dependency, the child is struggling for the first time with complex questions that re-emerge throughout life:

- To what extent am I independent and autonomous, and what obligations and responsibilities do I have towards others?
- What is the impact of my behaviour on others?
- How do I live in relationship with others?

The process of working out a balance between autonomy and relatedness is a challenging and complex one for the child. Because of their relative inexperience, children may go about the process of figuring the balance out in a rather clumsy way. For example, they may assert themselves inappropriately, make unreasonable demands, defy adults' requests and directions, and change their minds.

Self esteem

Alongside this challenge sits a related one that is just as profoundly defining: the development of a sense of worth, often labeled self esteem. The answers to the questions listed above also contain powerful messages about self worth, answers to questions such as

- Am I competent?
- Is it all right to make mistakes?
- Am I powerful – that is, can I make a difference?
- Do I contribute to others' happiness and well-being?
- Should I be proud or ashamed of my culture and family?

- Am I accepted as I am?
- Am I valued for who I am or for what I do?
- Am I valued at all?

Co-operation and collaboration

Developing a sense of self is linked to issues about the place of competition and co-operation in a children's service. A desirably strong sense of self carries with it a belief in self-improvement, valuing, trying one's hardest. Competition is with oneself and not with others. Supporting life-enhancing relationships means creating a culture in the children's service where everyone's efforts are valued and the successes and achievements of others are a cause for acknowledgement and celebration.

Diversity and the child's sense of self

Culture impacts on development, and it provides a context for children's experiences. Parents and families vary in the extent to which they identify with their culture of origin, and professionals learn most effectively about families through interactions and communication over time. It is not something that can be assessed at interviews or through completion of a questionnaire. It is very risky for professionals to make assumptions about cultural identity without discussing these issues with parents.

Cultural background is a part of identity, and one's sense of self is affected by the degree of acceptance of cultural, language, and religious background. Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people accept the fact that their children have to be able to operate comfortably in both the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural context and that of the mainstream non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, when those two are very different. Children's services can help bridge the gap.

The tension between independence and separateness on the one hand, and interdependence, connection and responsibility for others, on the other hand, is one that exists in various forms throughout life. Culture affects the relative emphasis, as some cultures value independence and autonomy, even in young children, very highly, while others value interdependence and reliance on others. In other words, in some cultures interdependence is considered much more important than an autonomous independent self. This means that independence in daily living skills at an early age is not valued as highly as it is in Anglo-Australian settings.

These values will affect priorities in children's services, and will need to be discussed and worked through with parents. Whatever the views that are held about the relative importance of autonomy and interdependence in young children, quite clearly children have the right to be supported to function as individuals while at the same time valuing relationships with others, and to appreciate the contribution they make to the well-being of others.

The professional's role and the child's sense of self

To support the child's sense of self requires the professional to:

- Discard notions of the generic "ideal child"
- View each child as an individual
- Identify strengths and interests, for example, the baby who is especially good at engaging adults' attention, the toddler who is caring and gentle with babies, the four year old who has an outstandingly active and fertile imagination
- Help the child develop a positive and realistic

sense of self. This means avoiding "inauthentic positives", responding in an excessively positive way to everything the child does

- Offer much more encouragement than discouragement, more positive feedback than negative. Show clear disapproval of undesirable behaviour in ways that don't demean or frighten the child or result in feelings of unworthiness.

When professionals empower children, they are helping them to learn about the impact they can have on others. Children have power, and the early years can help them to harness that power and use it constructively on behalf of themselves, others, and the community.

A desirably strong sense of self carries with it a belief in self-improvement, trying one's hardest.

A major responsibility of the professional is to help children grow to be themselves in the best way possible, to help them to know themselves, and to support them to live constructively in relationship with others.

Possible outcomes within the Framework

Supporting the child's sense of self is an integral part of this Framework, implemented by acknowledging the

child as capable and resourceful, by honouring diversity and by providing opportunities to experience an environment that promotes the making of meaning and connections.

If children are to be constructive members of learning communities, then experiences in the early years support them to:

- Develop awareness of their uniqueness and what contributes to that
- Experience curiosity, satisfaction, challenge, provocation, and joy
- See themselves as competent, as creative, as capable communicators

- Identify their own strengths
- Accept their differences
- Identify with and be proud of their culture and their family
- Develop new skills in all dimensions of living
- Have broad inclusive notions rather than restrictive ones of what it means to be male or female
- Feel powerful and effective
- Learn to assert themselves appropriately, stand up for themselves, and at the same time appreciate the rights of others
- Have the assertiveness and confidence to ask questions and seek help
- Have a sense of belonging to the community and contributing to it
- Begin to appreciate what it means to be an Australian
- Add to and alter the picture they and others have of themselves, by taking reasonable risks, meeting new challenges, and having new experiences and relationships
- Be sufficiently confident and resilient to persevere in the face of obstacles and not be devastated by lack of success.

It is important for children to see themselves as powerful, valued, as making a constructive contribution to the lives of others, as capable, as valued.

EXAMPLE OF A CHILD BEING POWERFUL

A three-year-old was teasing another child. Andrew walked over and said, "Stop teasing, it hurts his feelings. It's not fair – we all have feelings."

THE COMMUNICATING CHILD

Communication can be defined broadly as both giving messages to others and interpreting messages received. It plays a vital role in establishing and maintaining relationships, for example in making possible negotiation and expression of feelings. It is also at the centre of learning and making meaning, playing a vital role for example in problem solving through asking questions.

Communication must be thought of broadly, to include oral and written language, sign language, touch, facial expression, and behaviour. Movement, drama, music and singing, the visual arts, film and television are also modes of communication that the child may experience as the maker or interpreter of meanings and messages.

Developing the ability to communicate

Babies are born with the ability to communicate through crying, eye contact, vocalising, facial expression, and body movement. The emergence of smiling and laughing provides a very powerful tool for securing adults' attention and engaging them in interactions. What happens over the first five years of life, particularly over the first three years, is an expansion of ways of communicating, greater ability to communicate effectively, and an increasing capacity to communicate complex thoughts and ideas. By the time they reach their fifth birthday, and well before that, children are sophisticated communicators who can ask complex questions, tell their own stories, talk at great length about topics that interest them and that they know about, as well as use and decipher non-verbal communication.

EXAMPLE OF A CHILD USING COMPLEX LANGUAGE AND TERMS

A child told the group what had happened at his house over the holidays when a tree fell in his garden. He said: "My dad pulled up a big tree with his mates. He used a trolley with a handle and put some ropes on it and tied it to the other trees that were stable. The ropes will stay there till the roots grow."

The importance of language

Of particular importance of course is communication through language, both the ability to understand what is said and the ability to use language to communicate with others, although non-verbal communication remains important throughout life. Children whose ability to communicate in the language or languages used in the service is limited may develop very effective ways of communicating non-verbally.

The ability to use language is an area of development where children vary a great deal. For example, between the middle of the second year of life to the third birthday, the number of words children can speak clearly will range from a few to many. The age at which children put two or more words together also varies tremendously. However, it can be said that in general in the first three years the child's ability to understand language surpasses the ability to communicate through language. It is important for professionals to keep in mind that use of language is an area where there are many examples of children's cleverness in evidence through the mistakes they make. As examples, at around the age of 1 1/2 or 2 years they may call a bird a plane or vice versa, or refer to all men as Daddy. Rather than being a cause for amusement, these confusions are as evidence of children making meaning of the world by noticing similarities in it. Similarly when children begin to put words together they do so creatively. They demonstrate appreciation of some of the rules of language.

Communication and diversity

Culture and language are inextricably tied together.

Most children's services will include children and families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. It is almost inevitable that some will have as their first language one other than that spoken by most of the people in the children's service, and perhaps even a language that no one else in the service speaks. They may have no English or a little bit of English (or whatever the dominant language of the service is).

Not being able to communicate through verbal language can be very isolating and disempowering. It is ideal to have someone working in the service who speaks the first language of the families that use the service. Where this is not possible, access to interpreters is invaluable.

For a young child coming to a children's service, there are so many new and unusual things to adjust to and become comfortable with, and an unfamiliar language can make the transition very difficult. Hearing a familiar language, even before the child can speak or even understand what is being said, is very comforting, and is certainly reassuring for the child's family.

Maintenance of the first language and English as a second language

The importance of maintaining the child's first language cannot be over-estimated. Language is a tool for thinking, and to deprive a child of the language which is so closely connected to understandings and information acquired in early life is to restrict a child's thinking and learning opportunities. Every effort is made to encourage maintenance of the child's first language in the home and validation of it to the extent possible in the service.

Parents may believe that the best way to help their child succeed is to drop the first language and

focus on English. They may need the assistance and encouragement of the children's service to appreciate the importance of supporting the child to maintain the first language.

When children are learning English as a second language, they may go through a period of not speaking at all. They will still show evidence of understanding, however, and being silent is accepted. Pressure to speak may in fact prolong the period of not speaking. Children are not ignored or left out because they are not speaking, and certainly it is not inferred that they are simply being stubborn or strong willed. It is thought by some that this silent period, as it is sometimes called, is actually a time for taking in much about language, almost as if in preparation for speaking.

Children are much more capable of learning a second language than are most adults. Rather than thinking of children who do not speak English as being in deficit, they are thought of as potentially very rich when they are on the way to having two languages. The ability to function in two distinct language environments demonstrates considerable capability and resourcefulness.

EXAMPLE OF THE CHILD AS A TEACHER OF LANGUAGE

Chinese and Korean children in the centre are teaching the staff key words in their language, words such as "no" and "good morning". They laugh heartily at the adults' pronunciation.

Communication and the role of the professional

Supporting children's communication skills requires professionals who appreciate the central role that effective communication plays in all areas of development. They also appreciate the importance of a language-rich environment and understand that the richness of experiences children have informs their communication and provides occasions for communication.

At its simplest, the professional's role in supporting young children as communicators can be reduced to four main responsibilities:

1. Providing an environment that supports communication:
 - where there are worthwhile experiences and objects for adults and children to talk about
 - where language at its richest is used
 - where there is sufficient "space" for children to communicate
 - where there is the opportunity to communicate and to be responded to
 - where literacy is embedded appropriately in every provision made
2. Using language and other forms of communication appropriately with children
3. Responding in a meaningful way to children's efforts to communicate, both verbal and non-verbal (Sometimes professionals have to try hard to figure out what is being communicated and respond appropriately.)
4. Actively encouraging children to use language and to recognise the power of language, while at the same time encouraging and acknowledging the power of non-verbal means of communication.

The power of language

Children need to be supported to learn about the power of language, that it can make people feel sad, angry, fearful or happy. Helping children label feelings with words assists them to know themselves and to understand and "read" others' feelings. Saying things such as "I can see you feel sad because Mummy has just left", or "You must be hungry – it's way past morning tea time" not only assists in the development of communication skills, but also validates children's feelings, perceptions, and their own experience.

Possible outcomes within the Framework

Supporting the communicating child is an integral part of this Framework, implemented by acknowledging the child as capable and resourceful, honouring diversity and through providing opportunities to experience an environment that promotes the making of meaning and connections.

Children are being supported to:

- Develop the ability to seek and understand information, express opinions, convey feelings effectively
- Learn to communicate easily and effectively with peers and with adults in familiar situations
- Use and understand non-verbal communication
- Show pleasure in playing with language through rhyming, making up words and sounds, and telling stories
- Recognise a range of literature
- Appreciate literacy and numeracy as invaluable means of making meaning in the world
- Demonstrate the beginnings of understandings needed to learn to read and write

THE THINKING, INVESTIGATING, EXPLORING, PROBLEM SOLVING CHILD

Young children are tireless investigators, explorers, experimenters and problem solvers. When they are healthy and feel safe and secure, they seem committed to an endless quest to find out about the world around them. Starting in infancy, children learn through their own exploration and efforts as well as through interactions with sensitive supportive adults, and from a very early age, with peers. In general, children move during the first few years from “thinking” by acting with their bodies and senses to a greater capacity to think

internally. Understanding and being able to use language assists this shift. However, hands-on, body-in, total immersion in experiences and with objects that interest them remains a dominant way of operating in the world. Children also learn from modelling and observation.

During the first few years of life, as children’s ways of engaging in this quest to know expand, the knowledge and understandings they have acquired become a foundation for the pursuit of additional knowledge and understandings. These understandings change through further interactions and new perspectives brought about through the interplay of accumulated experience. The child influences and is influenced by others. They are enriched by the presence of more experienced fellow learners to assist, support, and enhance their learning and less experienced learners for whom they can be teachers.

Children deserve to have the richest possible human and physical environment, one which offers endless possibilities of things to explore and find out. There is no question that learning is assisted by a rich physical environment that provides equipment and materials to engage with and learn from. However, the emphasis in this Framework is on relationships, interactions and responsiveness in children’s learning, with the assumption being that much of children’s learning happens in social contexts. Any place where adults and children are together provides the potential for teaching and learning by both. Diverse talents, strengths and perspectives contribute to the power of learning with others.

The power of learning with others

The collaborative process itself generates new learning, when people solve problems together, figure things out, build collective understandings and come up with new ideas and meanings together. Whether alone or with others, the child plays a pro-active role in her or his own learning, the child actively constructs and re-constructs

meaning through engagement, discussion, and reflection. The position taken in this Framework is that learning with others is often more exciting, rewarding, and efficient than the solitary pursuit of learning, although both are valuable. Through working together to solve problems, meet challenges, relationships are strengthened. Through relationships, learning is enhanced.

Babies and toddlers learn through tireless exploration and use of all the skills they have. Although their skills in collaborating with others are more limited than older children, they too learn so much from interacting with, watching, and communicating with adults and other children.

EXAMPLE OF SHARED PERSPECTIVES

A wooden spinning top had been placed on the table for the children to use. In the group time the staff member asked the children what they had discovered when they were using the top. Their comments were:

- The colours disappeared.
- There were straight lines.
- It couldn't stand up straight on its pointy end.
- I pushed it fast with my power. The heart pushes – it pumps.
- When I run fast my heart goes fast.
- The children then all wanted to try running fast.

Perspectives and strategies

Young children in the years before school amass a great deal of factual knowledge. The emphasis in this Framework, however, is on the children's service providing children opportunities to develop a perspective on the world, an outlook on life and learning, as well as strategies and skills to use. A major aim of this Framework is to provide young children with a framework for life and for learning.

The importance of meaning

Children learn more effectively when the learning is meaningful, purposeful, and related to their lives and interests. Learning in context, learning that is useful and motivated by the learner's desire to know, to master, and to figure out, rather than learning that is imposed, is effective learning. This is one reason that imposing learning artificially in the absence of interest by children is not encouraged. Imposition of learning happens when the professional is directed not by children but by pressures from other adults, theoretical knowledge about children, or current accountability requirements of the service. Often the learning that happens in these situations is superficial and shallow. As an example, very young children can memorise numbers and go through the motions of pointing to objects as they recite the numbers. However, this is not real counting even though adults often label it as such,. Similarly, getting children to recite letters of the alphabet or even recognise letters is much less meaningful than responding to their interests in sounding out words, "reading" pictures, or even writing letters and words.

Imposing learning is quite different to providing opportunities for learning, which the effective professional does continuously in working with children. That is, the professional often provides additional information, suggestions and perspectives as well as opportunities through the physical environment and experiences offered for children's learning. While it is important to challenge and extend children, those challenges and extensions evolve from their interests and are not imposed artificially by adults who are eager to "get children to where they should be later".

In general children can be trusted to indicate to sensitive adults what they should be doing. However, a provocative question or statement or the introduction of a material or stimulus can provoke an interest that would not otherwise occur and give the child the opportunity to demonstrate interest and competence.

EXAMPLE OF COLLABORATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING

[Lesley is the teacher.] The following discussion took place after an excursion to the Sydney Harbour Bridge. During the initial stages of the excursion the children were very interested in what the bridge was made of, especially when they saw the wood scaffolding.

Lesley: What was the bridge made of?

Maddie: There's wood underneath.

Lesley: Why was the wood there?

Eliza: Because they were making something under it.

Nick: They were making a safety wall.

Maddie: And they had these shade things under it.

Eliza: And why did they have the cranes?

Maddie: Maybe to put stuff up. Maybe they were too tired to climb that far.

Eliza: Maybe it was broken, maybe that's why they were fixing it.

Maddie: I saw one that was broken.

Eliza: Maybe they were fixing the bridge up. Maybe it is really old and when it dies it will fall down and it will go up to heaven.

Nick: The harbour bridge goes up to heaven!

Lesley: How can we find out what they were doing?

Holly: The man who put a stamp on us. [When the money was paid to go up the pylon].

Eliza: Maybe we could see if they are there again and give them a letter

Maddie: Maybe we could send a letter in the letterbox.

Eliza: We could put it where they work on the crane or something.

Maddie: We're not work ladies or gentlemen. How can we get up there? You know how we did a letter to my dad. We could just do a letter and go up to the letterbox today.

Matthew: We could send it to the workmen.

Nick: The man in the pylon.

Eliza: And I'll post it because I'll write it.

Lesley: What would the letter say?

Eliza: Could you please tell us why there is wood underneath near the playground.

EXAMPLE OF PROFESSIONAL ENCOURAGING RESOURCEFULNESS

The children are being helped to relax just before rest time. Soft gentle classical music is playing. The teacher asks the children to close their eyes and "imagine".

A child asks, "Where are the pictures?" The teacher responds, "Close your eyes and your mind will make your own pictures."

The professional's role in children's learning

Various roles of the professional are explored in the section on The Professional. It could be argued that if the perspective taken in this Framework is a broad view of learning and that children are learning all the time, then there is no need to separate out roles of the professional related particularly to children's learning. However, in order to emphasise the critical importance of the professional in children's learning, what follows is a fairly long list of roles that support children's learning and growing competence. These roles are not discrete, but rather are intertwined. In any interaction, the professional is likely to engage in several of them.

The professional as model and demonstrator.

Children learn a great deal from watching and listening to adults, just being around them and "absorbing" ways of doing things as well as information. Children learn how to learn by being around learners. They learn as well when the adult deliberately and explicitly demonstrates something or shows a child what to do. A professional challenge is deciding when to demonstrate, and when to allow a child the time to figure something out.

EXAMPLE OF CHILD LEARNING FROM MODELLING

Tim was a settled member of his pre-school community. When he heard another child sobbing at his mother's departure, Tim called out "Don't cry, Jason. Your mummy will come back soon." Tim was severely visually impaired, and was responding to what he could hear and also using a caring tone and words that he had heard his teacher use.

Enthusiasm for and excitement about learning is contagious. Children learn how to learn by being around learners. Perseverance, trying alternative solutions when faced with an obstacle, eventually giving up when a situation is impossible, using other people as resources, and being creative are all learned both through direct experience and by being around others who display these characteristics. Professionals convey a sense of curiosity, excitement and wonder about the world around them.

The professional as learner. The professional has greater maturity, more factual knowledge (at least

in some areas) and longer and richer life experience than the child. But he or she needs to have considerable humility and respect for children's wisdom, their capacity to find a way, figure things out, and sometimes think of solutions to problems that the professional has not thought of. A respectful approach to children involves working with the genuine belief that children often know more than they are thought to and are cleverer than adults give them credit for being. The professional operating within this Framework shares appropriate genuine problems and dilemmas with children, and sets up many situations that result in reminders about children's capabilities and creative thinking. A professional operating within this Framework is continually surprised, impressed and delighted by children's wisdom.

EXAMPLE OF CHILD COMING UP WITH A SOLUTION TO A PROBLEM

It had been raining consistently for about three days. Nicholas was looking out the window. He then turned and asked the teacher where she lived. She answered "near the water". He replied, "There is lots of rain and there might be floods at your house so you can stay at my house."

The teacher said, "Well I need to go home to make sure my dogs are okay." Nicholas agreed, "Yeah, okay, you can bring the dogs to my house too." The teacher questioned him, "But I ride a motorbike, so how would we all get there?" Nicholas thought and replied, "Well, in the flood you'll need a boat so you can put wood, but curved wood, on the bottom of your house, put the dogs inside – oh, are the dogs allowed in your house?" The teacher replied, "Yes, they are." Nicholas continued, "Okay, put the dogs inside the house, shut the doors and sail over to my house if there is a flood."

The professional as instructor. While the emphasis in this Framework is very much on the child's competence and growing ability as an independent learner, there are occasions when direct instruction is appropriate. Best used sparingly, direct instruction is most effective on occasions when a child has struggled unsuccessfully with a problem or challenge and has asked for help. On other occasions, collaboration between the child and the professional to explore alternative solutions are more appropriate.

Instruction is appropriate when there are safety concerns, for example, if a child is climbing and needs advice on how to do it safely.

The professional as supporter, provider of encouragement. A major role for the professional in children's learning is that of "leading from behind", motivating the child to try hard, suggesting a course of action, and helping the child to persevere in the face of obstacles. Encouragement and support are concepts preferable to praise or

reward, as the former are more likely to result in the child developing the ability to feel satisfaction and pride in accomplishments and hard efforts rather than being dependent on or largely motivated by approval from others. Children's ability to evaluate their own work and behaviour rather than relying too much on outside evaluation and critique can be nurtured. Sometimes, often in fact, in a children's service where collaboration is actively encouraged, the professionals will play an important role in suggesting and facilitating collaboration among children. Support and encouragement may be verbal, but can also involve making a task a bit easier, more manageable.

Celebrating a child's accomplishments is important, whether it is a baby managing to insert clothes pegs into a narrow necked container, a toddler using a spoon successfully at lunch time, a three year old managing to put her jacket on without help, or an older child making an elaborate block construction. The point is to notice the child's sense of accomplishment and affirm it, or to point out achievements that are valued that the child may not be aware of, such as when a toddler treats a baby gently or sits at the table for a meal without getting up and roaming around.

Children can learn from mistakes, and it is desirable for children to accept mistakes and learn from them rather than being discouraged by them. At times however, professionals will refrain from pointing out mistakes to children, giving them encouragement to figure things out themselves. A baby trying to fit a large block down the neck of a plastic bottle, a young toddler trying to complete a simple puzzle, or an older child struggling with a more complex one are examples of the many situations where the professional has to exercise judgement about how long to allow the child to struggle and when to step in and help.

The professional as encourager of teaching by other children. A significant way that professionals promote children's capabilities is to actively promote them as teachers of other children.

EXAMPLE OF ENCOURAGING THE CHILD TO BE A TEACHER

Khira and Mia asked the teacher to make them playdough balls. The teacher replied that Jemima had made the balls herself. She asked Jemima to show the others how to do it.

The professional as re-director. Sometimes a child needs encouragement to change behaviour because of safety, inappropriateness, or the fact that success is unlikely if the child continues down a particular path. As an example, a young child trying to stack blocks who continually puts small ones on the bottom and larger ones on the top could be helped to do it in a way that is more likely to result in success.

