Evaluation of the Implementation of the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework: For All Children from Birth to Eight Years

Early childhood professionals' perceptions of implementation activities and resources 2010–2011

Final Report

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Executive Summary

Context

The *Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework: For All Children from Birth to Eight Years* (VEYLDF) was released in November 2009 for implementation from 2010. The VEYLDF aligns with *Being, Belonging and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (EYLF; 2009), and links to the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (2005) in the early years of schooling. *My Time, Our Place – Framework for School Age Care in Australia* (FSAC; August 2011) builds on the EYLF and extends the principles, practice and outcomes to accommodate the contexts and age range of the children and young people who attend school-age care settings.

The implementation of the VEYLDF is a partnership between the Early Childhood Strategy Division, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) and the Early Years Unit, Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA). Implementation of the VEYLDF requires significant cultural change among all early childhood professionals. This is occurring within two key reforms: Council of Australian Governments (COAG) reform in early childhood and in the development of an Australian Curriculum for the school sector.

The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care (NQF) commenced in January 2012 and includes a new National Quality Standard (NQS) linked to approved learning frameworks. In combination, these frameworks outline fundamental components to inform and guide educators in the delivery of nationally consistent and high quality experiences and programs across Australia.

The development of the new Australian Curriculum has a focus on general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities. This reflects the integrated nature of children's learning in both the EYLF, the VEYLDF and in the FSAC.

The VEYLDF advances all children's learning and development from birth to eight years. It does this by supporting all early childhood professionals to work together, and with families, to achieve common outcomes for all children.

The success of implementation of the VEYLDF is measured in relation to the following outcomes as described in the DEECD–VCAA implementation project plan:

- improved