The professional as extender and enhancer. In many situations learning is strengthened, creativity encouraged, perseverance and self-direction supported when professionals simply add an idea or a piece of equipment, offer a suggestion, or ask a question. This often happens in rich dramatic play and other problem solving situations. Sometimes the professional simply asks interesting or challenging questions that encourage the child to think more deeply.

At other times, this role involves the observant professional seeing possibilities in what is going on now, thinking of ways to augment and enhance the experience. Wise professionals often do this with routine everyday experiences, turning an everyday experience such as mealtime or a walk to the shops or watering the garden into a wonderful learning experience for children. Often when children are engaging in rich dramatic play the professional can make a suggestion or offer a prop that enhances and enriches the play. For example, seeing a couple of older toddlers in the home corner struggling to share the care of one baby doll, the professional finds another one, and also brings over some Duplo pieces on a plastic plate and suggests that they could give the babies a biscuit.

This suggests that extending and enhancing are tasks the professional performs with both child initiated and guided experiences, routine experiences, and ones that have been initiated by adults. This role entails addressing at least two crucial questions: What can I do to make this better? What else can I do that follows, builds on, extends or elaborates on this?

The professional as helper. Especially in the context of adults as fellow learners with children, sometimes the professional is most helpful in simply pitching in and assisting the child, or at least asking if the child wants some help. Some common examples that come to mind are when a young baby is trying to reach for something that is just out of reach, an older baby or a toddler is trying to fill an ice cream container with sand using a small spoon, when a three year old decides to help by putting all the blocks away, or when an older child is raking leaves.

The professional as gate-keeper. The professional, as the more experienced person, and as the person with power, determines to a large extent the equipment and materials that the child has access to, the experiences that are springboards for learning. Gate-keeping requires the professional to see possibilities and opportunities for learning. Providing sufficient space, arranging materials in an interesting way that suggests possibilities and opportunities for learning, structuring the day, empowering children to change the environment, and being flexible enough to allow the experience to continue longer than anticipated are all examples of gate-keeping that is in the interests of children.

The professional as facilitator. This task is closely related to supporting, helping and gate-keeping, and refers to "smoothing the way" and setting the scene for excellent learning experiences to occur.

The professional as translator, commentator. Learning is often facilitated by having someone who stands back a bit, looks on, and describes what is going on to those who are intensely involved. Young children tend to get totally immersed in what they are doing and someone

simply talking about what is happening can enhance learning. This of course also supports communication skills, especially with very young children. As an example, if two children are intruding on each other's work in the sand pit, the professional might say something like "You know, you two are very close together, and so you are getting in each other's way and getting annoyed with each other. Why don't you move apart and then you will both have more room."

Adults often have more information and a broader perspective than children do. Simply sharing those with children, interpreting and explaining, aids their learning. A common example of acting as an interpreter is when the professional helps a child figure out what another child is saying or wanting: "I think Jessica is telling you that she doesn't want a cuddle just now."

The professional as connector. It has been said that learning is about making connections, and one of the important tasks professionals undertake with young children, in part because children get so immersed in the here and now, is to link what is happening now with past and future experiences. Showing the babies the cardboard picture book on the shelf about animals after they have seen a cat and some ducks when out for a walk is an example making connections that assist learning.

The professional as initiator. It is quite appropriate, and quite enriching of children's learning, for professionals to bring some of their own personal interests and ideas into the children's experience, as long as these do not take precedence over children's interests. When this can be done genuinely, authentically, then everyone's experience is enriched. Gardening, cooking, playing a musical instrument or enjoyment of music, sewing, painting and drawing, aerobics, sport – there are many possibilities in these and other adult interests to enrich children's experience beyond the traditional early childhood education curriculum.

In all of these roles a considerable professional challenge is to decide when and how to intervene in a child's exploring and learning.

Possible outcomes within the Framework

Supporting the thinking child is an integral part of this Framework, implemented by acknowledging the child as capable and resourceful, honouring diversity and through providing opportunities to experience an environment that promotes the making of meaning and connections.

Children:

- Develop an increasing understanding of the world and pleasure in learning and problem solving
- Demonstrate an active approach to learning and problem solving
- Learn how to use other people to support their learning
- Delight in self-discovery and exploration.

THE HEALTHY, PHYSICAL, ACTIVE CHILD

Being healthy physically is a necessary pre-condition to being able to develop in all areas. Physical health is the basic foundation for children's learning and development. In other words, children's ability to take full advantage of the possibilities the world has to offer is limited if they are unhealthy or unwell.

In the areas of physical health and wellbeing, children's services professionals have a mandate to:

- Keep children safe and healthy
- Monitor children's health
- Provide and/or promote eating nutritional and interesting food
- Instill healthy eating habits
- Promote daily living habits, attitudes and skills that encourage children to take responsibility

for the well-being of themselves and others as they are capable of doing so

- Advocate for children's health
- Facilitate access by parents and families to appropriate health-related services for children and to specialist services where these are needed.

In addition, it is important for professionals to have knowledge of likely trends in physical growth, common illnesses and conditions, and nutritional needs in order to be a general resource for parents and to be able to identify when there is a concern and further attention is necessary.

Developing physical skills

One of the major challenges of the first few years of life is gaining control over the body. Just as children delight in exploring the world around them, so do they delight in exploring what their bodies can do. Momentous changes happen in all areas of development, especially in the first two to three years of life, but development in the control and use of the body is probably the most obviously dramatic and easily observed. Gaining control of the head, learning to sit alone, and reaching out to grasp objects are major achievements in the first year. Mobility, first with creeping or crawling, followed by walking alone, provides the opportunity to begin to explore physical autonomy. It affords the child relatively much more power and control over who and what they have access to, and the opportunity to make decisions about their own experience.

Alongside these developments the child is continually refining the use of hands and fingers, becoming increasingly skilled at managing such tasks as self feeding, picking up very small objects, using crayons, textas, and other writing and drawing implements, and cutting with scissors. Movements become more precise and accurate.

Of course, over the whole of childhood the child continues to acquire new skills and refine those that have been acquired earlier.

Some children are naturally much more active than others, and these individual differences are respected. At the same time, all children are supported to gain control over their bodies, to feel the exhilaration that comes from mastering a new physical skill and the sense of well-being that comes with being fit and healthy.

Children do not need to be taught basic large motor skills, such as sitting, crawling, walking and running, as these emerge through opportunities and encouragement to use them. However, activity and fitness are encouraged through the presence of interesting equipment and support. The acquisition of more specialised skills such as throwing and catching balls, climbing, and the fine motor skills required with some manipulative toys can be supported by professionals who respond to children's interests and efforts.

Possible outcomes within the Framework

Supporting the physical child is an integral part of this Framework, implemented by acknowledging the child as capable and resourceful, honouring diversity and through providing opportunities to experience an environment that promotes the making of meaning and connections.

Children develop:

- Comfort and skill in using their bodies
- Daily living habits, understandings and skills that will enable them to take responsibility for their well-being and the well-being of others as they become capable of doing so.

THE SOCIAL CHILD

If one of the major obligations in a children's services is promoting respectful, life-enhancing relationships, then obviously social development is a major focus of provisions.

Babies are born predisposed to form relationships, and over the first few years the range of skills and understandings increases to expand ways of communicating and relating. In general, over the first years of life, there are several trends in development that impact directly on social development and enable the child to engage increasingly successfully and satisfactorily with other children and adults.

- Increasing ability to "read" the behaviour, expressions, and moods of others
- Increasing empathy
- More skills in communicating and understanding the communication of others
- Increasing orientation to others, less self-centred, resulting in increasing ability to share, take turns, wait
- Less physical dependence on adults
- Greater understanding of the impact of one's own behaviour on others.

EXAMPLE OF A CHILD RELATING IN A CARING WAY

A child fell over in the yard and began to cry. A two year old ran over to him saying, "Are you all right?" as he helped him up.

During the first years of life the ability to show genuine compassion, empathy and concern for others grows. Glimpses can be seen even in older babies by adults who are sufficiently sensitive and "tuned in", and these initial efforts are acknowledged and supported.

Diversity and social development

Learning to get along with others involves a range of skills and understandings, some of which are fundamental, many of which are culturally based. Some of what might be thought of as social skills are really more accurately social conventions and may vary from culture to culture. Examples of this include what is considered to be good manners, views about making or not making eye contact as a sign of respect, and saying please and thank you. It is crucial that professionals seek out information about the conventions of social interaction in other cultures.

There is variation in social skills from culture to culture, depending on what is emphasised and valued. For example, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have highly developed caring skills for younger children at a very early age. Many are also very capable and willing when it comes to sharing and giving to others.

There is also individual variation in social skills and style, just as there is in older children and adults. Some children are much more gregarious than others, seeming to enjoy the company of others most of the time. Other children seem to enjoy and need time on their own, or time when they are with others but separate. While professionals would want all children to be able to be as social as they want to be, as is the case with other areas of development, it is easy for professionals to be guided by an image of the ideal outgoing child, rather than acknowledging and respecting each child as he or she is, and supporting them to be themselves. Supporting social competence requires giving children genuine choices about interactions and relationships.

The relationships of attachment that exist between the child and significant adults form the basis for other social relationships. The younger the child the greater the need to minimise the number of people involved in that child's experience. In other words, in general older preschool aged children

can cope better with more people and more relationships than can babies and toddlers.

How children learn social skills

Children learn many of their social skills from the way they are treated, from the interactions they have with others. Some of the most complex and challenging areas of learning, particularly learning to live in relationship with others, come out of early experiences of relationships. When others respond predictably and consistently, patterns or interactions are built that are based on sensitive responsiveness. These patterns form the basis for further social interactions, which as the child develops become more sustained and more complex.

Skills of negotiation and compromise balanced with appropriate self assertion, ways of showing caring, appropriate ways to convey anger, dealing with fear, working out a balance between ones own wants and interests and those of others are all learned over the early years of life. Learning these things is not just a matter of acquiring skills, but just as importantly, sensitivities, or being able to read the situation and the behaviour of others in order to know when to use the skills.

From infancy, children use their skills actively to engage others. When others respond predictably and consistently, patterns of interactions are built up that are based on sensitive responsiveness. These patterns form the basis for further social interactions, which as the child develops become more sustained and more complex. Of course, individual differences affect these interactions.

Relationships are the most powerful context for learning about the social and physical environments, and contribute to many aspects of development. Through these interactions and relationships, the child learns to communicate and interact, and develops a sense of self. Professionals need to seek actively for times and

situations during the day when these interactions can occur.

EXAMPLE OF A CHILD COMMUNICATING, SHOWING CARING AND RELATING TO ANOTHER CHILD

A new child who did not speak any English started at the centre. There were no other children from her cultural and language background. However, Tahlee formed a special friendship with her. Tahlee said, "I can smile and hold her hand and that is how we can talk." At each transition or when Tahlee was moving to another part of the room she simply smiled and took this child by the hand and off they went.

In addition, what children take from their own experience, the interactions and relationships that they have, is an affirmation of relating, being themselves with others, being honest, being genuine. These are the characteristics of genuine engagement.

Possible outcomes within the Framework

Supporting the social child is an integral part of this Framework. It is implemented by promoting life-enhancing relationships, acknowledging the child as capable and resourceful, honouring diversity and through providing opportunities to experience an environment that promotes the making of meaning and connections.

Children develop:

- Familiarity with and a sense of belonging to the larger community
- Skills in interacting with adults and other children

- Appreciation of others and the benefits of collaboration
- The ability to function as a member of a group, including skills of negotiating, leading, following, conflict resolutions, appropriate assertiveness
- Empathy, caring, a sense of justice, appreciation of the worth of all people
- Comfort with difference, and a commitment to honour diversity
- A sense of fairness, the courage to work to eradicate injustice and racism
- The capacity to control behaviour from within and to be motivated primarily by care and respect for self, others and the environment.

THE FEELING CHILD

Young children experience the range of feelings and emotions experienced by adults. In the past this has been denied, and childhood has been regaled in literature and elsewhere as a time of blissful happy innocence, a totally joyful time when children are oblivious to the unpleasant side of life. This view leads to treating children as somehow less than fully human.

Developing an understanding of feelings

During the first few years of life children become more conscious of feelings. They became able to identify their own feelings and to exercise some control over the expression of them in their behaviour. Through learning about their own feelings children become more conscious of the feelings of others.

Children's expression of feelings is often through actions or play, particularly dramatic play. Expression may be indirect; for example, frustration at not being accepted into a group may manifest itself in the child disrupting the group.

What is desirable is that children come to recognise and accept their feelings. They also need to learn how to express feelings appropriately and to "read" other people and situations. This comes

about as children are better able to judge the impact of their behaviour on others, as their self-awareness increases, as their competence in expressing themselves with language grows, and as their experience expands.

Some children are much more expressive and "easier to read" than others. Those children who do not display their feelings so clearly still have the same depth and range of feelings however. They require professionals who are especially tuned in to them.

The necessity of trusting children is highlighted in the Framework. One dimension of trust is to acknowledge the legitimacy of feelings, to empower children to express feelings in constructive ways rather than keep them to themselves or worse deny their existence. This is part of the bigger message that needs to prevail in a children's service, a message that says to children continually "We can cope with anything that happens here; this is a safe place to be yourself." This message provides one of the major pillars for feelings of security and also engenders respect for others.

Possible outcomes within the Framework

Supporting the feeling child is an integral part of this Framework, implemented by promoting respectful life-enhancing relationships, acknowledging the child as capable and resourceful, honouring diversity and through providing opportunities to experience an environment that promotes the making of meaning and connections.

Children:

- Come to recognise and accept their feelings
- Learn how to express feelings appropriately and to judge the impact of their behaviour on others
- Learn to read other people's feelings and situations.

THE CREATIVE CHILD

Creativity, defined broadly as manifestations of inventiveness, imagination, and originality in behaviour or communication, can be seen at a very early age. When a smiling baby takes a block and bites it as if it were a biscuit, when a toddler puts two words together, when a three year old makes a block construction or a four year old makes up a story, there are elements of creativity present. There is a very close link between creativity and communication. Creativity is self expression, and therefore is a form of communication. Creative thinking and problem solving are creativity of the highest order.

Because creativity can manifest itself in every other area of development, it is the perhaps most inappropriate area of development and learning to discuss in isolation from other areas. It is more appropriate to conceive of *creativities*, as there are many different ways to be creative. Perhaps it is easier to recognise the diverse manifestations of creativity in adults than in children, in part because of narrow notions of the “ideal child”.

The joy of creativity

Young children are creative naturally, and if it is nurtured, creativity will grow and expand as children refine their skills, add to their life experience, and increase their understanding of the world.

Creativity is usually thought of as being a deliberate process, but creativity in children is aligned closely to spontaneity, self-direction and empowerment. Children demonstrate their creativity best in its multiple forms when

- They feel safe and secure
- They know that they can get help when it is needed
- Innovation, self expression and creativity are actively encouraged

- They know that there is time – time to dream and imagine, to plan, to try, to change directions, to start over, to really become engrossed
- They are in a rich environment with many props, equipment and materials that lend themselves to multiple uses
- Dramatic play is valued and encouraged
- Collaboration and group projects are promoted overtly as good ways of working and playing.

Creativity is life enhancing. There is hardly anything more satisfying than being creative, whatever the form. Being creative is self defining, in that a creative act by definition has some quality of uniqueness and originality. This Framework is founded on a view that creativity that emerges from working with others has added value. The product or result (if there is one) is enhanced. In addition, coming up with something original with someone else or in a group forges relationships and connections that would not exist through engagement in solitary pursuits.

Recognising diverse manifestations of creativity

Creativity is connected closely with play. Playful thinking is creative and leads to advancements in thinking and solutions to apparently unsolvable problems.

There are diverse ways of being creative in the first five years of life: painting, drawing, sculpture, collage, movement, singing, drama. In addition to creativity through what are usually called the visual and performing arts, there is creativity in play and creativity in thought.

Professionals acknowledge diverse ways of being creative and encourage them. Encouragement of creativity is something that is pervasive throughout the child's experience in the children's service.

Recognition of creativity in its diverse manifestations and active promotion and celebration of it provides powerful illustrations of putting into practice the notion of the child as capable and resourceful. Children are naturally creative and typically willing and confident in creative endeavours. In contrast, a common assertion of many adults is that they “don’t have a creative bone in their body”! While this is undoubtedly because the common definition of creativity relates it to artistic accomplishment, it is worthwhile for professionals to contemplate what sorts of experiences and messages from adults have led so many people to a perspective that they have no capacity for creativity, so that they can avoid transmitting those messages to children they work with. Professionals in children’s services are caretakers of children’s creativity.

EXAMPLE OF “CONTAGIOUS” CREATIVITY

A large supply of tongue depressors were put out on the collage trolley with tape, fabric, textas and other materials. The children helped one another make some exquisite puppets, which were each very distinctive.

EXAMPLE OF UNEXPECTED CREATIVITY (AND ATTENTION TO DETAIL)

A child began to tape cuttings and drawings to the collage trolley. Another child joined in and they would draw and cut and tape their work to the trolley. These children didn’t usually do a great deal of craft but they worked for several weeks on this “project”, and the drawings were quite intricate. One of the drawings was of one of the children’s grandmothers. When asked what the marks were on her arms, the child said: “Tattoos.”

Possible outcomes within the Framework

Supporting the creative child is an integral part of this Framework implemented by acknowledging the child as capable and resourceful, through honouring diversity and through providing opportunities to experience an environment that promotes the making of meaning and connections.

Children are developing:

- The ability to express ideas using a range of media
- The realisation that some problems do not have an easy solution
- Recognition that many problems have a number of good solutions
- Appreciation of individuality and diversity in approaches and solutions
- An understanding that working creatively and collaboratively to find solutions is an enjoyable activity.

THE SPIRITUAL AND MORAL CHILD

In this Framework, spirituality is about reverence for life and appreciation of beauty in nature and in creative endeavours.

Children are born with a sense of awe and absolute appreciation of the world around them. To be convinced of this, one only has to watch a baby or toddler transfixed by drops of rain falling on a window, the sound of music, or a butterfly, or a group of four year olds mesmerised by a fountain or by fire. Over their first years of life this initial unfettered awe is re-shaped by the values of others around them. In other words, children learn to appreciate what the people around them appreciate. One of the most significant responsibilities that professionals have is to support children to retain the sense of awe and wonder that they are born with, to add to that a

desire to nurture and protect what is beautiful, and to encourage them to appreciate that there are many possibilities for honouring life and the wonders that the world holds.

Developing spirituality

Over their first years of life, children adopt values and perspectives on the human and physical world from those around them. They are developing a sense of what is fair and reasonable, of what is moral. This sense evolves along with cognitive development and increasing capacities to take the perspective of others and to appreciate the impact of one's own behaviour on other people. They learn from their own experience, from what they observe around them, and from what they are told by other people, particularly significant adults. The children's service experience can support children to adopt an attitude of respect and caring for others, and a deep sense of their own obligations to other life.

EXAMPLE OF A VERY YOUNG CHILD APPRECIATING BEAUTY

In the nursery there was a beautiful Chinese satin tablecloth on a small table. A child of about 14 months was touching the fabric with her hand. She put her cheek down on the cloth to feel it on her face, and smiled.

Spirituality as it might be nurtured and encouraged in a children's service is difficult to define, as it is most commonly associated with religion. While religious beliefs and traditions may be brought into the service in some form as they are part of the lives of members of the community, a service, unless its community has one religion shared by all, will not endorse or embrace a particular set of religious customs and beliefs. However, the religious customs and beliefs of all members of the community in the children's service are respected.

The natural environment

Australians are very privileged to live in a rich, varied, and very beautiful physical environment. The heritage of all Australians embodies strong ties to and appreciation of the land, of the natural environment. This reverence and feeling of belonging to the land is a fundamental value particularly for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Children's services have many opportunities to nurture respect for and love of the environment. Children's services as communities, wherever they are — in cities, suburbs, the country, or remote areas — acknowledge and celebrate their setting. This can be done in a variety of ways, and involves using the setting in which the service is located as inspiration for experiences, for places to offer experiences, for materials.

The moral child

Over the first five years of life children gradually acquire ideas of right and wrong, of what is desirable and appropriate behaviour. This understanding develops mainly through the interactions and relationships they have and the sensitive teaching that others around them engage in. Their increasing ability to control their own behaviour, to read and appreciate the feelings of others, and to experience the impact of their own behaviour on others, enables them over time to build up understandings and the capacity to act on those. What is moral or fair often depends on context, culture, religion and many other factors, and is a complex judgment to make even for adults. What is required with young children is help and guidance to develop an internal system of morality that will guide them to be constructive members of the community.

Children's services are microcosms of the larger community. If the values and perspectives that children are supported to adopt as their own are the ones that will serve them for life in the larger community, then it is the responsibility of the

children's service to actively nurture appreciation of the beauty and power in all its manifestations – in nature, music, art – wherever it is found.

Possible outcomes within the Framework

Supporting the spiritual and moral child is an integral part of this Framework, implemented through honouring diversity and through providing opportunities to experience an environment that promotes the making of meaning and connections.

Children develop:

- Respect for and enjoyment of the natural environment and living things
- Appreciation of beauty in its many manifestations
- A sense of what is fair and just.

QUESTIONS AND ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION AND DISCUSSION

1. What are the key theoretical perspectives that underpin your work? How do these impact on your practice?
2. What examples can you think of where a child's cultural background affects the child's development and behaviour?
3. What limitations can be placed on planning and practice if understanding children does not extend beyond traditional developmental areas?
4. Collect examples from your practice with the children you know of each developmental area discussed in this chapter.
5. Focus on a particular area of development for a period of time and look closely at opportunities provided for children.
6. Discuss the implications of focusing on children's strengths. Think about ways of documenting children's development, learning and behaviour that explicitly focus on identifying strengths and providing for those. Discuss any risks associated with doing this.
7. Collect examples from your own work and that of colleagues that illustrate the main points in this chapter.

PARTNERSHIPS WITH PARENTS AND FAMILIES

Contents	Page No.
Benefits of Partnership.....	79
The Meaning of Partnership.....	80
Shared Goals for Children.....	84
Partnerships in Practice.....	84
Cultural and Language Differences.....	87
In Conclusion.....	88
Questions and Issues for Consideration and Discussion.....	89



PARTNERSHIPS WITH PARENTS AND FAMILIES

Parents and other members of the child's family are important members of the children's service community. Not only are they welcomed and invited to become involved, but also most importantly they are collaborators with professionals and the child in the provisions made for children.

The family is the most powerful influence on children's learning and development; therefore it is crucial that children's experience in their family and the family's perspective on the child are taken into account and that professionals operate in partnership with parents on behalf of their child.

The most significant contribution that children's services professionals can make to a child's life is to enhance parents' understanding and appreciation of their child, increase their confidence in carrying out the challenging and enormously complex role of being a parent, and ensure that they understand that they are the most important people in their child's life.

While there are some dimensions of the parenting role that cannot and should not be delegated to anyone else, in many ways the notion embodied in this Framework is that use of a children's services can be likened to sharing parenting, sharing the provisions for the child's childhood.

BENEFITS OF PARTNERSHIP

Children's services are most beneficial to children, families and the broader community when professionals have both an understanding of the concept of partnership and the skills and conditions to put the concepts into practice on a daily basis. The workplace must provide time, opportunities and support to implement partnerships.

Professionals can contribute substantially to parents' picture of their child, through listening to what parents have to say and contributing their own perspective. The benefits are reciprocal, as families enrich and expand the professional's picture of the child through sharing theirs. After all, they know the child over a long time and in different contexts.

The benefits of parent-professional partnerships for children are

- A more coherent experience
- A more meaningful and appropriate experience
- Enhanced feelings of security.

The benefits for parents are

- Increased confidence in the quality of their child's experience
- A clearer picture of their importance in their child's life
- Additional information about their child
- Support for their relationship with their child.

The benefits for professionals are

- A more complete picture of the child
- The satisfaction of contributing to the child's well-being through supporting the parent-child relationship
- Higher regard and greater appreciation by parents of the work of children's services professionals.

Furthermore, everyone within the children's services community benefits from being active members of the community, contributing to its life and progress.

EXAMPLE OF A CHILD BENEFITING FROM COMPATIBILITY OF HOME EXPERIENCE AND THAT IN THE CHILDREN'S SERVICE

Jonah's family wants him to tell them what he needs. The speech therapist is teaching him a small number of signs, which the family uses at home. He can use the sign for 'want'. The professional can use occasions when she can give Jonah a choice, such as at meal times and when choosing a book to look at with him, to ask him which he wants.

EXAMPLE OF THE IMPORTANCE OF KNOWING THE CONTEXT IN WHICH THE CHILD LIVES

Jasmine often looked sleepy on arrival at the centre and was mostly passive and uncommunicative, looking blankly at a puzzle, toying with lunch, only beginning to look more alert in the afternoon playing with jewelry in front of the mirror. Was she unwell, was it her lack of English, was it her culturally defined style of interaction? Talks with family members revealed that Jasmine stayed up late at the family restaurant and liked to go to drive-in movies with her aunts when the restaurant closed. Negotiating her sleep patterns with the centre took some time and care and resulted in a very different understanding of Jasmine's abilities.

THE MEANING OF PARTNERSHIP: WHAT IT IS NOT

Partnership is complex. In children's services it is sometimes confused with other relationships. Partnership is not the same as friendship. Everyone working in a children's service has to be clear about the nature of the desired relationship, and about the distinction between a warm professional relationship and friendship. Although they have elements in common, the first is appropriate, the second is not.

It does not happen when professionals see themselves as taking the place of parents and family. It is desirable for children to feel "at home" in children's services, meaning that they feel comfortable and secure and develop a sense of belonging. It is also desirable for children and the professionals who work with them to develop relationships of attachment. However, professionals in children's services must avoid falling into the trap of seeing themselves as taking the place of parents. Children's services are a support to the parental and family role, not a replacement or substitute for them.

Partnership is not the same as involvement

A strong tradition of parent involvement has underpinned the operation of early childhood programs from their inception. However, traditional notions of parent involvement do not fit well with contemporary children's services, particularly child care, for a number of reasons. One of the main reasons is that many parents work and are available on only a very limited basis. Partnership in this Framework goes far beyond parents coming in to help out, and far beyond parents being the recipients of advice and information from professionals, although these may be components of some partnerships.

The most valuable way for parents to be involved is to be involved in their child's experience and life. This is much more valuable than participation in management or contributing to the operation of the service, although these are valuable and opportunities are available to parents who are interested. It is easier to figure out ways for parents to be involved in the operation of service than to work in partnership with them.

EXAMPLE OF A PARENT CONTRIBUTING TO THE SERVICE AND SHARING AN EXPERIENCE WITH HIS CHILD

A small vase with flowers was kept on a table in the entrance to the centre. The staff began to notice that someone (other than the staff) was changing the flowers, and then a stick started appearing each time the flowers were changed. Later a staff member saw a father and his son changing the flowers. Staff respected that they did not want to identify themselves. Much later the father was thanked for what he and his son were doing. The father said he was grateful to be able to continue the ritual and to share this special task with his son.

Involvement is a means to an end, not an end in itself. At the same time it is important for a children's services to provide a variety of ways for parents and other family members to "connect" with the service. Some parents will want to be involved; others will not or will not have the time and energy to do so. Involvement can assist the formation of partnerships, but it is not the same thing. It is possible to have a partnership with parents without them being involved in the operation of the service. Involvement is optional, partnership is not.

Ways to be involved are typically defined and prescribed by professionals, which means that the professional retains the power. Working in partnership necessarily carries with it handing over power to parents. Even when parents are encouraged to work with children alongside professionals they can feel unempowered if they feel constrained, restricted to specific tasks or ways of doing things, or unsure about the "right" way to do things.

What is partnership?

Partnership is a term used commonly to describe close personal or business relationships between two adults. The meaning of partnership in those two contexts applies also to partnerships between professionals and parents in children's services.

The characteristics of successful partnerships both within and outside of children's services include the following:

- Mutual trust and respect
- Empathy, the ability to take the perspective of the other
- Acceptance and appreciation of the different perspective of the other
- A common goal or purpose
- Complementary strengths and contributions, and recognition and appreciation of those
- Commitment to on-going communication
- Shared decision making
- Willingness to compromise.

In early childhood intervention *family centred practice* is the term used to refer to professionals working with parents and family members. There is very much a focus of looking at the child in the context of her or his family, and empowering the family to make decisions about their child. The concept requires professionals to share power with parents, in fact to be comfortable with a relationship where parents actually have more power than professionals.

The challenge of partnership

Working in partnership with parents is challenging. Some professionals would assert that it is the most challenging part of their role. The reasons can be classified loosely into three clusters: the context, the focus, and differences. While some of these challenges exist across all forms of children's services, others apply largely or exclusively to centre based and family day care.

The context

There may be confusion on the part of both professionals and parents about roles, responsibilities, and expectations, and in fact about the very nature of the relationship.

There is also the constraint of time. When parents are working or training, partnerships have to be forged largely in brief bits of time at the beginning and end of the day or session. Not only are these times brief and sporadic, but they come at awkward times of the day, when both parents and professionals have other responsibilities. For successful partnerships to happen, they must be understood and valued at all levels in the service, and by parents.

In the case of child care, some parents may have to use the service but would prefer not to. In other situations, parents who have chosen to use child care for other than financial reasons may still feel uncertain about the wisdom of their decision. Many are likely to feel some ambivalence and some will feel guilty. To add to the complexity, among professionals in child care there is a range of views about the appropriateness of using child care for very young children. A belief that all parents who can afford to should stay at home when their children are young, even if this view is not communicated directly, is an obstacle to partnerships with such parents.

Partnership is made more difficult because of a natural tendency to “blame the other” if problems arise. Parents and professionals are invested in believing that they are doing a good job with the child. As professionals come to know a child and a warm relationship of attachment develops, it is easy to slip into being critical of parents, and to operate with a conviction that any problems the child has are the result of the home and family experience. Parents, especially those who may be ambivalent about using the service, are likely to be predisposed to put responsibility on the service for anything they are unhappy about in their child’s

behaviour. Only when the partnership is a genuine one where parents and professionals work in collaboration is there a sense of shared responsibility and no desire to blame.

A critical element of the context is the simple and complex fact that when parents use a children’s service, they are entrusting the well-being of their child to people who usually are initially strangers. Because of the significance of this, parents are not likely to trust professionals until they are confident that their child is catered for, valued, and cared for. Until they do trust, they are continually looking for signs that everything is okay. They are likely to continue to look for positive signs throughout their participation, but that basic trust becomes a sturdy platform or foundation on which further evidence is placed.

The focus

The relationship between parents and professionals is complicated by their different priorities. It is inevitable, and in fact desirable, that parents’ interests and concerns are focused on their child. The professional on the other hand, must provide for all children and families in the group. In other words, no service can be ideal for any one child or family because it must cater for a number of diverse children and families. But then that is the nature of any community.

It is easy for professionals, whose major focus is the well-being of children, to overlook an obvious fact that bears on parent-staff partnerships, namely that parents are people, not just parents. They have other roles and responsibilities, which may mean that they cannot always put the child first. It is easy for professionals to become very critical of parents who seem to be giving priority to someone or something other than the child in the service.

Parents vary in their feelings of competence and confidence in their child rearing. Some parents may feel overwhelmed, alienated, and ashamed

because they are not able to cope, and some lack confidence. Consequently they may appear to be willing to hand over the parenting role and hand over responsibility for their child. One of the greatest challenges as a professional is figuring out how to support those parents by providing some temporary relief and at same time re-inforcing the idea that they are the most important people in their child's life.

There may be some parents who, precisely because professionals are skilled and competent, expect them to take over responsibilities for everything about their child. If those parents feel powerless in society, and/or have been victims of racism and discrimination, then they may rightly believe that the professional in the children's service is in a more powerful position to deal with other professionals on behalf of their child. If they have no extended family and are used to strong family ties and extended family involvement in child rearing, they may see the children's service as taking on that role.

Professionals must be sympathetic to their situation and clear about the limits of their own expertise and the role of the service. They have a role to play in assisting families to access services that can help them.

Difference

The term *difference* is used in two ways in this discussion. Difference refers firstly to the perspectives, based on their role and prior experience, that parents and professionals bring to the experience of a children's service.

Professionals bring experience of many children, many bring knowledge and understanding based on formal study, and as professionals they all bring appropriate objectivity and professionalism to their relationship with any child. Parents on the other hand, hopefully bring to the children's service an absolute passion about their child, deep and broad experience of the child from birth, a strong

emotional bond, and a commitment to a lifelong relationship. This means that parents cannot be objective about their child, and should not be expected to be so.

Sometimes professionals forget to acknowledge this difference in perspective and can fall into the trap of almost wishing or even expecting that parents will think as they do, know what they know, act as they act. For example, they may be critical of parents who succumb to the barrage of propaganda about early learning of traditional school related skills, or who discipline their children in certain ways, or who worry when their child has his second birthday and still shows no signs of being interested in learning to use the toilet.

The best partnership happens when the complementary perspectives of parents and professionals are brought to bear on the child.

Difference also refers to the range of ways that parents will differ from one another. The children's service community is a microcosm of the larger community, so all the differences in the larger community will be reflected in the children's services community. Families will differ in life experiences and personal characteristics in the following ways: culture, language, religion, family composition, lifestyle, values, personality, style of interaction, degree of child orientation, extent of career or work orientation, engagement in communication with staff and involvement in the operation of the service, attitudes to the children's service, educational level, child rearing beliefs, how much they want to know about what goes on in the service, and how much and what information they are willing to share with professionals, among many others.

The differences in the perspectives of parents and professionals has been discussed. Developing a partnership requires both parties to learn about their differences as a basis for respecting them. The greater the differences however, the more

important it is for professionals and parents to have a robust partnership based on considerable on-going sharing of information about the child.

Partnerships are challenging ultimately because they require the utmost of professional judgment and wisdom on the part of the professional. Compromise is necessary on occasion and good will is essential. Professionals may have to let go of what they might consider “best practice” if it is not what parents want. Professionals may have to acknowledge and deal with their own biases and prejudices. At the same time they will need to be absolutely clear about areas where they cannot or are not willing to compromise, areas where they will negotiate and compromise with parents, and areas where parents make the decision.

SHARED GOALS FOR CHILDREN

Families will have varying expectations about the children's service. However, a common goal for most families is that the service will provide children with an environment where they are safe and well cared for, where there are opportunities to develop mutually satisfying relationships with other adults and children and where there are interesting things to do.

Parents and professionals would mostly agree on medium and long-term goals for children. Most would want children to:

- Maximise and take full advantage of their life chances
- Do well at school
- Eventually find work that is meaningful and rewarding to them and that provides them with the financial means to have what they need
- Have meaningful and positive relationships with others
- Have a healthy lifestyle
- Realise their potential in as many areas as possible

- Become constructive contributing members of the community.

Points of difference between parents and professionals may arise however on how to achieve those goals. As examples, parents may believe that it is only through very strict discipline that children learn to balance their wishes with others, while professionals may support a gentler approach. Parents may believe that the best way to ensure success in school is to get children to learn letters and numbers and to engage in highly structured activities at a very early age, while professionals may be strongly opposed to these approaches. Genuine partnership means that the professional has to engage seriously with these differences and work out a way through in collaboration with parents.

It is easy to go along with parents' perspective when they share the same views as the professionals. When they do not, it is easy to distort the notion of shared decision making by turning it into “I'll do my best to persuade them to adopt my point of view”. Such an attitude does not reflect genuine partnership or an appreciation of multiple perspectives.

PARTNERSHIPS IN PRACTICE

Embracing the sentiment of parent-professional partnerships is a very different matter to putting the concepts into practice on a daily basis. Initial contacts are important in setting the stage for partnership, but the desirability, the necessity, for partnerships is re-inforced in daily practice. The professional takes the lead - it is not sufficient to be receptive. The rhetoric in the service's policy document, the assertion that parents are welcomed any time, that they share any concerns that they have, that they are expected to make requests and these will always be given consideration (although not always agreed to) is lived out in daily practice.

What follows are selected examples of ways to encourage and promote partnerships by ensuring

that the messages of partnership are evident in every aspect of service operation. It is imperative that all professionals are clear about the centrality of partnership, and what that means. It cannot be assumed that even if professionals are clear, parents will simply pick it up.

The message about partnership is presented in a variety of different ways, but most importantly through daily interactions.

- Have a strong vision or philosophy statement that includes partnership.
- Ensure that there are clear, up-to-date comprehensive policies that guide current practice, and that the notion of partnership is clear and visible in those policies.
- Be predisposed to accept individual differences. Toss aside singular notions of the “ideal” parent. Just as is the case with children, interactions with parents are individualised. There is no formula.
- Establish a clear common vision of the scope and limitations of what the service offers, and the importance of partnerships.
- Try to ensure that the expectations, obligations and roles of both parents and professionals are clear to all. Some significant examples of areas where clarity and common understanding are needed if tensions are to be avoided are: who is responsible for the child’s behaviour when both the parent and a professional are present; confidentiality with regard to other children and families in the service; parents’ roles in relation to other children (for example, if other children behave inappropriately); appropriate lines of communication if there is a complaint or a problem.
- Work out with each parent a plan for settling in the child. Be open about the aim of that process also being to help the parent to feel comfortable and secure leaving their child. Parents need to know that there is not an expectation that they will feel confident about their child’s experience immediately.
- Put in place clear ways of resolving inevitable conflicts and tensions. They can be dealt with much more easily and effectively in the context of a comfortable robust positive relationship than in a fragile, negative, or non-existent one, or where there is little or no relationship.
- Establish a culture where professionals support each other to work constructively with all parents. Accept that there may be parents with whom relationships and communication are difficult to achieve, and work out ways to ensure that those parents have every opportunity for partnership.
- Provide a welcoming entry, and places for parents to sit comfortably (some adult sized chairs). If it can be done safely, provide them with the opportunity to help themselves to coffee or tea.
- Encourage parents, without pressuring them, to be involved in a variety of ways: membership on management or advisory committees, contribution of materials, participation on committees, organisation of and participation in community events, policy development, equipment repairs, facilities improvement, contribution of specialist skills (for example, computer skills), participation and assistance with the children’s program.
- Find ways to involve interested parents as direct contributors to children’s experiences by using their own interests, talents, resources and ideas in the service.
- Provide information to parents in a variety of ways and in as many community languages as possible: newsletters, notices posted on notice boards, individual notices, and most important, through verbal communication with staff. Never let other ways of communicating be seen as adequate substitutes for face-to-face conversations.

- Resolve to give parents all the positive feedback, the “good news”, that can honestly be given about their child.
- Be thoughtful about how to talk to a parent about a problem, difficulty or concern about their child. There will be occasions when the concern is a minor one, and professionals may decide to work on it themselves, and not raise it immediately. This decision has to be weighed against a parent wanting to know, and wondering why they were not told.
- Try to maintain a perspective of honest optimism when discussing a problem with parents, as their reaction will be influenced by the tone of the professional.
- Most importantly, work to establish habits of an easy flow of communication.

EXAMPLE OF LETTING PARENTS IN ON THE THINKING BEHIND WHAT HAPPENS

The following is an item from a parent newsletter:

The Environment as Curriculum
or
Why We Set Things Up the Way We Do

You may notice from time to time that there are changes in the way the room is set up and the activities arranged. Sometimes these changes are small, other times quite major.

During first term, as we programme for the children, we have several objectives:

The children will:

- Feel comfortable in an environment other than their home
- Feel secure and valued by adults other than their parents
- Become accustomed to routines and expectations of pre-school
- Begin to develop a repertoire of social skills and be comfortable with other people, respecting social and cultural diversity
- Experience being one of a larger group
- Become familiar with the range of equipment and activities available
- Understand the need for respect and safe handling of equipment and resources.

The staff will:

- Develop a warm, trusting relationship with each child and their family
- Foster within the group a sense of collaboration, empathy and group identity
- Observe each child carefully to better understand their skills and interests

- Develop an appropriate programme based on these observations to extend each child
- Evaluate the programme, using these as a basis for future programming.

These objectives had a direct bearing on the way the room was set up, which activities were provided, and how they were offered.

As mentioned in staff reports, children and staff have settled well into the flow of the year. All these major objectives have been achieved. We are now ready to take some next steps.

In order to support the next steps of growth and development, which will include:

- Becoming more autonomous in their learning
- Confidence using equipment and materials
- Recognising and pursuing their unique interests and approaches
- Extending and refining skills and understandings
- Becoming increasingly confident to think critically and solve problem.

We have made some major changes in the room.

We have established writing, collage, and clay areas, which will remain set up each day so that children will be able to pursue and extend an interest, become competent and creative with materials. They will be extended by the regular addition of resource materials and stimulus activities such as excursions, visitors, input from families, spontaneous happenings and arrivals!

We value any observations and comments you may have, as we recognise your unique perspective on your child's progress and interests. Feel free to jot these down in the daily diary.

CULTURAL AND LANGUAGE DIFFERENCES

Some of the differences between professionals and parents related to children's experiences can be attributed to differences in cultural background. Taking care to avoid pre-conceived notions based on stereotypes, professionals need to inform themselves about the cultural backgrounds of the families in the service. Within any cultural group there are vast individual differences, so professionals avoid making generalisations or assumptions about any family. What matters most is creating a culture of negotiated experience and openness, and encouraging parents to tell professionals what is important to them.

Some cultural groups, for example, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, operate generally with much more of a notion of communal responsibility for children than do Anglo-Australians. This impacts on parents' perceptions of the role of children's services, as they may expect it to operate like extended family. Also, parents may expect the service to have close contact with grandparents, older siblings, or other family members rather than parents who bring and pick up children rather than with them.

There may be varying expectations of different types of children's services by different cultural groups. For example, some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families as well as members of some other cultural groups may view children's service as potentially or actually moving children away from their culture and therefore away from their family. Professionals working within this Framework assure families through their daily communication and practice that honouring diversity is a major obligation of the service.

Some parents may have a strong expectation that children's services will provide "formal education", mainly structured experiences that will prepare children for school, and that the children's service will look and feel much like a school.

Perhaps even more challenging than cultural differences are lifestyle and value differences. In other words, it may be easier to respond positively to a practice or a request that is clearly the result of cultural background than one that comes from a parent from the same cultural background as the professional. Reflective professionals examine their own biases, acknowledging these to themselves and maybe even to their colleagues, and then ensure that the biases do not impact on interactions and relationships.

The critical importance of communication

Developing partnerships requires on-going communication. It is through listening to, speaking with, negotiating and debating with others that solutions to problems are found.

There is great merit in sharing with family members the complexities and challenges associated with working with children. This requires going beyond simply displaying completed plans or programs. Displayed documentation about projects, conversations, problems children have encountered and solutions explored helps families appreciate what is happening in the children's service. In addition, families can contribute information about their child and their ideas.

Professionals need to be mindful of their communication, and observant about the feedback from it.

IN CONCLUSION

To truly open oneself up to a genuine partnership with parents is to expose one's professional expertise to scrutiny and to relinquish the power that the professional holds traditionally simply by virtue of being the professional. Engaging in partnership intensifies the requirement for professional judgement, thinking on one's feet, embracing compromise. Engaging in genuine partnerships also requires a great deal of confidence on the part of the professional, a trust of self that eliminates the need to adhere slavishly to dogma, formulae, or facile solutions to complex issues and tensions. Perhaps the hardest challenge for a children's services professional to meet on a daily basis is that of taking seriously the notion of the child's experience in the service as a negotiated one.

QUESTIONS AND ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION AND DISCUSSION

1. What is the evidence in your practice of working in partnership with parents?
2. Do you find some parents easier to have a partnership with than others? Why?
3. What are the kinds of parent involvement available in your service?
4. To what extent do the policies in your service support partnership? Do any of them need to be altered? Do you need any new ones?
5. How do you find out information about the cultures represented in your service?
6. How do you encourage parents and other family members to share information with you about the child?
7. Think about conducting a survey of parents to find out what they think about the degree of partnership in the service.
8. Discuss notions of the ideal parent. How do these differ among professionals in the service? How might they impact on practice?
9. Discuss the difference between parent involvement and working in partnership with parents.
10. It may be the case that the most effective ways to engage parents in the implementation of this Framework is to let them see and hear the changes it brings about. Discuss how your service might work in partnership with parents to implement the Framework.
11. Collect examples from your own work and that of colleagues that illustrate the main points in this chapter.



THE CHILDREN'S SERVICE AS A COMMUNITY

Contents	Page No.
Diversity.....	93
Promoting Relationships and Connections.....	94
Rights and Responsibilities of Individuals.....	94
Creating a Learning Culture.....	95
The Children's Service in the Wider Community.....	96
Questions and Issues for Consideration and Discussion.....	98

THE CHILDREN'S SERVICE AS A COMMUNITY

Children's services operate as microcosms of desirable larger communities. As professionals practise in ways that reflect a desirable larger community, children are supported to adopt values, attitudes and ways of living that will enable them to be effective members of the broader communities in which they live now and will live in the future.

A children's service is much more than a collection of individuals committed to working together. It is an organisation with structures, policies, procedures, a history, a vision for the future, and just as important but perhaps less often articulated, its own culture or way of currently operating. The relationships and connections that exist between management and staff, among people who work in the service, and between professionals in the service and those outside are very important in influencing the practice with children and families.

This Framework, as it relates directly to the daily experiences of children in the service, can be implemented fully only if there is a shared vision and sense of common purpose among professionals, parents, and those who manage, fund, regulate, and support the institution. It is not simply a matter of these people appreciating the rationale behind what is provided for children; rather the operation of the service overall must mirror the principles that inform the children's experience. In other words, the service itself operates with a clear vision that the major obligations are to promote constructive, life enhancing relationships, to practise in ways that acknowledge the capabilities and resourcefulness of children, to work to help children make meaningful connections, and to honour diversity.

The quality of the leadership is undoubtedly the single most significant contributor to the culture of an organisation. The leadership of a service implementing the Framework needs to be strong, grounded in a vision, empowering of others, committed to collaboration, and illustrative of the

ways of working that are central to the Framework.

In a service that implements the Framework everyone feels empowered to use their abilities, to be their best selves for the sake of children's well-being.

The discussion of children's services as communities will focus on three of the main overlapping themes of the Framework:

- Diversity
- Promotion of relationships and connections, both within the service and with individuals and organisations in the larger community.
- The creation and maintenance of a learning culture within the service, a culture of reflection, on-going evaluation, openness to change, openness to diversity, and continuous improvement.

DIVERSITY

A children's service that is a microcosm of a desirable community reflects the diversity that makes communities rich and complex. This diversity manifests itself in age, gender, cultural, religious and language backgrounds, in lifestyles, dress styles, hair styles, personal styles, interests, personalities, and in many other ways. Ideally, among the professionals who work in a children's service diversity in these and other ways will be manifest.

It is ideal to have among the professionals a range of cultural and language backgrounds, both genders, different ages, but what is most important is visibility of a range of types of diversity. Diversity goes beyond culture however, and a service that operates as a desirable community embraces diversity in background, level of education and qualification, life experience – the richness of human diversity. Diverse views and perspectives are not simply tolerated, but welcomed as a catalyst for generating better ideas and solutions to problems.

Of particular importance is having professionals working with children and families who are from the cultural and language backgrounds of the families using the service and of the local community. If the families using the service are from a single cultural background, especially if it is an Anglo-Australian background, then finding ways of incorporating cultural diversity in an authentic way, ideally through recruiting staff from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, is even more important.

It is not enough to just have cultural diversity among the staff. Professionals are empowered and supported to “live” and use aspects of their culture naturally and comfortably in the daily operation of the service. It must be kept in mind, however, that professionals from the non-dominant cultures in the service are not solely responsible for providing the multicultural dimension. Embracing diversity in a children’s service is much more than everyone “doing their culture”. Supporting children to be comfortable with diversity is everyone’s responsibility. To do this well, professionals have the confidence to recognise their own biases and prejudices, as the first step toward doing something to eliminate them or at least to ensure that they are not communicated.

There are unfortunately relatively few males working in children’s services, relatively few older people, and relatively few people with disabilities. The point that was made about cultural diversity applies also however to other kinds of differences, in that approximating real desirable communities involves including diversity of all kinds.

It is accepted that when people who are diverse are working so closely together in an endeavour that they care so much about, tensions and conflicts are inevitable. Services with a learning culture do not hide or ignore these, but accept them with the idea that from the constructive resolution of these can come progress and positive outcomes.

PROMOTING RELATIONSHIPS AND CONNECTIONS

Operational and structural decisions about such matters as adult-child ratios, group size, the balance of qualified and unqualified staff, rostering, what is done about relief staff, the use of full time, part-time and casual staff, rotation, and planning for absences have direct impact on the quality of the experience for children and their parents. Most particularly the decisions made about such issues affect directly the quality of the relationships that develop between professionals and young children. In general, the younger the child the more important it is for the child to be in a small group and to minimise the total number of people working directly with the child, in order to help the child form secure relationships of attachment.

In centre-based child care the Framework supports putting in place a primary caregiving system, especially for the youngest children but ideally for all children. Each child should have one professional who takes main, but not exclusive, responsibility for that child’s experience and who becomes the authority on that child. Primary caregiving supports close relationships between children and professionals, and between professionals and parents. The Framework also supports professionals staying with a group of children as long as possible so that relationships build.

RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF INDIVIDUALS

Being a member of a community carries with it rights and responsibilities. In any community, tensions can exist between the rights of individuals and their responsibilities to the group, or to other members of the group. Societies and communities document strategies for resolving these tensions, and set standards or rules to be observed. Children’s services exist within a legislative context, and operate within policies and laws.

As communities themselves, they must document policies and procedures that protect and guide all members of the children's service community – management, professionals, and families through detailing rights and responsibilities.

Written, accurate, up-to-date policies to underpin practice must be in place. Rather than restricting diversity and creativity, good policies provide a foundation that supports them. A process of regular review ensures that policy and practice match and that there are not areas of practice that have emerged for which there is no basis in policy. If everyone on whom the service impacts is involved in the development and review of policy there is a sense of shared ownership.

The implementation of policies requires clear, efficient and effective management and administration. Procedures are developed to improve the provisions made for children and families and to support professionals in their work.

In addition, current and detailed job descriptions encourage collaboration by making roles and responsibilities clear, and at the same time ensuring that there is an appropriate balance between clarity about roles and appropriate flexibility.

The critical importance of strong, effective and inclusive leadership has been mentioned. This includes clarity also about delegation and responsibility.

There is also a great need for absolute clarity about the responsibilities of management and employees of the service, especially the distinction between policy development and implementation of policy.

Children will learn about their rights and responsibilities through being assisted to live out human responsibility for self, others, and the physical world.

CREATING A LEARNING CULTURE

The conceptualisation of a children's service as a learning community implies that all members of the community, adults as well as children, create and maintain a learning culture. A learning culture is a culture of reflection, on-going evaluation, openness to change, openness to diversity, and continuous improvement. Professionals are thinkers, alert to new possibilities, willing to take risks, and looking continually at their practice reflectively with the aim of improving it. The Framework will thrive in a service where professionals are encouraged to work together, to share ideas and problems, and where there is sufficient confidence to expose one's own practice to the scrutiny of others.

The creation of a learning culture translates into seeing each professional involved in the service as having particular strengths, and creating a workplace that capitalises on those strengths. While it is essential that to recognise that everyone has strengths to contribute to the well-being of children, this Framework endorses acknowledging explicitly the knowledge, skills and understandings that come from undertaking formal study. While a strongly hierarchical staffing structure does not support implementation of the Framework, neither does a workplace where it is assumed that everyone knows as much as everyone else, and that the roles and responsibilities of various staff members are completely interchangeable.

Particular strengths, talents, and interests of individual professionals in the service are identified and used. For example, someone who is particularly talented in thinking of clever ways to use re-cycled materials with children could be given assistance to set up a display or give an informal in-service session. Even when the interests and talents are not those that might immediately be thought of as appropriate to use with children, they can often be used anyway. This Framework encourages professionals to think

when it comes to children's experiences. For example, someone who collects masks, has a passion for jazz, bakes wonderful bread, is a keen tennis player, or who is a competent gardener could share those interests with children in ways that are meaningful to the children.

In a more general way, tapping strengths is also about recognising the characteristics of people and matching their responsibilities with what they are good at. For example, someone who is highly organised and tidy might be put in charge of the storage areas. This is not a glamorous responsibility, but an important one, and if it is not taken for granted but appreciation is shown, then it assists in engendering a feeling of belonging and making a valued contribution.

A workplace with a learning culture supports collaboration. Collaboration requires communication. A culture of communication can be established, where everyone feels that they know what is going on. Just as was recommended in the section on partnerships with parents, a variety of ways of communicating can be used. Similarly, staffing patterns acknowledge the need for professionals to communicate, and allow overlap to do so.

Obviously there need to be opportunities to actually get together to reflect together on practice, explore new possibilities and plan.

Success, achievement, and progress are celebrated. Just as is the case with children, acknowledgment of hard work and sustained effort of professionals is essential.

Many and varied opportunities are provided for professionals to expose themselves to new ideas, alternative approaches to working with children through participation in workshops, seminars, lectures, and conferences; reading; visiting other services; discussion.

THE CHILDREN'S SERVICE IN THE WIDER COMMUNITY

A children's service is located in a particular community and takes into account in its operation the local context in which it operates.

Responsibility to the community

Children's services are accountable to their community. A service needs to be comfortable with the continual requirement to justify its existence and to take seriously the expectations of the community, either by meeting them, or if it is not able to do so justifying why it cannot. When those expectations cannot be met, whether because of inadequate resources, licensing requirements, or professional orientation and values, the community is owed a non-defensive explanation.

Connections with communities

A children's service should be firmly embedded in the wider community, in the children's services professional community, and in the community of services that support children's well-being and families' child rearing functions. An active effort is made within each service to reach out and sink roots into the rest of the community, to become part of a strong network where support is both provided and received. This results in families being more aware of what is available to support them and more grounded in the community, the service accessing resources for its operation, and a vision of children's services as an integral part of any community that purports to provide for families and children in a helpful way.

There need to be particularly strong links with other children's services that the children attend so that the child's experience can be as meaningful and 'seamless' as possible.

It is especially important to have strong links with the schools that the children will attend in the future.

Participating in a children's service should be a means of the child being in the community rather than being taken out of it.

EXAMPLES OF LINKS WITH THE COMMUNITY

A centre has a relationship with the local community library. Approximately three times a term someone comes with stories or videos for about an hour. They also bring new books as well as old favourites. One of the aims is to encourage families to visit their local library.

About once a month a staff member goes to the local newsagent who saves for the centre any unsold newspapers that are in other languages. He simply removes the "header" on the front page and the centre gets the rest. These are used in the book corner, for painting and collage, in the home corner, and to cover easels or tables.

In summary, children's services work best when both the community that is the children's service and the broader community are committed to a common purpose: supporting the well-being and learning of children. It is the role of the professional to ensure that links and partnerships with the outside community, including businesses, community organisations, other professional organisations that serve children and families, and particularly schools, are strong. This is advocacy of the highest order for children and families.

QUESTIONS AND ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION AND DISCUSSION

1. What are the major strengths and interests of the professionals working in the service? Are these used well in providing for children and families?
2. To what extent does the diversity in the professionals in your service reflect the diversity among the families who use the service and the local community?
3. What are the organisations, businesses and individual professionals that your service has strong links with? Could they be strengthened? If so how?
4. Are there organisations with which you need to establish links?
5. What are some examples of recent practice that involve children being in the community?
6. Think about the values that lie behind the practice with children in your service. Discuss the extent to which they reflect the values of a desirable community.
7. Think about what can be done to highlight diversity throughout your service.
8. Collect examples from your own work and that of colleagues that illustrate the main points of this chapter.

THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT AS TEACHER

Contents	Page No.
The Scope of the Environment.....	101
Supporting the Children's Service as a Community.....	101
Encouraging Relationships and Interactions Between Children.....	102
Relationships and Interactions Between Children and Adults.....	103
The Child as Capable and Resourceful.....	103
A Rich Array of Materials.....	104
Reflecting the Children's Service Community.....	105
Attention to Beauty.....	105
The Outdoor Environment.....	105
Promoting the Values of the Service.....	106
Questions and Issues for Consideration and Discussion.....	107

THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT AS TEACHER

Human behaviour is influenced greatly by the physical environment. The environment includes physical spaces and materials, both indoors and outdoors. The environment teaches, affords opportunities to make meaning and connections, affects mood, guides children's behaviour, and influences interactions. The environment is a major contributor to children's experience in a children's service.

THE SCOPE OF THE ENVIRONMENT

The physical environment in a children's service is much more than a backdrop for children's experiences. It is a major provider of opportunities and possibilities. More broadly it is a literal depiction of the identity, traditions, priorities, history and vision of the service. It has been asserted early in this Framework that the professional as the decision-maker is the major contributor to the experience of children in children's services. One of the professional's significant roles is architect and designer of the environment and the gate-keeper who determines what children have access to in order to construct meaning. The arrangement of the environment and what is in it reflect the image of the child that professionals hold.

Any environment presents both constraints and possibilities. Certainly, in children's services there is a range of physical spaces, from new environments thoughtfully designed and constructed specifically for the purpose they serve, to spaces that once matched the need of the service but no longer do (too small, too open, inaccessible storage), to converted spaces, to multipurpose spaces such as family day care homes, to temporary spaces that have to be set up and dismantled each time they are used. The Framework can be implemented fully in each of these environments.

Taking care of the physical environment supports a feeling among the people who use it that they and the things that happen in it are valued. In this way, the physical environment mirrors practice.

Encouraging children to care for and respect the physical environment both indoors and outdoors also engenders a sense of belonging and is one hallmark of a healthy community.

The full implementation of this Framework would be obvious in the physical environment of a service even when no one is present in it. In other words:

- It is obvious that relationships and collaboration are encouraged.
- There is evidence that children as seen as capable and resourceful.
- It is clear that this is a place that supports a range of appropriate opportunities for learning.
- The lives, surroundings, and interests of members of the community, especially children, are reflected.
- There is a rich array of materials accessible to children to engage with.
- There is evidence of diversity.
- There is attention to beauty and aesthetics.
- There is evidence of the processes as well as the products of children's experiences. This evidence is for children, professionals, and parents. This visibility of engagement encourages discussion and debate, which are hallmarks of a learning community.

SUPPORTING THE CHILDREN'S SERVICE AS A COMMUNITY

The environment must work not only for the children who use it. If the service is a community, then the environment, while focused primarily on the wellbeing of children, is comfortable for parents and professionals as well.

The physical environment conveys a strong message of welcome and belonging to parents. This is achieved in many ways, including:

- the availability of sufficient safe and accessible parking
- a place to store children's belongings
- attractive notice boards with a range of information for parents (in appropriate languages)
- provision of an easy way for parents to jot down information for professionals
- a suggestion box
- an arrangement of space whereby the director or manager of the service is easily accessible to parents
- photographs of families
- a place to stop and have a cup of tea or coffee
- a space for entering and exiting the child's room so that parents do not feel that they are in the way.

The environment supports professionals to be capable, resourceful and responsive.

An organised and orderly environment, with materials and supplies at hand in accessible storage, frees up time and energy for interactions and for collaboration with children.

The presence of some furniture that is comfortable for adults, such as sofas and chairs, encourages warm physical interactions between adults and children.

Places for breaks, places for adults to meet for discussion provide opportunities for the development of adult relationships.

ENCOURAGING RELATIONSHIPS AND INTERACTIONS BETWEEN CHILDREN

Having sufficient space that is well organised promotes positive interactions by not forcing children to be in close contact with each other. Sufficient well-organised space allows children to concentrate and play alone or with one or two other children. When the amount of space is inadequate children are forced to be close to each other, and consequently they are likely to interfere with each other and with each others' endeavours, especially if they are babies or toddlers. Even if children are participating for only a brief period of time, and most definitely when they come to the service for an extended period of time, there need to be places to "withdraw" safely, to take oneself out of the group or to be in pairs or small groups.

Relationships and interactions are encouraged by the choice of equipment and materials and the ways they are arranged and grouped. A service that implements this Framework, regardless of the age of the children in the service, will provide many opportunities for children to experience the satisfaction and pleasure of interacting with each other. The younger the children, the more challenging it may be to engage in sustained co-operation, but even babies enjoy playing together, for example, taking turns filling a container with sand, or chasing each other on hands and knees through a large appliance carton made into a cardboard tunnel. The older the children the more capable they are of being in close contact with other children without interfering with them. This means that even issues such as how close to each other children are at mealtimes are a consideration.

Providing materials that encourage co-operation or even parallel contributions support interactions. For example, a large surface (table or paper) for finger painting or a piece of pipe the weight of

which requires two children to carry it to the sandpit are provisions that encourage co-operation. Babies and toddlers will come together as they wish, and the idea with under three year olds is to allow them the choice. A cardboard appliance carton with both ends cut out permits a spontaneous chase and hide game between two almost one year olds.

The older the child the more capable they are of sharing and collaborating. It is argued by some people that functioning well in a group is encouraged by deliberately building in opportunities for children to learn to wait, to cope with someone else having something that they want, or to take turns. However, in a children's service there will be many opportunities for children to learn these things without making explicit provision for them. In fact, when children are very young care is taken to provide an adequate number of play materials so that they are not continually faced with the temptation to take away attractive items being used by others.

EXAMPLE OF ENCOURAGING COLLABORATION AND SHARING OF IDEAS

The painting easels were designed and made so that children work alongside each other and can see what each other is doing rather than the more traditional arrangement of working on opposite sides.

RELATIONSHIPS AND INTERACTIONS BETWEEN CHILDREN AND ADULTS

A rich, well set up environment empowers children to engage independently with materials and equipment and frees the professional to engage in interactions that support relationships and that support children as capable learners. An environment that relies heavily on the professional controlling what children do will inhibit implementation of the Framework.

Ensuring that the environment is healthy and safe is a basic concern in a children's service. There is an

inevitable tension between providing a safe and healthy setting and one that encourages children to extend themselves, take reasonable risks, and meet challenges. The possibility of the kinds of interactions between professionals and children that promote constructive relationships is increased when the physical environment is safe, when adults do not have to be constantly vigilant about the safety and health of children.

The presence of some furniture that is comfortable for adults, such as sofas and chairs, encourages warm physical interactions.

The presence of objects, pictures, music, and other items that are of interest to both children and adults and that reflect them as people will promote conversation and interactions.

THE CHILD AS CAPABLE AND RESOURCEFUL

When children are active contributors to setting up and maintaining the environment their sense of mastery and control is supported and their feelings of confidence and security are enhanced.

An environment that respects children and acknowledges that they are capable and resourceful is one where the opportunities provided match what is known about their strengths, capabilities and interests and also allow for unknown possibilities. It is an environment set up in response to what children tell professionals, sometimes in words, but more often in their behaviour, about how they want to spend their time, what they are interested in. In traditional discussions about children's services the necessity of providing challenges is stressed. This Framework is premised on an assertion that professionals can easily underestimate children's skills, abilities, insights and understanding. The possibilities for children are limited when professionals base their provisions for children solely on their prediction about what the children will want to do and what they think will interest them.

Within this Framework, professionals will make available to children a variety of open materials that lend themselves to innovation. Such materials may be combined in unusual ways, used in unpredictable ways, made into not-yet-thought-of products. Open ended materials and equipment, in contrast to those that have a single designated purpose, encourage children to create, improvise, and make their own meanings.

EXAMPLE OF MULTIPLE USES OF OPEN EQUIPMENT

In the yard there is a huge tractor tyre. When it was placed there by the parent committee, the staff thought that it would be great for climbing on, in and out of. As the weeks went by the children showed just how many uses it had, none of which the staff had thought of. Some of them included: a cubby house, a rocket, a flying saucer, a car, a fire truck, a swimming pool, and the staff's favourite: "a giant chocolate donut that doesn't disappear"! It has also been a trampoline, a lion cage, a dog kennel, and at times just a tractor tyre to climb on.

EXAMPLE OF FLEXIBILITY ABOUT THE USE OF THE ENVIRONMENT

Some boys were digging in the dirt and the digging was moving sideways. The teacher almost said "Not there, over here", but just left it, thinking that the benefits of these "tough" boys digging outweighed the work of filling in the holes later. The children negotiated with each other about who was to dig where and ended up saying that they were digging to China. The group co-operated. The sister of one of the boys was actually going to China and he told his sister that he was going to be there first. This work ended up taking almost a term to complete and became a huge group project.

Equally important as the amount of space is the organisation of space. One big open space invites

undirected aimless wandering (and running!) around. Dividing large spaces, whether indoors or outdoors, into smaller spaces provides tangible assistance to children to focus their attention. Some of these spaces may be designated for specific purposes (for example, block play, home corner) with clear pathways from one to the other and cues about the appropriate number of people for the space or the experience. For example, something as straightforward as placing two chairs at a table is a cue that what is there is most suitable for two people. The idea is not to restrict and limit unnecessarily, but to provide sensible suggestions to children through the set-up of the environment.

Providing a rich environment where children have considerable power and control over what they are doing and what they are using demonstrates trust in children. As an example, keeping equipment and materials out of children's reach or denying them access to part of the space is a message about their inability to choose or use those appropriately and safely. Careful thought needs to be given about the validity of reasons for restrictions. In some children's services the children themselves decide what artwork and other "products" are to be displayed.

A RICH ARRAY OF MATERIALS

Another dimension of acknowledging the child as capable and resourceful is ensuring that the environment stays interesting, that there are things to talk about, get involved with, wonder about, figure out.

Providing an interesting environment raises issues about the balance between, on the one hand, sameness and familiarity that nurture feelings of security, empowerment, and being "at home", and on the other the need for change and novelty. While interest and novelty are important at any age, the younger the children the more important sameness is.

Small changes– for example, re-arrangements of furniture or equipment, or the addition of something new, are often sufficient to re-kindle interest.

However, it is not a matter of the more the better. Children need choices, but overload in the form of too many things, too much clutter or colour, or too much noise can cause frustration and interfere with constructive engagement.

The environment needs to be language rich, using print, pictures, and symbols, providing much to talk about, encouraging children to understand symbols and to want to represent them. Particularly important is a rich collection of a variety of print material, including children's books and a range of other suitable material to read to, use with children or make available to them.

REFLECTING THE CHILDREN'S SERVICE COMMUNITY

Relationships and interactions are encouraged when children are supported to develop a strong sense of their own identity. Including photographs of children in the environment, displaying selected pieces of children's work, and providing a place for each child's possessions and supplies encourage both a sense of self and community.

The physical environment in a children's service is personalised, reflecting the lives and interests of the people who spend time in it. This means that the environment will reflect the near geographic environment in which it is located. The near environment, wherever it is, is rich and varied and there is so much potential for the content of the children's experience.

The diversity within the children's services community and the broader community is reflected in the physical environment. Cultural diversity is perhaps what comes to mind first, but diversity related to gender, ability, lifestyle, family composition, and individual and family interests also be reflected. The environment reflects the cultural backgrounds and heritage of the families and professionals in it, as well as the broader

community. Not just in the children's areas, but in decorations, furniture and equipment and pictures used throughout the service. Professionals need to consult with parents and with members of the community to ensure that outdated stereotypes and tokenistic manifestations of cultural background are avoided.

ATTENTION TO BEAUTY

If children adopt values from the experiences they have in their early years, and if an appreciation of beauty and aesthetics is to be fostered, then these are an essential feature of the physical environment. Attention is paid to colour, texture, light, softness, sound, and the presence of beautiful objects such as stones, flowers, fabric, baskets, seashells, prints and paintings.

A PARTICULAR WORD ABOUT THE OUTDOOR ENVIRONMENT

The outdoor environment is a place where worthwhile learning and engagement can take place, not just a place for running around and getting rid of excess energy. The outdoor environment in the Framework is an arena, a space for being.

Enjoyment of and connection with the outdoors is part of the Australian identity. Australians identify with the land and have closeness to the natural environment. It is something unique and special about Australia and should be celebrated in all children's services. It is part of the culture all Australians share.

EXAMPLE OF WONDERFUL POSSIBILITIES OUTSIDE AND OF EMERGING LITERACY

In the back corner of the play yard there is a garden which has a stepping stone path through the middle of it so that children are able to walk through it and see it from within. Each week, although the garden doesn't change in any major way, the children frequently explore, discover, discuss and learn many new things from it. For example recently some children discovered a bright orange tube-like plant growing under the fern. They came and told the staff member and they decided that they would need to look in a book or take it to the "plant place" to find out what it was. They looked in their garden book and learned (the adult too!) that it was a type of fungus (mushroom) but not one that could be eaten. One child commented, "I know you don't eat that mushroom because mushrooms aren't bright orange."

PROMOTING THE VALUES OF THE SERVICE

Both the physical and human environments need to reflect the values and aims of the service.

- When relationships are valued, there are a number of small spaces that encourage small groups of children to enjoy and get to know and feel comfortable.
- When interdependence and co-operation are valued, there are many opportunities for children to collaborate and work together.

- When self sufficiency and containment are valued, there is sufficient space, and the space is arranged so the children are not forced to be together and they can be safely on their own for a time.
- When initiative is supported, the environment is arranged so that children can access materials and equipment unassisted and so that they play an active role in arranging and maintaining it.
- When concentration is valued, the environment is set up to minimise distractions.
- When it is desired that children explore actively, experiment, discover and create, there is a variety of open materials freely available that lend themselves to innovative uses.
- When making meaning is valued, there are many "real" and relevant things in the environment, materials that reflect the lives of the children, families, and professionals.
- When diversity is valued, the materials provide opportunities to engage in alternative ways of doing things. Decorations, materials and equipment portray diversity of all kinds, not just for children but for families too: signs and notices in a variety of relevant languages, posters, materials and equipment used, the music corner, home corner, food, arrangements for sleep and rest, and clothing.
- When beauty is valued and a sense of aesthetics engendered in the children, there is beauty in the environment.

The environment provides opportunities and possibilities for children's learning.

QUESTIONS AND ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION AND DISCUSSION

1. What examples can you identify of the environment empowering children?
2. How many things are there for children to do in the space before you put out any toys?
3. How can space be re-arranged to encourage children to spread out, to concentrate?
4. Conduct an audit of the physical environment. To what extent does it reflect the diversity in the children's service community? In the larger community?
5. Discuss the challenges presented by dividing big space into little space, particularly the possibility that all children will not be in view all the time.
6. Think about and discuss how often you change the environment, including equipment, play materials, pictures and decorations.
7. Collect examples from your own practice and that of your colleagues that illustrate the main points of this chapter.



THE NATURE OF PROVISIONS FOR CHILDREN

Contents

Page No.

Provisions, not Activities.....	111
The Nature of Desirable Provisions.....	112
The Capable and Resourceful Child.....	113
Meaningfulness in Children's Lives.....	116
Overall Structure of the Day or Session.....	117
Cultural Diversity in the Content.....	119
The Impact of Attendance on Provisions.....	119
Categories of Provision.....	119
Media and Technology.....	120
Literacy and Numeracy.....	120
Reflecting the Framework.....	122
Questions and Issues for Consideration and Discussion.....	129

THE NATURE OF PROVISIONS FOR CHILDREN

The curriculum is everything professionals do to support children's wellbeing and learning, the intentional provisions and the offerings they make in order to create possibilities and opportunities for children's engagement.

The conversion by children of these opportunities and possibilities into actual experiences, and the meanings they make with them, assumes forms that are sometimes expected and predictable and often unexpected and unimagined. What children do with the provisions is influenced by their abilities, what they observe others doing, the encouragement and support they receive from others, and what interests them at the time.

PROVISIONS, NOT ACTIVITIES

Most traditional curriculum and curriculum framework documents place major emphasis on the categories of activities and experiences that are offered to children and the anticipated outcomes from those in terms of children's learning. To do so in this document would be incompatible with this Framework. Context, children, parents and community, and most of all the exercise of professional judgment grounded in extensive wisdom dictate what should be provided. Content for children's experiences can be just about anything, although it is possible to make predictions about likely content. While the content is not prescribed, what the Framework does is provide guidance about what to do with the content.

The focus on the potential and possibilities of children and the view of them as more capable and resourceful than they are often thought to be by adults also means that it is not sensible, in fact, not possible, to specify all outcomes, as many will be surprises and unexpected outcomes. However, it is possible to discuss some likely desirable outcomes.

The terms *provisions*, *experiences* and *opportunities*, rather than *activities*, are used deliberately. Often the focus in children's services is on activities in a narrow sense at the expense of

some of the more pervasive and more important dimensions of the child's experience. The term activities is typically used to designate an experience that has the following characteristics:

- Available at a designated time and for a certain amount of time only
- Often requires adult preparation and supervision
- Often has a pre-determined fixed outcome
- Frequently results in a 'product'
- Is instigated typically by professionals, not by children
- Is sometimes something that the adult is invested in
- Sometimes sits apart from the flow of the day or session, somewhat unrelated to the rest of the provisions
- Is often viewed by adults (both parents and professionals) as having 'educational' value

A focus on activities often means that professionals pay relatively less attention to other dimensions of the provisions: interactions and relationships, routines or daily living experiences, opportunities and possibilities offered by the physical environment, the structure and flow of the day. All of these are significant in contributing to the quality of the child's experience overall. In other words, the most powerful experiences for the child are just as likely, if not more likely, to happen around the edges of what is planned for, outside of activities. What are traditionally labelled activities are but one dimension of the provisions for children rather than the centrepiece or most important part of the provisions.

Working within this Framework involves seeing possibilities, being thoughtful about opportunities provided, and looking at possibilities in the unorthodox.

EXAMPLE OF MAKING MEANING IN CONTEXT

From a mobile preschool session: We arrived to find a dead bird inside, mice through the kitchen and a 'porno' magazine in the toilet. To add to this a paddock full of toadstools was in our immediate play area. However, among all the risks we had identified and were dealing with we found the biggest and most magical red and white spotted mushrooms, the ones that are in fairytales, in the paddock. So we picked them and displayed three huge ones and one tiny one for the children and parents. Everyone was amazed and excited with wonder. We drew mushrooms, painted mushrooms and looked at how many were in the paddock next door under the pine trees. What a great day we had considering it started out so bad! And by the way, at lunchtime one of the staff discovered that a mouse had got into her lunch bag and eaten her lunch. Each of the children shared some of their lunch with her.

This is an excellent example of taking advantage of the reality of the circumstances of the service. It is quite possible that from a child's perspective the most significant event of that session was sharing lunch with an important adult, that is, making a real

contribution to the well being of someone else. This is also a wonderful event, although certainly not one that was planned, and provided an excellent opportunity to build a sense of community through sharing and collaboration.

THE NATURE OF DESIRABLE PROVISIONS

Professional knowledge enables predictions to be made about the kinds of provisions that are likely to be engaging for children. Babies love to explore objects with their hands and their mouths. Children with a visual impairment are likely to be interested in experiences that capitalise on their listening skills. Most toddlers who have just learned to walk love carting things around, moving things from one place to the other. Children whose mobility is limited or who are not mobile need access to materials and equipment. However, while the predictions may give guidance to the professional about provisions, care has to be taken that they do not become a prescription or recipe about what to provide that blinds the professional to truly seeing what children are capable of doing and are interested in.

This Framework advocates learning through meaning making, allowing evidence of children's

interests to inform the provisions and opportunities. Anything a child expresses interest in is followed up. It is inappropriate for the professional to deny children's interests or deem them inappropriate and therefore ignore or actively discourage them. What the professional has to do is to consider what to do with the interest, where to take it. That is where professional judgement comes into the equation.

In general, the kinds of provisions viewed as most desirable for children's learning are ones that:

- Acknowledge the child's capabilities and resources
- Support relationships, interaction and communication with others, both children and adults
- Are relevant in the context of the children's lives and experience and support the development of meanings and connections
- Reflect the values of the children's service and its priorities for children's learning and development

Routine daily experiences can embody these characteristics. Even the powerful experience of an adult disciplining a child in response to unacceptable behaviour can embody these characteristics to some degree. Experiences traditionally categorised as play in the literature certainly embody these characteristics. All provisions, all opportunities offered to children can be placed on continua depicting where they sit in relation to the characteristics above.

THE CAPABLE AND RESOURCEFUL CHILD

The child has considerable power and control to influence the experience and its impact or result, and to an appropriate extent has the opportunity to create or construct it.

A major consideration is that children deserve support to establish themselves as members of the community, as contributors with a sense of responsibility and commitment. Children's

engagement is most meaningful when it has a genuine purpose.

Experiences that are open-ended, where there is not a fixed pre-determined outcome or product, encourage creativity and self-expression and cater for a range of abilities. Children often "stretch themselves" and demonstrate greater ability in these kinds of experiences where there is no set standard, no definition of right or wrong ways.

Play as a medium for learning and development

Traditionally in children's services play is viewed as the cornerstone of good practice that promotes children's learning and development. However, in this Framework there is no major distinction made between play and other types of appropriate experiences that support children's learning. Labelling some experiences as play and some as not play is somewhat artificial, given that play is in part a state of mind, an approach or attitude toward an experience rather than the experience itself.

That having been said however, the provision of opportunities for open-ended child-directed play in a rich environment is very important.

Traditional notions of play include the following:

- The child participates voluntarily, not compulsorily.
- The child has power; the experience has inherent meaning.
- The child can invent the rules.
- The emphasis is on the process rather than the outcome.
- Much of the time, although not always, it is joyful.

Most of the experiences in a children's service where this Framework is implemented would have some of these characteristics to some extent.

In making provisions for children's learning, often the professional will have an outcome in mind but may allow the child to dictate or have control over

the process. An example would be if the professional told the children that she had put out a range of art and craft materials, and that she would like them to do something with them that related to the recent picnic they had in the local park.

Similarly, a professional may want to encourage babies to use their hands and so will put out on a mat a range of toy cars, blocks, and small animals for them to use as they wish. As another example, a professional may say to a child with speech difficulties that she wants the child to indicate in some way which book she wants to look at.

Alternatively in some experiences the outcome matters less, but there are always rules or some guidelines that the professional will enforce. An example of this would be when the children go outside or go for a walk. There are also occasions when the professional is appropriately very directive, for example, in a situation of danger.

The provision of open-ended play experiences that may go in a direction that the professional did not envisage acknowledges children as capable and resourceful. Such experiences also empower children to create meaning, to create links between their life experiences past and present.

EXAMPLE OF CHILDREN TAKING SOMETHING DIFFERENT FROM THE EXPERIENCE THAN WAS INTENDED

The centre had two bottle-fed lambs that had grown enough to need shearing. A shearer and his dog were organised to come and demonstrate shearing to the children. The dog rounded up the sheep and they were shorn. That afternoon when the parents came to pick up the children staff suggested that they tell them what had happened that day. One child responded, "It was wonderful. A man came to the centre and he knew how to roll his own cigarettes"!

EXAMPLE OF OPENNESS TO CHILDREN'S MEANING

An activity was organised with matchbox cars and large "mud maps" of the community that the adults had made. The aim was to focus on road safety. It became an amazing medium for social activity and communication, about who lived where, about making road signs and other things to go on the map. Adults were wise enough to see that this offering or provision, made with one purpose in mind, had taken on a different meaning for the children, one that didn't negate what they originally had in mind, but extended it. The adults were able to shift their own focus to support the experience as a social and communication one.

Play at its purest is when the child is most constructively powerful and open to possibilities. Professionals have to think about how to construct situations that allow a child with a disability to be constructively powerful. The professional supports play best when he or she knows each child well, trusts each child and appreciates the importance of children taking responsibility and owning their play. Supporting play does not mean that the professional is always passive. It is actually when adults are involved when some of the richest most complex play occurs. Adult involvement can take many forms, ranging from providing time, space and materials to playing with the child.

Routine daily living experiences as medium for learning

In any children's service, there is a range of experiences that are essential and occur on a regular basis. These include eating, sleeping and resting, toileting and nappy changing, hand washing, dressing and undressing, tidying up and maintaining the physical environment in a reasonable state, and arrivals and departures. Sometimes these experiences take up a substantial amount of the professional's time and energy, and constitute a major part of the child's experience in

the service. These experiences are fundamental to children's lives and development. They provide opportunities to nurture close relationships and to support many of the interests and skills of children. These kinds of experiences are especially promising for learning, as they are by their very nature meaningful and purposeful. For all these reasons, they are viewed not as time away from what is important but as experiences that are important and that can contribute in a positive way to the overall quality of the child's experience.

It is around the routine experiences of daily living that the professional has numerous opportunities to model respect, caring, warmth, responsiveness, and affection to young children. When children participate in these kinds of interactions, they benefit in at least two ways. These interactions are the heart of what leads to positive feelings about oneself, feelings of being an effective and valued human being. Secondly, children learn to care for and respect others from being cared for and respected themselves.

EXAMPLES OF BUILDING A SENSE OF COMMUNITY

The younger two year olds who sleep are patted by the older two year olds who don't sleep.

In the same room a group of four year old children came for a visit and saw that the beds for the two year olds were not made. Courtney asked, "Why don't the beds have sheets?" She was told that the staff are busy and the children make their own beds. Courtney then said, "That's sad. Let's make their beds for them." This has now become a ritual with the four year old children making the two year olds' beds each day.

A staff member was away sick. The children kept asking where she was and were told that she was at home because she was sick. Finally one child suggested that they ring her at home to see how she was. Staff helped the children to ring and each had a turn speaking with her.

If the child is viewed respectfully, as knowing what he or she needs, then to the extent possible, routine daily living experiences happen when the child indicates a need, or demonstrates that he or she is ready.

It is often in daily living experiences that children manifest their growing competence, their drive to take control and do things for themselves. Professionals are provided with opportunities to respond to the child as capable and resourceful, as they respond to indications of the child's interest in self-feeding or toileting for example. This does not mean abandoning the child as soon as signs of wanting to be independent appear, but standing back, allowing the child to do as much as she or he can, being encouraging and supportive, and being ready to step in and provide help when that is needed.

If relationships and interactions are to be encouraged, then meal and snack times are wonderful social times for pleasant interactions and communication. Nappy changes afford a brief but powerful one-to-one time between child and adult.

Daily living routines are areas of children's experience where cultural and other types of diversity that exist among families and differences between families' and the service's ways of doing things are highlighted. Parents may have very specific ideas about such things as what foods are appropriate, conventions and "manners" related to eating and drinking, time and method of helping children learn to use the toilet, and where children sleep as well as if and how they are helped to sleep. As has been emphasised throughout the Framework, discussions, negotiation and compromise occur between parents and professionals to work out an agreed upon experience for the child.

Arrivals and departures are a crucial time for increasing or diminishing a child's sense of power and security. These are not times to leave children

or parents to fend for themselves, especially if the child is distressed.

EXAMPLE OF EVIDENCE OF RELATIONSHIP AND SENSE OF COMMUNITY

Every day at lunch time a group of two year olds pour their water and then touch glasses and say "Cheers".

The above is a small act, one which could easily be overlooked or dismissed as merely an example of toddlers being "cute". However, it actually represents toddlers having learned a ritual that they have observed adults engaging in. More significantly, it is through rituals such as these that a sense of community and fellowship is forged.

MEANINGFULNESS IN CHILDREN'S LIVES

Emphasis on supporting and enhancing children's interests, reflecting the life and cultures of the community, responding to context, and ensuring meaning suggests that the content of provisions might well be unique to each individual service. The content of children's experiences in a children's service can be just about anything. What matters is not so much what the content is, but rather how, why and when it is provided.

The professional has to ask a number of questions:

- What are the children telling me that they are interested in?
- What are parents and other family members telling me that they want children to experience and know about?
- What do I observe and what am I aware of that is important in the lives of these children and families?
- What is going on in the community?
- How can I use the tasks of daily living in a meaningful way?
- How can I use my own interests and talents, as well as those of family members and colleagues, in the interests of children?
- Are there any community or cultural observances that should be reflected in some way in the children's experience?
- What does my professional knowledge about children and about practice tell me to introduce to children?
- What can I do constructively with unexpected opportunities and events?

Everyday real tasks

Children learn most effectively when what is to be learned is immediately relevant and useful. Children need to know why they are doing what they are doing. Doing real work that they see adults doing in the real world is often particularly meaningful. The maintenance of a children's services community, whatever its form, involves tasks such as shopping, setting the table for a meal, folding nappies, cooking, cleaning, posting letters, gardening, preparation of materials and experiences, moving things from one place to another – all of which can be enjoyable for children.

Contributing to the life of the group or the larger community in a meaningful way enhances children's sense of self worth and gives them the satisfaction of doing something for others. This can be as simple as helping with some cleaning, tending the garden, giving a toy to a crying baby, pushing a child in a wheel chair, or helping to set the table for lunch. A children's service that implements this Framework will actively seek out opportunities to involve children in an authentic way in these tasks.

Concerns children bring to the service

Very distressing, frightening, painful and disturbing experiences in some children's lives are likely to be brought to the children's service. The ways these are dealt with can provide powerful lessons to children, lessons about finding support and strength in the support of others, lessons about the fact that others have often had similar experiences, lessons about how almost always it helps to talk about things that are troubling them. There is nothing a child brings to service that is not appropriate to deal with in some way. The more confronting what the child brings to the professional, the more potentially powerful and significant are the lessons to be learned from how it is dealt with.

EXAMPLE OF ACKNOWLEDGING WHAT CHILDREN BRING AND BEING OPEN TO CHILDREN'S MEANING

In a group time when sharing news, a child announced that the police had come to his house last night and took his dad away, and Mum had blood all over her. The two professionals felt very uncomfortable and uncertain about how to respond, but the other children started talking about similar experiences they had had themselves or knew of. The teacher, without probing and without making value judgments, talked with the child about how he felt, and encouraged other children to participate.

What was being modelled by the children in the example above is acceptance of feelings, acceptance of the reality of people's lives, responding to children's meaning, and most importantly the power of relationships and communication to help deal with sadness and fear; that is, a "lesson" about the support that can come through relationships.

Professionals have to make a value judgment about the worth of various provisions. The most

important thing to keep in mind is that children learn much more and much more effectively when what they are learning fits with the context of their lives. An additional criterion is the extent to which experiences afford children the opportunity to make a legitimate contribution to the common good of the community.

In general, the most sensible way to approach provision for children's experiences is to think of

- depth and breadth
- big segments of time, time extended over days or even weeks
- a variety of kinds of linked experiences
- naturally occurring opportunities
- open materials that invite children to use their inventiveness, and wherever appropriate, natural materials, which have a kind of inherent meaning and also engender respect, understanding, and appreciation of the natural environment
- openness to the direction children take with the provisions made
- the provision of appropriate help and encouragement.

OVERALL STRUCTURE OF THE DAY OR SESSION

The day (or session) has a natural rhythm, a relaxed pace where one part flows comfortably into the next, where transitions are smooth and natural, where children have large flexible "chunks" of time to get involved in what interests them without a sense of being hurried or having efforts cut off abruptly before they are finished. Over-structuring and dividing the day into discrete bits may give professionals a sense of control but has little meaning for children and often contributes to a hurried, stressful unsatisfying experience for adults and children alike.

Engaging in collaborative projects, being creative, solving problems, and using materials that are open ended require that the child knows in the beginning that there will be time to engage. Otherwise engagement is mainly superficial.

A natural easy flow of time also allows for children to discuss and reflect on what is happening.

EXAMPLE OF COLLABORATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING THROUGH DISCUSSION

The group had planted peas. Snails were eating the peas. The teacher gathered the children together to discuss possible ways to solve the problem.

Madison: Get your clapping toy and put it in the garden. It will frighten the snails away.

Tessa: Yell really loudly at them and that will make them go away.

Mathew: Put bottles over the peas so the snails can't get to them.

Ambrose: Well you can put this stuff which is poison down and it will kill them or find a really really bright light and shine it on them and they will go blink and they won't be able to find the peas.

Jacob: Move them away from the peas to somewhere else in the garden.

Grace: Shout at them to 'GO AWAY'.

Mathew: Put them inside things so they can't get out.

Jacob: So they could only get out at night.

Ayla: Make a hole, put the pea-eating snails in it so they can't eat the peas any more.

Mitch: You could put them in bottles and take them to someone else's house.

Tessa: Put them into a flower so they don't eat anything else.

Greta: Put them in a tank and fill it with water.

Gemma: Put a cover over the peas so the snails can't eat the peas.

Lauren: Put something over the snails so it would stop them eating the peas.

These sorts of discussions cannot be hurried, and they need to happen when the issues arise, not at a scheduled group discussion time.

The structure allows for individual rhythms and patterns for eating, sleeping and resting, toileting, active and quiet times. It takes into account the times when children are most likely to be alert, able to concentrate, tired, active, or bored. In addition, the structure of each child's experience provides choice and balance, opportunities to engage in a variety of experiences. The aim is that there is a minimum amount of time when all children in the group have to do the same thing at the same time. In other words, the aim is that children have a choice about what they are doing much of the time. Predictable routines, such as sitting down together for a meal or for a group discussion at a regular time or washing hands before eating, give children a sense of mastery over their own experience. However, rigid adherence to timetables is at odds with responding to children and to providing an experience that has meaning in children's lives.

Transitions from one part of the day can contribute to the smoothness and pace of the day. Abrupt, everyone-at-the-same-time, no-warning, "stop this right now and pack away" transitions amount to no transitions at all, and cause frustration and disruption. They often result in there being much time when children are waiting, not doing anything constructive. Some children have difficulty stopping one experience, especially something they are engrossed in, and moving to another even

at the best of times, or changing abruptly from being active to being still and quiet. A respectful approach provides help for children to make transitions, to wind down, for example, after a busy active time, and to stop one thing and move to something else.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN THE CONTENT

Obviously, honouring diversity means attending to it in the range of provisions for children. In general, it is not appropriate to “do” cultures. In part this is because children in this age group do not understand the concept of cultures. More importantly, however, focusing intensely on a number of aspects of a particular cultural group and then resorting to what is familiar increases the likelihood of stereotyping, dealing superficially and in a tokenistic way that re-inforces misconceptions and biases.

A much more appropriate approach is not to separate out or label experiences, materials and equipment as multicultural or different, but to incorporate these naturally and in response to children's interests. Music, stories, books, materials in the home corner, play materials, pictures – every aspect of the provisions for children can embody diversity.

The issue of observing holidays and special days and celebrations in children's services is one that provokes much controversy. It is an issue that must be worked through respectfully and conscientiously with all members of the children's service community. In a diverse community there are few universal holidays and celebrations, and to ignore that and acknowledge only the holidays and celebrations of the dominant cultural group runs counter to honouring diversity.

Although this Framework supports the children's service connecting with what is happening in the community, this does not mean that everything that happens in the community, including celebrations

and holidays, is mirrored or replicated in the service. In fact, it may be that a sensible complementary experience is to provide some respite from the excitement and anticipation of it for children.

THE IMPACT OF ATTENDANCE PATTERNS ON PROVISIONS

The nature of an appropriate experience for any given child depends on a number of factors, one of which is attendance patterns and the amount of time spent in the service. This is one part of the context for each child that must be taken into account. For example, if the child attends for long periods of time on a regular basis, then this experience constitutes a major part of this child's childhood, and this has implications for what the children's service needs to provide for that child. As another example, if attendance is irregular or for short periods of time, then it is harder to establish continuity of experience, it takes more time for the child to re-enter and settle, and relationships take longer to be established. If the child attends irregularly or for short periods of time and some or most of the other children attend more regularly then there are additional issues, such as the issue of coherence of experience. What is appropriate and meaningful for a particular child depends also in part on what is happening in other arenas of the child's life, for example if the child is going to more than one children's service.

PARTICULAR CATEGORIES OF PROVISION

There are many ways to classify or categorise provisions for young children in a children's service, and there is no one best way. Traditionally this has been done according to developmental domains. Some children's services adopt categories similar or identical to those used as subject areas in primary schools.

Because of the contemporary emphasis on these areas and how they should be dealt with in children's services settings, media and technology and literacy and numeracy will be discussed briefly.

MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY

Most children today experience media and technology as an integral part of their lives. In fact, many of them are more knowledgeable and comfortable with it than many adults. Their play, interests, and concerns are often shaped quite powerfully by the media.

It would be incompatible with the notion of engaging with what is meaningful to children to say that there is no place in a children's service for television, videos, and computers. At the same time, the use of these needs to reflect consideration of the aims of the children's service. There is limited value in simply replicating in the children's service the opportunities that children have in other arenas of their lives. That is, if children spend a lot of time outside the children's service watching television and videos and playing with computers, there may be limited value in doing more of the same in the children's service.

Technology is a tool, a medium for providing possibilities and opportunities for children, and is viewed just as other materials and equipment are, that is, as resources for encouraging children to make meaning and to engage in life enhancing relationships.

LITERACY AND NUMERACY

Literacy and numeracy are defined in many different ways. For the purposes of this Framework, literacy is very closely linked to communication and involves:

- speaking and using written and visual means of

communication (words and other symbols) in ways that are appropriate to the context and that convey meaning to others

- listening, viewing, and reading to derive understanding.

Numeracy refers to the use of numbers and other mathematical concepts to analyse and solve problems using mathematical processes.

Within this Framework, children are seen as citizens in the present, and one of the aims of children's services is to support them to become active contributing members of the community. Functioning fully and effectively in the community requires that citizens are literate and numerate. There is a strong emphasis in the Framework on children being supported from birth to become competent in these areas. Opportunities to promote literacy and numeracy abound in children's experiences at home, in the community and in the children's service from infancy. These are particular areas of learning where professionals can support parents to exploit valuable learning opportunities for learning in the context of everyday life. The successful acquisition of skills and abilities in these areas by young people is a major concern in contemporary society.

Children make more useful meaning of experiences when they see that they have a useful purpose. Therefore, experiences relating to literacy and numeracy are integrated naturally and purposefully into the daily life of the service, not singled out for specific attention at specific times or imposed artificially and out of context.

Children's signs of interest in such things as identifying numbers and letters, de-coding text, writing, pretending to write, and learning words in other languages are perhaps more obvious signs of emerging literacy and numeracy, but so are such behaviours as engaging in complex dramatic play,

memorising text in books and pretending to read it, sequencing objects by size, engaging in one-to-one correspondence (for example, by placing one cup in front of each chair at the table), and “reading” pictures by talking about what is happening.

EXAMPLE OF CHILDREN KNOWING MORE THAN EXPECTED

Two children, both under three years of age, had shown interest in writing, and they were exploring the possibilities of shapes as symbols for letters and words. They were sticking small pieces of paper with their writing on it onto larger sheets of paper and in rows, in much the same way that text would appear on a page.

Everything that has been said about provisions for children and children’s learning in general applies to the areas of literacy and numeracy. Some guidelines related to these two areas are included in the section on provisions for communication later in this chapter.

EXAMPLE OF CHILDREN AS CAPABLE AND RESOURCEFUL

A teacher reads the book *The Lighthouse Keeper’s Lunch* to a group of children. She gets to the part where all the things Mrs. Grinling has sent over for his lunch are listed. One item is a “cold chicken garni”. She says instead “a cold chicken salad”, thinking that would be a more meaningful word for these children. Several children interrupt to say that it is not a cold chicken salad but rather a cold chicken garni.

As is the case with any other areas, children’s interests and achievements in areas typically identified as literacy or numeracy will vary. However, it is possible to suggest some general outcomes that might be appropriate to expect for most children by the time they leave the children’s

service to attend school. These are in part adapted from Foundation Outcomes for Kindergarten (New South Wales Department of Education and Training, 1998).

In the areas of talking and listening

Children will communicate easily and effectively with peers and with adults in familiar informal situations. Examples include:

- Engaging in conversation
- Joining in songs, chants and rhymes
- Using non-verbal communication appropriately
- Understanding non-verbal communication of others
- Listening and responding to simple instructions
- Using a rich vocabulary
- Demonstrating pleasure in “playing with” language through rhyming, making up words, telling stories
- Demonstrating an awareness of the sounds in different words.

In the areas of reading and writing

Children will demonstrate the beginnings of understandings needed to learn to read and write. Examples include:

- Looking at books and other printed materials, commenting about their meaning, perhaps even attempting to “read” them through their pictures or from having memorised text because of repeated exposure
- Recognising their own name and perhaps attempting to write it
- Knowing the difference between writing and drawing
- Attempting to “write” by making marks resembling letters on a page

- Recognising different kinds of texts.

In the area of numeracy, children will demonstrate

- An awareness of same and different
- An awareness of pattern
- Knowledge of position and direction
- One-to-one correspondence
- Awareness of the relationship between parts and wholes.

Examples include:

- Sorting and describing objects in terms of their features, such as size, shape or colour
- Comparing and contrasting everyday objects, describing them in terms of the similarities and differences
- Recognising, describing and making simple number and spatial patterns
- Using everyday language associated with time, temperature and position
- Recognising and comparing sizes of things

using a variety of strategies such as estimating, counting, matching one-to-one

- Manipulating groups of objects by combining and separating.

REFLECTING THE FRAMEWORK

It would be possible for anyone with substantial experience in children's services to generate a very long list of provisions that are likely to be appropriate for children at different ages, and there are many such lists in the literature. However, there are many other provisions that may not be part of the standard repertoire in many children's services, in other words that are a bit unorthodox, that also provide rich opportunities and possibilities.

In developing a curriculum within this Framework, specific provisions in terms of content and experiences are based on evidence of children's interests and chosen in collaboration with children. In addition, specific provisions will support the values and priorities for children's learning and development identified by the children's service community.

The list of selected provisions that follows uses the same headings as those used in the discussion about the child's learning and development. The division into categories is artificial in as much as all experiences involve more than one of the categories. These are not special recommended provisions, but rather some general comments and a few representative examples of the kinds of experiences that support the major obligations in the Framework.

The child's sense of self

- Help the child in conversation to identify special likes and dislikes, favourites, features such as hair, eye, and skin colour, gender, and discuss how these are similar to and different from those of others.
- Point out and re-inforce what the child is good at. Offer more encouragement than discouragement, more positive feedback than negative.
- Encourage, as the child is ready, self-help skills such as managing eating, toileting.
- Greet and respond warmly to the child, demonstrating pleasure in her or his company.
- Affirm diversity in language, dress, ability, and gender.
- Discuss family and other aspects of the child's life outside the children's service.
- Encourage children to communicate with whatever skills they have.
- Listen and respond thoughtfully to children's efforts to communicate in ways that are meaningful to them.
- Make every effort to incorporate the child's home language into the program in a natural way and use alternative means of communication as well, when a child's first language is one other than the main language spoken at the service.
- Tell stories, share rhymes and poetry, encourage word games and other creative uses of language.
- Talk about how the same words can have different meanings.
- Discuss ways that the same messages can mean different things to different people.
- Share books and other printed material with children from infancy on, read to them often, look at and talk about books with them, and make books that document children's experiences.
- Make a rich array of books accessible to children, both texts that extend and relate to the children's experiences and current interests and texts that suggest new possibilities and broaden children's horizons.
- Support individual children's emerging interest in reading and writing through ensuring that materials and opportunities related to literacy are provided: children's books, maps, adult books, calendars, musical scores, paper and pens, timetables, menus, clocks, information from the internet.
- Encourage children to incorporate literacy and numeracy related experiences into their play by making provisions, for example, by putting a note pad and pen beside the telephone in the home corner, setting up an office or restaurant for dramatic play, encouraging children to find the items needed on the supermarket shelves.

THE COMMUNICATING CHILD

- Provide a rich environment, with lots of interesting things to talk about – for example, reminders of shared experiences in the past, unusual objects, engaging pictures.
- Talk to children naturally and in a meaningful way, about what is happening, about what is of interest to them.
- Provide time and an atmosphere that encourages children to communicate, especially with language when they are able.

- Provide many opportunities for children to appreciate the value of print.
- Respond to children's interest in numbers, letters, and decoding written text.
- Model the use of references, written or the internet, to answer questions, find out how to do something, help solve a problem.
- Provide encouragement for multiple means of expression, through movement, singing, puppets, the visual arts, music.
- Use words and phrases from a variety of languages.
- Emphasise language but maintain other ways of communicating.
- Respect the fact that different cultural groups have different notions of literacy; for example, some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures tend to value oral literacy.
- Integrate numbers through such experiences as counting, adding to and taking away from, encouraging children to classify and match like objects.

THE THINKING, INVESTIGATING, QUESTIONING, EXPLORING, PROBLEM SOLVING CHILD

- Model curiosity and a desire to know and find out.
- Provide an abundance of open-ended materials and equipment that can be used in a variety of ways.
- Encourage the use of all the senses.
- Provide time and opportunities to explore interests in depth.
- Provide opportunities for children to explore the properties of objects, gravity, weight, sinking and floating and other physics concepts in appropriate ways.
- Pose legitimate questions and problems that may lead to investigations and problem solving.

- Actively promote the pleasures, advantages and satisfaction of engaging in shared exploration and problem solving.
- Take children on excursions into the community, ones that have meaning for them.

THE HEALTHY, PHYSICAL, ACTIVE CHILD

- Provide space and time to safely use all large motor skills and to gain control over the body.
- Make equipment available to encourage children to use their whole body and to develop skills.
- Encourage children to develop sound daily hygiene habits, for example, hand washing and teeth brushing.
- Provide nutritious and attractive food and promote healthy eating habits.

THE SOCIAL CHILD

- Provide many opportunities for children to become comfortable with diversity in gender, skin colour, and ability.
- Encourage children to work and play together as they are interested, and provide support to help them do so happily.
- Provide choices about being with others or safely alone.
- Ensure that each child develops a secure attachment with at least one adult in the service, but that the child is able to cope when that person is away.
- Model gentle interactions, empathy, negotiation and compromise and talk about these with children.
- Take children out into the community, taking advantage of both natural and human made environments.
- Provide appropriate means for children to develop feelings of being able to affect others in a positive way, to make a constructive difference.

- Give children opportunities to be with older and younger children.
- Actively encourage collaboration and relationships by highlighting the value of diverse perspectives in solving problems and planning.
- Assist children to identify their own and others' strengths and talents and use those for the benefit of the group.
- Set expectations for behaviour that are reasonable. Enforce limits and encourage desirable behaviour with firmness, but also with gentleness and empathy.
- Assist children to identify others' needs and feelings.
- Encourage children to exhibit kindness and helping behaviour towards others.
- Encourage children to empathise with others.
- Encourage alternative means of expressing feelings or ideas – through visual means, through words, through movement.
- Pose problems and dilemmas that lend themselves to creative problem solving.
- Display and use a variety of visual art and music in the children's service.
- Invite creative people from the community – for example, poets, writers, artists, sculptors, musicians, and dancers — to share their abilities with the children's service community.

THE SPIRITUAL AND MORAL CHILD

- Ensure that the child is exposed to beautiful objects.
- Talk about meaningful experiences in the lives of human beings – birth, death, rituals and celebrations, for example – in ways that are appropriate to the interests of the children.
- Include symbols and acknowledgments of spirituality in the children's experience, as appropriate.

THE FEELING CHILD

- Validate and label children's feelings as they are expressed.
- Talk about feelings, as expressed in the group, in books, in pictures.
- Assist children to identify their own feelings and to learn appropriate ways of expressing them.

THE CREATIVE CHILD

- Encourage innovation and self-expression.
- Promote collaboration and group projects.
- Encouraging sensory play and exploration of expressive materials.
- Emphasise the process of expression, with less emphasis on the product or result.
- Provide free access to expressive materials appropriate to the age group.
- Acknowledge and celebrate creativity in its many forms.

Achievable desirable outcomes

Outcomes in the Framework are expressed in broad terms and are not emphasised to the extent that they are in many traditional curriculum frameworks. This is in large part because of the focus in the Framework on provisions, that is, on what professionals do and on the assertion that children will often achieve in unexpected and unimagined ways. The open nature of the Framework, however, does not preclude professionals deciding on quite specific outcomes or intended results for an individual child or a group of children, so long as these support and do not interfere with carrying out the major obligations in the Framework. In other words, competent professionals will inevitably have outcomes toward which they will work. These will be short, medium, and long-term desired outcomes.

Some will be for individual children, some for several children, and others for all children. A word of caution however: an over-emphasis on outcomes, particularly very specific ones, can easily result in a narrowing of focus and therefore of possibilities and opportunities provided for children. An emphasis on specific achievements can result in putting pressure on the child to move on to new challenges, denying the child the opportunity to savor success and the feelings of satisfaction that go with having mastered a challenge.

A statement of outcomes that is particularly compatible with this Framework is *The New Zealand Early Childhood Curriculum Te Whariki* (Appendix 2).

Professionals working in children's services work with a sense of purpose. Much of what has been written is about what guides and motivates professionals in their practice. Clarity about the results or impact of the provisions adults make in children's services is important. Outcomes are derived from professionals' knowledge of development, their understanding of individual children and their strengths, interests, and potential, the nature of the service in which they work and the provisions it can offer, and the wisdom and aspirations of parents and the community. Combining these perspectives into achievable outcomes for children is a particular challenge.

However, a general list of qualities desired for children within this Framework follows. These are the qualities that support living fully and contributing in a positive way to the community. The qualities below are not something children "acquire" in early childhood. Rather, pre-dispositions to many of these qualities exist from birth, and they remain important throughout life. This Framework is premised on the notion that children are predisposed to move in these directions, and the role of significant adults in their lives is to encourage and support their movement. However, there are many choice points along the

way, and the adult contributes options or possibilities that the child alone may not see, supports the child's choices, assists them, in fact accompanies them in their learning.

The list that follows comes out of Chapter 2: The Child. Obviously, the achievement of these outcomes depends on age and developmental level. The emphasis in this document on commonalities across the age span of children under school starting age precludes specific outcomes, as those are necessarily developmentally related. The wording of the outcomes below is in most cases in terms of a process in which the child is engaged. For many of these, the process is life-long, and it would be expected of course that a child approaching five years of age will be further along in the process than a younger child.

SENSE OF SELF

The child is developing:

- An awareness of their uniqueness and what contributes to that
- A sense of curiosity, desire for challenge, and joy in learning and achieving
- A view of self as a competent, creative, and capable communicators
- An appreciation of her or his own strengths
- Feelings of belonging to and pride in their culture and their family
- Broad inclusive notions rather than restrictive ones of what it means to be male or female
- A view of self as powerful and effective
- Growing ability to assert him- or herself appropriately and at the same time appreciation of the rights of others
- Confidence to ask questions and seek help
- A sense of belonging to the community and contributing to it

- An appreciation of what it means to be an Australian
- An ability to add to and alter the picture they and others have of themselves, by taking reasonable risks, meeting new challenges, and having new experiences and relationships
- Sufficient confidence and resilience to persevere in the face of obstacles and not be devastated by lack of success.

THE COMMUNICATING CHILD

The child is developing:

- The ability to seek and understand information, express opinions, convey feelings effectively
- Skills to communicate freely and effectively with peers and adults in familiar situations
- An increasing ability to use and understand non-verbal communication
- Pleasure in playing with language through rhyming, making up words and sounds, and telling stories
- Recognition and valuing of a range of kinds of literature
- An appreciation of literacy and numeracy as invaluable means of making meaning in the world
- Understandings and skills needed to learn to read and write.

THE THINKING, INVESTIGATING, EXPLORING, PROBLEM SOLVING CHILD

The child is developing:

- Increasing understanding of the world and pleasure in learning and problem solving
- An active approach to learning and problem solving
- Skills to use other people to support their learning
- Delight in self-discovery and exploration

THE HEALTHY, ACTIVE, PHYSICAL CHILD

The child is developing:

- Confidence and skills in using the body
- Daily living habits, understandings and skills that support health and well-being.

THE SOCIAL CHILD

The child is developing:

- Familiarity with and a sense of belonging to the larger community
- Skills in interacting with adults and other children
- Appreciation of others and the benefits of collaboration
- The ability to function as a member of a group, including skills of negotiating, leading, following, conflict resolutions, appropriate assertiveness
- Increasing empathy, caring, a sense of justice, appreciation of the worth of all people
- Comfort with diversity
- A sense of fairness, the courage to work to eradicate injustice and racism
- The capacity to control behaviour from within and to be motivated primarily by care and respect for self, others and the environment.

THE FEELING CHILD

The child is developing:

- The ability to recognise and accept their own feelings
- The ability to express feelings appropriately and to judge the impact of behaviour on others
- The ability to read other people's feelings and situations.

THE CREATIVE CHILD

The child is developing:

- The capacity to express ideas using a range of media
- Understanding that some problems do not have an easy solution
- Recognition that many problems have a number of good solutions
- Appreciation of the individuality and diversity in approaches and solutions
- Realisation that working creatively and collaboratively to find solutions is an enjoyable activity.

THE SPIRITUAL AND MORAL CHILD

The child is developing:

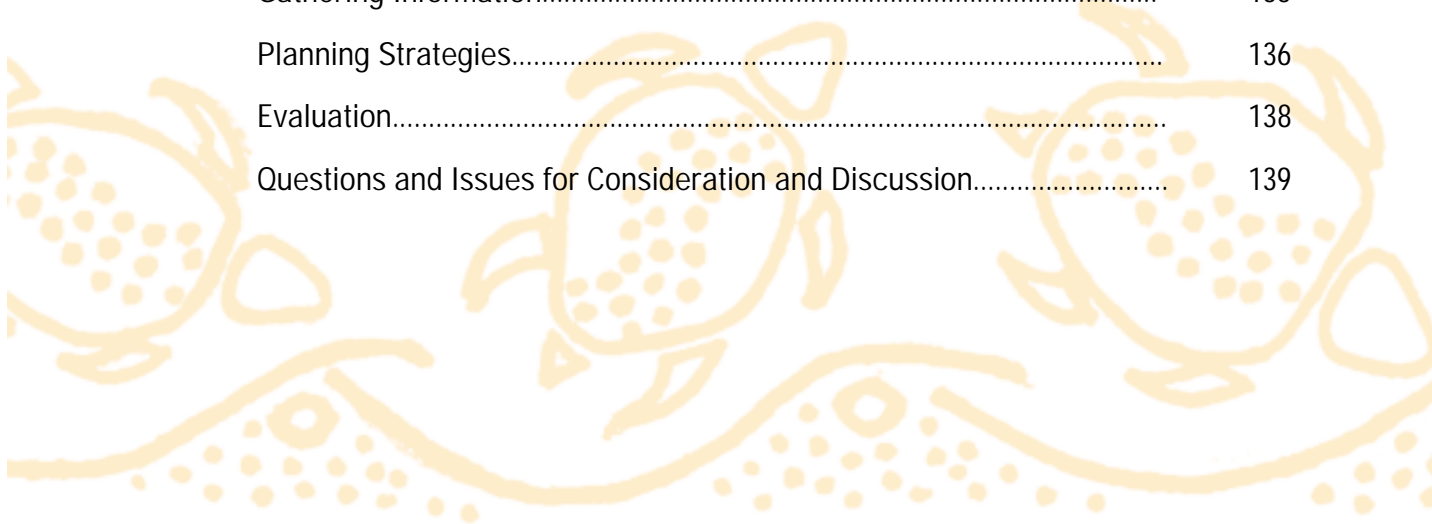
- Respect for and enjoyment of the natural environment and living things
- Appreciation of beauty in its many manifestations.

QUESTIONS AND ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION AND DISCUSSION

1. Look at other resource material and find alternative ways of categorising children's experiences. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each?
2. Do you agree with the statement that almost anything a child brings to the service is suitable content to deal with in some way? Why or why not?
3. How do you deal with situations when children are talking about confidential family matters?
4. Regardless of the age of the children you work with, what are you doing to support emerging literacy and numeracy?
5. Discuss the implications of various attendance patterns and amounts of time spent in the service on the provisions for a child.
6. Discuss and reflect on your service's policy about holiday celebrations. What are its advantages and disadvantages?
7. Look at each of the categories of outcomes at the end of the chapter. Discuss the ways you are supporting those outcomes in your current practice. How can you improve?
8. Discuss the application of the main points in this chapter to a child with a disability.
9. Collect examples from your own practice and that of your colleagues of the main points in this chapter.

DOCUMENTATION, PLANNING AND EVALUATION

Contents	Page No.
General Guidelines.....	133
Outcomes.....	133
Gathering Information.....	133
Planning Strategies.....	136
Evaluation.....	138
Questions and Issues for Consideration and Discussion.....	139



A WORD ABOUT DOCUMENTATION, PLANNING AND EVALUATION

The curriculum for children arises out of all of the provisions professionals make for the whole of the child's experience in the service, including

- The physical environment, equipment and materials
- Interactions and direct engagement with children
- The way time is structured
- The way opportunities are offered
- Daily living experiences and routines
- Special events or experiences
- Communications and relationships among adults in the children's service community

The emphasis in planning is on provisions, that is, on what professionals do and on the assertion that children will often achieve in unexpected and unimagined ways.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

A good experience for children emerges from informed critical reflection and careful planning. Careful planning and preparation actually support spontaneity rather than inhibiting it. Planning does not have to lock professionals in, but rather forms a basis for provision. A plan after all is only a best guess, and the most effective children's service experiences emerge out of careful planning and preparation and a willingness to alter or even drop what is planned.

One of the reasons for documenting plans and experience is to have a record for children and professionals to use to reflect and make future plans, and also to share the experience with families. Having accessible information not only informs parents but invites them to contribute ideas and perspectives. Ideally, planning is collaborative,

where the wisdom of professionals, families and children is brought together on behalf of children. Parents particularly are given the opportunity to reflect on and review what has happened, offer constructive criticism, and offer suggestions.

A group of professionals working together under the guidance of a formally qualified leader develops their own effective ways of planning and evaluating the provisions for children. Planning formats change over time to meet the unique needs of the service and the group.

Whatever the format used, cross-checking mechanisms, that is, alternative ways of classifying provisions, should be applied to ensure that major considerations have not been overlooked. That is, several different ways of collecting information and planning used simultaneously are likely to produce better results.

Professionals who are truly open to children's meanings, to the possibilities presented by families and the community, use planning formats as a basis for planning, but do not restrict their thinking about possibilities and opportunities.

OUTCOMES

While there is some attention to outcomes for children in the Framework, these are expressed in broad terms and are not emphasised to the extent that they are in many traditional curriculum guidelines. The open nature of the Framework supports the children's service community deciding on outcomes or intended results, so long as these are compatible with the Major Obligations in the Framework.

GATHERING INFORMATION

Planning is informed directly by close observation and documentation of children at work and at play, and by on-going evaluation of practice. Traditional standard observation techniques such as anecdotal records and checklists provide some information,

but careful observation and documentation of processes, interactions and relationships, children's development and the emergence and progress of projects provides a much richer basis for planning. Documentation done with children as contributors is richer and more meaningful than that done by professionals alone. That sort of documentation relies very much on the professional encouraging children to disclose what experiences mean to them.

The sources of information on which plans are based also need to be diverse, going beyond what has worked in the past, identified needs of children based on checklists of developmental milestones, or observations of individual children. These are valuable, but sources should include information from parents, reflection on what the children are talking about and doing, what is going on in the community, and interests expressed directly by the children.

Information should be collected about:

- Children's in interactions with others
- Projects and experiences
- Particular parts of the day (for example, arrivals, morning tea time, meal times, transition times, group times, preparing for rest and sleep)
- Areas of the physical environment and their uses.

One suggestion of a way of documenting information follows. It is designed for making notes on an on-going basis. One sheet for each area of learning and development is kept for each child. The notes inform communication with parents as well as planning. Notes in the information column include reminders of things to follow up on, observations of children's experiences and behaviours in these areas.

Name: Hugo Area of learning: Sense of self		
Date	Information	Provision
14.10.00	Hugo crawled over to the end of a lunch table, pulled himself up, banged his hands on the table, looked up, smiled and crowed. He tried to walk around the table, but the chairs were in the way. His father said he does this at home with any furniture that is low enough.	Put a table out on the grass. Add materials for him to play with ... blocks banging, some play dough? See what works.

This format has suggested headings only. The headings overlap considerably, so professionals can choose the headings that best suit their needs. It is important that professionals design forms that are suitable for them.

Another example follows. This sheet would be

prepared for each child, in conjunction with parents, on a regular basis (perhaps every 3-6 months). In between the times of updating the sheet, these categories highlight some areas for discussion between parents and professionals. The information on such a sheet would inform planning directly.

Name: Jaiyra
Date: February 2002
Age: 23 months

Contributing Information: Aleisha (mum), Scott (dad), Susannah (teacher)

Categories of information	Notes	Provisions
Family situation, religion, culture, current events, other	Baby Cody now 8 mths, grandparents visited for 4 weeks – left two weeks ago. J is the eldest grandchild & grandparents spent a lot of time with him. At home is challenging all requests, mother thinks he has realised that he has to share her time and attention now that Cody is more active and sleeps less.	Extra attention where possible, as he misses this.
Recent accomplishments, successes, achievements	Increasing vocab. Speaks clearly, manages self feeding with ease using fingers, excellent climber	Encourage use of language, acknowledge success in eating, provide opportunities to climb safely – watch him when he is outside in the older children's play area, as he will try to climb anything.
Major developmental tasks currently working on	Enjoys talking, interested in large motor skills, particularly climbing and running, having trouble coping with sharing adults' attention.	Engage in conversations, try to give extra attention
Main interests	Enjoys books. Spends time 'reading' by himself. Asks for new books to be read aloud to him.	Ensure books are of interest to him; try to find books about babies.
Particular strengths	Language skills Climbing skills	Lots of conversations, as above, and opportunities to climb safely.
Challenges	Coming to terms with Cody's increasing competence. J challenges adults here and at home. Is having trouble separating from mum.	Give choices where possible; be firm when there can be no choice. Be sure adult is able to help J and his mum separate. Establish a ritual and try to stick with it.
Likes and dislikes	Loves fruit and enjoys books	See above
Other	Mum and Dad seem pretty worried.	Try to reassure parents that J's behaviour is normal for age; give them all the good news about J that we can.

PLANNING STRATEGIES

Planning strategies encourage the professional to think about every dimension of the child's experience rather than operating with a focus on what are traditionally referred to as "activities".

Planning needs to encompass:

- the routines of daily living
- the physical environment
- relationships and interactions (between children, between professionals and children, between parents and professionals)
- provisions for play, as well as special experiences and opportunities.

It is important that over time the planning and reflection process requires professionals to *think about* every dimension of the provisions. However, the written plans for a particular period of time do not have to cover every provision. In any service, there are some provisions that are always there, that can be taken for granted. These include among other things, some of the equipment and materials, the routines and rituals, and the usual ways of interacting with children. While these may be varied from time to time, and they should be looked at occasionally, they are usually fairly stable dimensions of the provisions. Planning takes place in the knowledge that many other provisions, in addition to what has been deliberately planned, will be present.

Themes, often chosen by professionals and slavishly followed with little regard for the diversity of children's interests at any one time, do not fit with the spirit of this Framework. Theme-based planning is attractive to some professionals because it gives a kind of coherence and rationale (at least on paper and at least to the adults) to what is offered: it links everything to the same content topic. However, it has already been said that learning is best supported through a collection of related provisions that are offered over a period of time and that are meaningful to children. Themes may emerge as a result of children's prolonged interest, but that is different to imposing them. While a collection of

related provisions may result in retrospect in a kind of theme, this is a very different process to one where the professional picks a topic in advance and plans a collection of experiences around that topic, or even in a situation where the topic derives from children's interests. Themes emerge through a process of collaboration rather than being imposed in advance.

Especially with under three year olds, the only theme that is appropriate is Me, Life, and the World!

Written plans do not have to be structured according to time, that is, they do not have to be written as a timetable. Plans can forecast possibilities and children's actual experiences can be noted at the time of evaluation.

The aim of the format below is to focus attention on the most significant dimensions of children's experience. A version of this format can be used in conjunction with a more traditional way of thinking about what is provided for children, such as one that categorises experiences in terms of developmental areas. This plan would be informed by documentation of various kinds and evaluation of previous plans. This format below could be used for planning for one week at a time or for longer periods.

Like the Framework itself, it presumes deep and broad knowledge about children and practice with children.

Comments on specific aspects of the planning format follow:

- What is written in different boxes overlaps.
- Including a section called Ordinary Provisions or Other Provisions provides opportunities to indicate changes or additions to what is usually or always there. Some examples would be adding some new equipment to the sandpit, changing the home corner into a restaurant, moving the easels to a different part of the room, or removing the existing craft materials and replacing them with fresh ones.

Week Beginning:

Provisions	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Follow Up
Routine daily living experiences						
Environment (indoors & outdoors)						
Special opportunities						
Interactions & relationships						
Structure of the day/session						
Partnerships with parents/families						
Diversity						
Children as capable and resourceful						

- Special opportunities might include excursions, major events such as someone coming in from the community, a celebration of some sort, going out to a playgroup (family day care).
- The category of Interactions and Relationships foregrounds the major focus of provisions. The kinds of notes that might be included here would be about promoting collaboration between particular children, setting up equipment and materials in ways that invite children to work together, ensuring that a quiet undemanding baby gets some one-to-one time with an adult, or encouraging group discussions. It might also be a reminder about talking more about feelings or making sure that an adult is close by when toddlers are playing together.
- The side columns under the heading Follow-up are a place to make jottings on the run, reminders for alterations, and observations and insights to reflect on later. The boxes along the bottom are places to write notes about those significant areas ahead of time or as the day proceeds.
- It is important to remember that children need time, to engage, to adjust, to enjoy success. There would be many times when arrows extend across boxes, indicating that a provision will remain in place or be a focus for several days or longer.
- Plans made in advance are adjusted all the time, in response to a variety of circumstances.

It is useful for professionals to have at hand several ways of classifying the provisions that are made for children. These can be used to reflect on what has happened and to ensure that all areas of development and all categories of experience are being catered for. For example, cross classification could happen using the categories of learning and development that are considered in this Framework.

The following format provides a means of cross checking and is used in conjunction with the previous one. It allows professionals to check that their provisions cover the areas of learning and development, and may help them to think more

broadly about the kinds of learning afforded through their provisions.

The following may be sources of ideas:

- A child's indication of interest
- Parents' or family members' suggestions
- Observation by self or colleagues
- Interest of colleague, self or other member of the community
- Community events or facilities.

Identifying the source of ideas gives professionals an opportunity to think about the extent to which they are listening and observing to find out what children are interested in doing, and the extent to which family members are used for ideas and input.

EVALUATION

Evaluation is on-going and continuous, that is, it is built into the culture of the service for the entire children's service community to reflect on what is happening. There should be provision for making notes about plans as they are implemented, that is, for on-going documentation of reflections and evaluation as things are occurring.

There is great merit in letting parents in on the complexities and challenges associated with working with children. This requires going beyond simply displaying the completed plan. Displayed documentation about projects, conversations, problems children have encountered and solutions explored helps parents to appreciate what is happening in the children's service. Plans and other documentation intended for parents must be written in ways that parents can understand and appreciate.

Areas of Learning	Provisions and comments	Source*
Child's sense of self		
Communicating child		
Thinking child		
Physical child		
Social child		
Creative child		
Spiritual and aesthetic child		
Source* of ideas	Child - c Parent - p Staff - c	

QUESTIONS AND ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION AND DISCUSSION

1. In your planning how is information about each child translated into plans and actual practice?
2. In what ways do you encourage parents and other family members to contribute to the provisions for children?
3. Examine and discuss with colleagues the ways information is collected about children in your service. In light of this chapter, could they be improved?
4. Discuss the planning formats provided. Could they be adapted for your service in ways that are useful?
5. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of planning according to themes. Are themes ever appropriate? If so, when? For what age groups?
6. Examine the information you provide for parents about the daily experience of children. Is it written in ways that parents would appreciate and understand. Ask parents what kind of information they would like about their child's experience.
7. Collect examples from your own practice and that of your colleagues that illustrate the main points in this chapter.



MAJOR TRANSITIONS

Content

Page No

Links with Schools.....	143
Questions and Issues for Consideration and Discussion.....	146

SCHOOLS

Attending to transitions is an important part of creating and strengthening relationships and connections and making meaning from experience. Transitions involve making sense through making connections between something familiar and something new. Transitions are relevant to the Framework at many different levels and for all members of the children's service community.

Transitions are about movement, change, continuity or discontinuity. Transitions are points of vulnerability and of possibility. They can be stressful or calming, points for positive growth or for setbacks. If children, if people of any age in fact, are to feel secure, it is essential that transitions be given careful consideration in order for them to be positive.

Attention to transitions is part of a bigger concern to provide consistency and continuity for children so that feelings of security and empowerment are enhanced and learning is optimised. The younger children are the more novel every experience, and so it is more important that new experiences are built on what is familiar. Small changes can be very powerful for very young children. Development and learning, living in fact, are about expansion through encountering new experiences. What helps is to bring to a new situation related knowledge and previous experience.

Transitions for children who are going into services where their culture is under-represented or not represented at all and for children with disabilities must be handled with particular sensitivity to feelings and points of vulnerability.

Children's transitions are almost always families' transitions, and are points of opportunity and vulnerability for them as well. Parents' basic concerns rise to the surface: Will my child be safe? Will my child be looked after and cared for? Will my child be valued and cared about? Will I be treated with respect? Will I be listened to? Will my concerns and priorities for my child be taken into consideration? This is especially true if the child is in some significant way different to most of the

other children in the service.

Professionals empathise with these concerns and focus on developing partnerships with families. Professionals must work with families to provide as much continuity and appropriate similarity as possible between the child's past experiences, current family experiences, and those offered in the children's service.

The major transitions, in addition to those between segments of the day, that are worthy of attention include

- The move into the service and back to the family each time the child attends
- Entering a service for the first time
- Leaving a service forever
- Moving from one group to another within a centre.

Handling these and other transitions in ways that empower the child benefits the child's learning.

LINKS WITH THE EARLY YEARS OF SCHOOL

A very significant desired outcome of spending time in a children's service is that children make a successful transition to school. An aim of a children's service is that children will be contributing and comfortable members of the school community. This means that they will be confident, flexible, and have the confidence and skills to engage effectively in variety of interactions and relationships

It is important for children that professionals in children's services, staff in schools, and families share information with each other about programs, routines, expectations and knowledge about the child. On-going communication helps strengthen the notion of a continuum of learning and experience for young children, and strengthens the notion of community.

As with other transitions, the greater the continuity and similarity between the experiences, in general the easier the transition. The transition to school is an especially significant one, in part because of the complexity and size of most schools, and the ratio of teachers to children, in comparison with most children's services.

In addition, the importance of a successful transition to school is heightened because of the significance in community of the milestone of starting formal schooling. For the child there has often been a big build-up. The child has no doubt heard stories about school, which and lead to both positive and negative expectations. Professionals will work out the best ways to assist children to make the transition if they ask questions, encourage children to tell them what they are concerned about, and then figure out ways to address those concerns. Adults cannot presume to know what will re-assure children about starting school. All children's services, in collaboration with parents, the schools to which children will go, and children themselves make provisions for this major transition.

Both the notions of children being ready for school and schools being ready for children have some validity. This Framework purports to prepare children for school and for life. It does this in several major ways, by promoting:

- A sense of curiosity
- A sense of achievement
- Experience of successful learning
- Confidence in oneself, willingness to take reasonable risks
- Identification with one's culture and family

The transition to school is an especially significant one, in part because of the complexity and size of most schools, and the ratio of teachers to children, in comparison with most children's services.

- Familiarity with and sense of belonging to the larger community
- Appreciation of others and the benefits of collaboration
- Skills to interact with adults and other children
- Comfort with diversity
- Highly developed communication skills
- An active approach to learning, problem solving
- An appreciation of literacy and numeracy as invaluable means of making meaning in the world
- Flexibility, a robustness of self that allows compromise
- Resourcefulness and resilience

- Perseverance in the face of obstacles
- An optimistic and positive approach to life
- Developing self help skills
- An ability to follow directions
- Developing concentration skills
- Assertiveness, confidence to ask questions and seek help.

The child with these qualities and skills is then ready to take full advantage of the opportunities afforded by being at school. This means that they will approach that experience:

- Feeling confident about being able to cope
- Without excessive anxiety
- With a positive attitude
- With prior experiences and achievements which will be built on and extended in school
- Eager to meet other children
- Knowing what is expected of them

- Somewhat familiar with the school environment and rules.

The child's confidence about going to school is enhanced when children and families feel confident and relaxed about the transition process. It is appropriate for children's services to work together with families with schools to make and maintain links between schools and children's services.

Once children enter school, their curriculum is organised around six key learning areas. These are outlined below.

- English
- Mathematics
- Science and Technology
- Personal Development, Health and Physical Education
- Human Society and its Environment
- Creative and Practical Arts

These six areas incorporate the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that assist teachers in developing comprehensive learning programs for young children. This does not mean that learning and teaching in schools only takes place in these separated areas. Children of pre-and primary school age need to learn about inter-related concepts and processes across learning areas. One way in which this is achieved is by bringing

together two or more learning areas in a learning program. It is not appropriate for professionals in settings for children before they go to school to plan for children's learning according to key learning areas. Young children learn in a holistic way, so their experience must reflect the breadth of possibilities for learning.

In all settings, focusing solely on isolated academic skills limits children's opportunities for a broad range of experiences. Children need challenging opportunities to communicate, explore, reason, be creative, express their individuality and use their initiative in all areas of development and learning.

EXAMPLE OF ENCOURAGING LIFE ENHANCING RELATIONSHIPS

A preschool and the local primary school set up a buddy system where children of different ages in the primary school came down to the pre-school regularly to read to and work with the children. On a number of occasions they took the four year olds to the primary school for special assemblies, for lunch and just to familiarise them with the school.

QUESTIONS AND ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION AND DISCUSSION

1. What links do you have with the school or schools that children in your service will attend? How can they be strengthened if they already exist? If they don't, how can you initiate some contact and communication?
2. Reflect critically on the ways that you help children make the transition to school. Think of ways that these can be improved.
3. Collect examples from your own practice and that of your colleagues of the main points in this chapter.

CONCLUSION

Content	Page No.
Implementation in Different Types of Services.....	149
Preparation for Professionals.....	149
Understanding and Appreciation of Diversity.....	150
Affirming and Challenging.....	151



CONCLUSION

Embracing this Framework has major implications at the individual service level, in preservice preparation to work as a professional in children's services, in planning and delivering professional development experiences, and in advocacy.

What follows is a brief discussion of some of those implications.

IMPLEMENTATION IN DIFFERENT TYPES OF SERVICES

The Framework applies equally to family day care, centre based long day care, centre based occasional care, multi-functional Aboriginal services, mobile services, and preschools. The Framework deals with commonalities, but obviously, the implementation of the Framework, or the Framework in practice, will look different in the different service forms.

The following are important dimensions of any children's service. However, length of time that a child spends at one time, total amount of time spent, and age of the child make some dimensions more critical.

In general, the longer the child's day in the children's service, the more important it is to provide:

- Opportunities for time away from the group
- More different spaces to spend time
- A relaxed pace
- Serenity, peace and quiet
- Choice about pace and involvement
- Many opportunities for child initiated experiences
- Routine experiences conducted as occasions for learning and social interaction

- A comfortable and attractive environment.

In general, the larger the proportion of a child's childhood in a setting, the more important it is to provide:

- Opportunities to go out into the community
- A balanced experience that caters for all areas of development and learning
- Challenge, novelty and richness
- Variety in experiences
- Opportunities to learn and practice daily living skills
- Close caring relationships with mutual attachment with a few adults
- Time with older and younger people
- Partnership with parents.

In general, the younger the child, the more important it is to:

- Build feelings of security
- Ensure continuity of experiences and people
- Promote close relationships
- Provide a variety of hands-on experiences
- Work in partnership with parents
- Take routine activities slowly
- Individualise the child's experience.

Of course these three areas interact with each other and with other factors.

PREPARATION OF PROFESSIONALS

The Framework has major implications for both the structure and content of education and training in preparation to work in children's services and of on-going professional development.

An orientation to work in partnership with families, a deep appreciation of diversity and how to work with it in services, a holistic approach to the provision of opportunities for children, and a perspective on the child, no matter how young, that sees and capitalises on strengths and competence are just several of the key concepts in this document that have profound implications for preparation to work in contemporary children's services.

The very fact that the document relates to a range of forms of children's services and to the entire age range of children before they enter school provides a significant message about the structure and scope of courses to prepare early childhood professionals.

In addition, the Framework requires careful consideration of the qualities of people needed in the profession.

UNDERSTANDING AND APPRECIATION OF DIVERSITY

A specific implication of the Framework is that it is essential that all children's services professionals have a thorough understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and their contemporary situations and cultures, and grounding in meaningful approaches to cultural diversity. In addition, in as much as everyone has biases and prejudices, all children's services professionals need to understand racism and prejudice, and need to develop skill and sensitivities to deal with it effectively wherever they find it. Many will also need assistance in identifying their own biases and prejudices and the ways that these impact on their functioning as professionals, and addressing them.

AFFIRMING AND CHALLENGING

This Framework establishes desirable practice as

something that arises from deep engagement and creative constructive thinking. It explicitly rejects rigid, doctrinaire approaches to practice. The approach in this Framework will be for some confronting, a radical change from familiar understandings and comfortable ways of operating, and therefore there will be resistance to its adoption. The aim is to help professionals think more creatively and expansively. The hope is both that it will be validating and that it will create optimum disequilibrium.

There may be a tendency for some to view the Framework initially as mainly an affirmation of current practice. Deeper engagement with and reflection on the concepts are likely to result in re-thinking of at least some aspects of practice. For example, if some of the following characterise practice, there is need to reflect on the extent to which the Framework is being implemented:

- Special activities labelled as literacy activities
- Tokenistic celebrations of cultures, held in isolation from the rest of the provisions — for example Aboriginal Day or Turkish Week
- A designated period of the day called free play or free choice
- Only a portion of the day that is called “the program”
- Any distinction made between care and education
- A major focus in planning and programming on activities
- Discouragement or prevention of parents from being present except at designated times
- A number of times when children are all required to do the same thing
- Displays of products of children's efforts that all look the same
- A “cute ” name for the service
- The sound of “Good boy, good girl” or “Clever boy, Clever girl” being uttered frequently

- Predetermined themes for the rest of the term or year, or even on-going planning by themes
- Lack of encouragement for children to use their first language at home or in the service
- Observations and assessment of children focusing mainly or solely on designated developmental milestones.

And finally...

It is hoped that the Framework will be long lasting. However, it does reflect some current thinking around a set of beliefs and understandings that are appropriate at this time for children. It also reflects the social, political and professional context in which it has been written. These contexts will alter, and understandings and beliefs will be added to and altered in ways that cannot now be envisaged. They will be translated into practice in ways that are unique in each service, in each encounter, reflecting the individual creativity, wisdom and innovation that come out of collaboration.

While this document has been written primarily for professionals working in children's services, it is hoped that it will be read by and used with parents and other family members, and by policy makers who determine the shape of children's services. If the children's service models itself on the desirable community, then it follows that it is also a framework for the larger community. It defines the kind of community that gives children a desirable framework for their lives, a lens through which to view themselves, others, and the world around them. Another major implication is that the children's service has to engage with and in the community. If it takes a village or a community to rear a child then the village or community has to be involved, and the voices of the community must be listened to.

Children's services professionals wanting to move in directions indicated may want to reflect on the day, the week, the month, and discuss the following questions with colleagues:

1. What happened today, this week, this month that supports constructive relationships between everyone in the children's service community and with the broader community?
2. Can I identify an incident today (this week) where I was amazed at a child's understanding and competence and responded appropriately? What can I do to encourage the child further?
3. When have I suspended my own meaning and truly opened myself up to the meaning of a situation from a child's perspective?
4. In what ways has my practice with children, with parents, and with my colleagues acknowledged and honoured diversity, particularly cultural, linguistic and religious diversity?
5. What have I done and what more can I do to empower children appropriately in their own experience here?
6. In what ways have I actively encouraged collaboration and relationships among children?
7. How have I used the ideas, critique, suggestions, interests and strengths of parents and other family members of the children, and of my colleagues?

The essence of being a true professional is continually asking these and other questions, being confident and courageous enough to engage with what is difficult, challenging, frightening, worrying or unknown, and being wise enough to affirm and celebrate one's own success and achievements and those of others.

REFERENCES AND KEY RESOURCES

The list below contains the resources which most directly informed the Framework. These resources are particularly compatible with the Framework and which will be very useful to those individuals and groups that want to investigate the implications of the Framework further. It is a very selective list, and there are many other useful resources which can inform implementation of the Framework.

Arthur, L., Beecher, B., Dockett, S., Farmer, S. and Death, E. 1996, *Programming and Planning in Early Childhood Settings* (2nd edition), Harcourt Brace, Sydney.

Bowes, J. and Hayes, A. 1999, *Contexts and*

consequences: Impacts on children, families and communities. In J. Bowes and A. Hayes (eds), *Children, Families and Communities: Contexts and Consequences*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne.

Bredenkamp, S. 1998, *Defining standards for practice: the continuing debate.* In C. Seefeldt and A. Galper (eds), *Continuing Issues in Early Childhood Education*, Merrill, Upper Saddle River, New Jersey.

Bredenkamp, S. and Copple, C. (eds) 1997, *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs* (revised edition), National Association for the Education of Young Children, Washington.

Centre for Community Child Health Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne 2001, *Cornerstone of Quality in Family Day Care and Child Care Centres: Parent-Professional Partnerships*, Centre for Community Child Health, Melbourne.



APPENDICES

Contents	Page No.
References and Key Resources.....	155
Appendix 1: Glossary of Terms.....	157
Appendix 2: The New Zealand Early Childhood Curriculum Te Whariki.....	159
Appendix 3: Abridged Version of the Framework	
Appendix 4: Rationale for The Practice of Relationships: Essential Provisions for Children's Services	

- Centre for Community Child Health Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne 2002, *The Heart of Partnership – Carer-Parent Communication in Family Day Care*, Centre for Community Child Health, Melbourne.
- Dahlberg, G. Moss, P. and Pence, A. 1999, *Beyond Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care*, Falmer Press, London.
- Department for Education and Children's Services South Australia 1996, *Curriculum Framework for Early Childhood Settings: Foundation Areas of Learning*, Department for Education and Children's Services South Australia, Adelaide.
- Department of Education, Training and Employment South Australia 1999, *Aboriginal Perspectives on the Early Years of Learning*, Department of Education, Training and Employment, Adelaide.
- Dockett, S., Clyde, M. and Perry, B. 1998, Starting school: Voices of children. Paper presented at the Australian Association for Research in Education Annual Conference, Adelaide.
- Dockett, S., Perry, B., and Howard, P. 2000, Guidelines for transition to school. Paper presented at the Australian Research in Early Childhood Education Conference, Canberra, January.
- Early Childhood Working Party of the Council of Education Systems Chief Executive Officers (CESCEO) 2000, "Literacy, Numeracy and Social Outcomes in Early Childhood Education and Care".
- Fleet, A. and Patterson, C. 1998, Beyond the boxes: Planning for real knowledge and live children, *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, Vol.23, no. 4, December, 31-35.
- Gonzalez-Mena, J. 1998, *Foundations – Early Childhood Education in a Diverse Society*, Mayfield Publishing Company, Mountain View, California.
- Gonzalez- Mena, J. and Eyer, D.W. 1997, *Infants, Toddlers and Caregivers* (4th edition), Mayfield Publishing Company, Mountain View, California.
- Gonzalez-Mena, J. 1997, *Multicultural Issues in Child Care*, Mayfield, Mountain View, California.
- Greenman, J. 1988, *Caring Spaces, Learning Places – Children's Environments that Work*, Exchange Press, Redmond, Washington.
- Greenman, J. 1998, *Places for Childhood – Making Quality Happen in the Real World*, Exchange Press, Redmond, Washington.
- Greenman, J. and Stonehouse, A. 1997, *Prime Times – A Handbook of Excellence in Infant and Toddler Programs*, Longman, Melbourne.
- Hutchins, T. 1995, *Babies Need More than Minding – Planning Programs for Babies and Toddlers in Group Settings*, Australian Early Childhood Association, Canberra.
- Institute of Early Childhood, Macquarie University, 1998-2000, *Mia-Mia: A New Vision for Day Care* (Part 1: The Program for 2-5 year olds; Part 2: The Infants Program [Under Twos]; Part 3: Building Relationships). A video series for early childhood preservice and inservice programs. Produced by Change Focus Media, Sydney.
- MacNaughton, G. 1999, *Early Childhood Review: Curriculum Issues in Research and in Action*, Discussion Paper for consultation, prepared for the Department of Education, Tasmania.
- Makin, L., et al. 1999, *Mapping Literacy Practices in Early Childhood Services*, New South Wales Departments of Education and Training and Community Services, Sydney.
- Makin, L., Campbell, C., and Jones-Diaz, C. 1995, *One childhood: Many languages*, Harper Educational, Sydney.
- New, R. 1992, The integrated early childhood curriculum: New interpretations based on research and practice. In C. Seefeldt (ed), *The Early Childhood Curriculum – a Review of Current Research* (2nd edition), Teachers College Press, New York.

New, R. 1999, What should children learn? Making choices and taking chances, *Early Childhood Research and Practice*, Vol. 1, No.2, Fall, n.p.

New Zealand Ministry of Education 1996, *Te Whariki – He Whariki Matauranga monga Mokopuna o Aotearoa – Early Childhood Curriculum*, Learning Media Limited, Wellington.

New South Wales Department of Education and Training 1998, *Assessing Literacy and Numeracy: Starting Kindergarten*, NSW Department of Education and Training, Sydney.

New South Wales Department of Education and Training 1999, *Foundations for Learning: Kindergarten*, NSW Department of Education and Training, Sydney.

Perry, B., Dockett, S. and Howard, P. 2000, Starting school: Issues for children, parents and teachers, *Journal of Australian Research in Early Childhood Education*, Vol. 7, no. 1, 41-53.

Queensland School Curriculum Council 1998, *Preschool Curriculum Guidelines*, State of Queensland (Queensland School Curriculum Council), Brisbane.

Seefeldt, C. and Galper, A. 1998, *Continuing Issues in Early Childhood Education*, Merrill, Upper Saddle River, New Jersey.

Smith, A. 1999, The role of an early childhood curriculum: Promoting diversity versus uniformity. Paper presented at Enhancing Quality in the Early Years Conference, Dublin, November.

Stonehouse, A. 1995, *How Does It Feel? Child Care from a Parent's Perspective*, Australian Early Childhood Association, Canberra.

Stonehouse, A. 1990, *Opening the Doors – Child Care in a Multicultural Society*, Australian Early Childhood Association, Canberra.

APPENDIX 1

Glossary of Terms

Some of the terms used in the document are explained briefly below. The Glossary is intended to be a resource for the readers of the document. The terms are defined in the way they are used in the document.

Child-in- the-context-of-relationships centred approach: This term acknowledges that children's services promote the well-being of the child both by giving priority to constructive relationships and interactions and by looking at the child in the context of family, culture and community.

Children's service: A long day care centre, family day care scheme (and individual family day care home), preschool, mobile service, occasional care centre.

Community: The service is described as a community. The term is also used to refer to the local geographic context in which the service operates, the larger context of the state, nation and the world, and the professional context.

Core contextual concepts: These are the foundation for the Framework:

- Children's services are communities of learners that exist on behalf of children's well-being.
- The professional's judgements, decision making and choices are the major contributors to children's experience.
- The curriculum is the intentional provisions and offerings made by the professionals to support children's learning and well-being.
- The Framework both provides definition and supports uniqueness.

Culture: A dynamic, evolving complex collection of values, history, tradition, ways of living, and their material manifestations. Culture is inextricably intertwined with individual and family lifestyles, preferences and tastes. It cannot be defined or captured merely through tangible symbols.

Curriculum: Everything professionals do to support children's well-being and learning, the intentional provisions and the offerings they make in order to create possibilities and opportunities for children's engagement.

Desirable practice: Practice that fits the intentions of the Framework.

Essential qualities: Characteristics that it is necessary for the professional to have in order to implement the Framework. These qualities can be nurtured and strengthened through experience and learning. They include: empathy, respect, perseverance, and passion for learning that leads to growth.

Experiences: What children actually do with the provisions professionals make for them. Traditionally called activities, but experiences are broader. They are occasions for learning.

Framework: A collection of statements that underpins practice.

Honour diversity: To have respect for all people, a belief in all peoples' worth regardless of gender, lifestyle, family composition, abilities, cultural and linguistic background and other differences, and to demonstrate that respect in relationships.

Image: Picture, idea. Includes understandings and assumptions.

Life enhancing relationships: Meaningful relationships which are constructive and lead children (and adults for that matter) to value themselves and to an understanding of who they are. Relationships in children's services exist to promote the well-being of the child.

Major obligations: Significant and challenging tasks for which the professional accepts responsibility. These require a great deal of energy and commitment. They are:

- To promote and support respectful life enhancing relationships
- To practise in ways which acknowledge the child as capable and resourceful.
- To strive for meaning and connections
- To honour diversity

Outcomes: The result or impact of experiences on children's learning and development.

Parent involvement: Ways of engaging parents in the operation of the service.

Partnership: A relationship that exists for a common purpose and for mutual benefit, where power is shared.

Practice: The range of behaviours, actions, interactions and relationships in which children's services professionals engage on behalf of children's well-being and learning.

Professional: Anyone who works with children in a children's service in ways that implement this Framework.

Provisions: An inclusive term for all that is planned and prepared, what is actually there for the child. It includes the environment, experiences, interactions, relationships, structure and flow of the day and routines.

Spiritual and moral child: Includes dimensions of the child's development and learning that relate to appreciation of life and beauty, and to learning about right and wrong.

Strive for meaning and connections: This is when professionals ensure that children engage deeply in authentic relevant and meaningful experiences that reflect their lives and interests. Meaning and connection happen when children explore,

experiment, combine, take apart, reflect, image, hypothesise and considers possibilities in order to make sense of their world.

APPENDIX 2

The New Zealand Early Childhood Curriculum Te Whariki

There are many resources around that provide guidance for determining outcomes. The New Zealand Early Childhood Curriculum *Te Whariki* (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1996, Wellington), although it is structured very differently to this Framework and uses different terminology, is very similar to this Framework in its emphases. The daily experience and learning of children in children's services are categorised into five strands: well-being, belonging, contribution,

communication, and exploration. For each of these strands there are a number of goals, and for each goal there are a number of learning outcomes. These outcomes are a sample of knowledge, skills and attitudes, and it is acknowledged that each service will determine its own desirable outcomes. One of the many strengths of these excellent statements is that they are worded in terms of a process or path, rather than a fixed point at which children should "arrive". They are outcomes that reflect a journey that children are on in the years before school. Obviously age and experience will influence where each child is on that journey.

In addition this extensive list of outcomes emphasises children as capable and resourceful and the role of professionals as supporting and strengthening what children bring.

WELL-BEING

Goal 1. Children experience an environment where their health is promoted.

Outcomes. Children develop:

- increasing understanding of their bodies and how they function;
- knowledge about how to keep themselves healthy;
- self-help and self-care skills for eating, drinking, food preparation, toileting, resting, sleeping, washing and dressing;
- positive attitudes towards eating, sleeping and toileting. (p.48)

Goal 2. Children experience an environment where their emotional well-being is nurtured.

Outcomes. Children develop:

- an increasing ability to determine their own actions and make their own choices;
- a capacity to pay attention, maintain concentration, and be involved;
- a growing capacity to tolerate and enjoy a moderate degree of change, surprises, uncertainty, and puzzling events;
- a sense of personal worth, and knowledge that personal worth does not depend on today's behaviour or ability;
- an ability to identify their own emotional responses and those of others;
- confidence and ability to express emotional needs;
- trust that their emotional needs will be responded to. (p.50)

Goal 3. Children experience an environment where they are kept safe from harm.

Outcomes. Children develop:

- increasing knowledge about how to keep themselves safe from harm;
- confidence that they can participate and take risks without fear of harm;
- ability and confidence to express their fears openly;
- trust that their fears will be taken seriously;
- a sense of responsibility for protecting others from injury and from physical and emotional abuse;
- respect for rules about harming others and the environment and an understanding of the reasons for such rules. (p.52)

BELONGING

Goal 1. Children and their families experience an environment where connecting links with the family and the wider world are affirmed and extended.

Outcomes. Children develop:

- an understanding of the links between the early childhood education setting and the known and familiar wider worlds through people, images, objects, languages, sounds, smells, and tastes that are the same as at home;
- knowledge about the features of the area of physical and/or spiritual significance to the local community, such as the local river or mountain;
- interest and pleasure in discovering an unfamiliar wider world where the people, images, objects, languages, sounds, smells, and tastes are different from those at home;

- awareness of connections between events and experiences within and beyond the early childhood education setting;
- connecting links between the early childhood education setting and other settings that relate to the child, such as home, school, or parent's workplaces;
- knowledge about the role of the wider world of work, such as the hospital, the supermarket, or the fire service. (p.56)
- an understanding that these routines, customs, and events can be different in other settings;
- capacities to predict and plan from the patterns and regular events that make up the day or the session;
- enjoyment of and interest in a moderate degree of change;
- constructive strategies for coping with change. (p.60)

Goal 2. Children and their families experience an environment where they know that they have a place.

Outcomes. Children develop:

- an increasing ability to play an active part in running of the programme;
- skills in caring for the environment, such as cleaning, fixing, gardening, and helping others with self-care skills;
- the confidence and ability to express their ideas and to assist others;
- a feeling of belonging, and having a right to belong, in the early childhood setting;
- an ability to take on different roles in different contexts. (p.58)

Goal 3. Children and their families experience an environment where they feel comfortable with the routines, customs, and regular events.

Outcomes. Children develop:

- an understanding of the routines, customs, and regular events of the early childhood education setting;

Goal 4. Children and their families experience an environment where they know the limits and boundaries of acceptable behaviour.

Outcomes. Children develop:

- the capacity to discuss and negotiate rules, rights, and fairness;
- an understanding of the rules of the early childhood education setting, of the reasons for them, and of which rules will be different in other settings;
- an understanding that the early childhood education setting is fair for all;
- an understanding of the consequences of stepping beyond the limits of acceptable behaviour;
- an increasing ability to take responsibility for their own actions;
- the ability to disagree and state a conflicting opinion assertively and appropriately. (p.62)

CONTRIBUTION

Goal 1. Children experience an environment where there are equitable opportunities for learning, irrespective of gender, ability, age, ethnicity, or background.

Outcomes. Children develop:

- an understanding of their own rights and those of others;
- the ability to recognise discriminatory practices and behaviour and to respond appropriately;
- some early concepts of the value of appreciating diversity and fairness;
- the self-confidence to stand up for themselves and others against biased ideas and discriminatory behaviour;
- positive judgments on their own gender and the opposite gender;
- positive judgments on their own ethnic group and other ethnic groups;
- confidence that their family background is viewed positively within the early childhood education setting;
- respect for children who are different from themselves and ease of interactions with them. (p.66)

Goal 2. Children experience an environment where they are affirmed as individuals.

Outcomes. Children develop:

- a sense of “who they are”, their place in the wider world of relationships, and the ways in which these are valued;
- a realistic perception of what they know and of what they can and cannot yet do;
- a perception of themselves as capable of acquiring new interests and abilities;

- abilities and interests in a range of domains – spatial, visual, linguistic, physical, musical, logical or mathematical, personal, and social – which build on the children’s strengths;
- awareness of their own special strengths, and confidence that these are recognised and valued. (p.68)

Goal 3. Children experience an environment where they are encouraged to learn with and alongside others.

Outcomes. Children develop:

- strategies and skills of initiating, maintaining and enjoying a relationship with other children – including taking turns, problem solving, negotiating, talking another’s point of view, supporting others, and understanding other people’s attitudes and feelings – in a variety of contexts;
- a range of strategies for solving conflicts in a peaceful ways, and a perception that peaceful ways are best;
- positive and constructive attitudes to competition;
- an increasing ability to take another’s point of view and to empathise with others;
- a sense of responsibility and respect for the needs and well-being of the group, including taking responsibility for group decisions;
- an appreciation of the ways in which they can make contributions to groups and to group well-being;
- ways to enjoy solitary play when they choose to be alone. (p.70)

COMMUNICATION

Goal 1. Children experience an environment where they develop non-verbal communication skills for a range of purposes.

Outcomes. Children develop:

- responsive and reciprocal skills, such as turn-taking and offering;
- non-verbal ways of expressing and communicating imaginative ideas;
- an increasingly elaborate repertoire of gesture and expressive body movement for communication, including ways to make request non-verbally and appropriately;
- an increasing understanding of non-verbal messages, including an ability to attend to the non-verbal requests and suggestions of others;
- an ability to express their feelings and emotions in a range of appropriate non-verbal ways. (p.74)

Goal 2. Children experience an environment where they develop verbal communication skills for a range of purposes.

Outcomes. Children develop:

- language skills in real, play, and problem-solving contexts as well as in more structured language context, for example, through books.
- language skills for increasingly complex purposes, such as stating and asking others about intentions; expressing feelings and attitudes and asking others about feelings and attitudes; negotiating, predicting, planning, reasoning, guessing, story-telling; and using the language of probability, including words such as "might", "can't", "always", "never", and "sometimes";

- a playful interest in repetitive sounds and words, aspects of language such as rhythm, rhyme, and alliterations, and an enjoyment of nonsense stories and rhymes;
- an increasing knowledge and skill, in both syntax and meaning, in at least one language;
- an appreciation of te reo as a living and relevant language [this is the Maori language and reflects the deep commitment to preserving and honouring Maori culture];
- confidence that their first language is valued;
- the expectation that verbal communication will be a source of delight, comfort, and amusement and that it can be used to effectively communicate ideas and information and solve problems;
- the inclination and ability to listen attentively and respond appropriately to speakers. (p.76)

Goal 3. Children experience an environment where they experience the stories and symbols of their own and other cultures.

Outcomes. Children develop:

- an understanding that symbols can be "read" by others and that thoughts, experiences, and ideas can be represented through words, pictures, print, number, sounds, shapes, models, and photographs;
- familiarity with print and its uses by exploring and observing the use of print in activities that have meaning and purpose for children;
- familiarity with an appropriate selection of the stories and literature valued by the cultures in their community;
- an expectation that words and books can amuse, delight, comfort, illuminate, inform and excite;

- familiarity with numbers and their uses by exploring and observing the use of numbers in activities that have meaning and purpose for children;
- skill in using the counting system and mathematical symbols and concepts, such as numbers, length, weight, volume, shape, and pattern, form meaningful and increasingly complex purposes;
- the expectation that numbers can amuse, delight, illuminate, inform, and excite;
- experience with some of the technology and resources for mathematics, reading, and writing;
- experience with creating stories and symbols. (p.78)

Goal 4. Children experience an environment where they discover and develop different ways to be creative and expressive.

Outcomes. Children develop:

- familiarity with the properties and character of the materials and technology used in the creative and expressive arts;
- skill and confidence with the processes of art and craft, such as cutting, drawing, collage, painting, printmaking, weaving, stitching, carving, and constructing;
- skills with media that can be used for expressing a mood or a feeling or for representing information, such as crayons, pencils, paint, blocks, wood, musical instruments, and movement skills;
- an ability to be creative and expressive through a variety of activities, such as pretend play, carpentry, story-telling, drama, and making music;

- confidence to sing songs, including songs of their own, and to experiment with chants and pitch patterns;
- an increasing ability to keep a steady beat through speech, chants, dances, or movement to simple rhythmic patterns;
- an increasing familiarity with a selection of the art, craft, songs, music, and stories which are valued by the cultures in the community;
- an expectation that music, art, drama, and dance can muse, delight, comfort, illuminate, inform, and excite;
- familiarity with a variety of types of music, art, dance, and drama as expressions of feeling, mood, situation, occasion, and culture. (p.80)

EXPLORATION

Goal 1. Children experience an environment where their play is valued as meaningful learning and the importance of spontaneous play is recognised.

Outcomes. Children develop:

- the ability to make decisions, choose their own materials, and set their own problems;
- the attitude that not knowing and being uncertain are part of the process of being a good learner;
- an expectation that they take responsibility for their own learning;
- the knowledge that trying things out, explorations, and curiosity are important and valued ways of learning;
- increasing confidence and a repertoire for symbolic, pretend, or dramatic play;
- the knowledge that playing with ideas and materials, with no objective in mind, can be an enjoyable, creative, and valid approach to learning. (p.84)

Goal 2. Children experience an environment where they gain confidence in and control over their bodies.

Outcomes. Children develop:

- increasing knowledge about how to keep physically healthy;
- increasing control over their bodies, including development of locomotor skills, non-locomotor skills, manipulative skills and increasing agility, co-ordination, and balance;
- strategies for actively exploring and making sense of the world by using their bodies, including active exploration with all the sense, and the use of tools, materials, and equipment to extend skills;
- confidence with moving in space, moving to rhythm, and playing near and with others. (p.86)

Goal 3. Children experience an environment where they learn strategies for active exploration, thinking and reasoning.

Outcomes. Children develop:

- confidence in using a variety of strategies for exploring and making sense of the world, such as in setting and solving problems, looking for patterns, classifying things for a purpose, guessing, using trial and error, thinking logically and making comparisons, asking questions, explaining to others, listening to others, participating in reflective discussion, planning, observing, and listening to stories;
- the ability to identify and use information from a range of sources, including using books for reference;
- a perception of themselves as “explorers”, competent, confident learners who ask questions and make discoveries;
- the confidence to choose and experiment with materials, to play around with ideas, and to explore actively with all the senses;
- the ability to represent their discoveries, using creative and expressive media and the technology associated with them. (p.88)

Goal 4. Children experience an environment where they develop working theories for making sense of the natural, social, physical and material worlds.

Outcomes. Children develop:

- the ability to enquire, research, explore, generate, and modify their own working theories about the natural, social, physical and material worlds;
- an understanding of the nature and properties of a range of substances, such as sand, water, ice, bubbles, blocks and paper;
- spatial understanding, including an awareness of how two- and three- dimensional objects can be fitted together and moved in space and ways in which spatial information can be represented, such as in maps, diagrams, photographs, and drawings;
- familiarity with stories from different cultures about the living worlds, including myths and legends and oral, non-fictional, and fictional forms;
- working theories about Planet Earth and beyond;
- a knowledge of features of the land which are of local significance, such as the local river or mountain;
- theories about social relationships and social concepts, such as friendship, authority, and social rules and understandings;
- a relationship with the natural environment and a knowledge of their own place in the environment;
- respect and a developing sense of responsibility for the well-being of both the living and the non-living environment;
- working theories about the living world and knowledge of how to care for it;

- a growing recognition and enjoyment of "nonsense" explanations. (p.90)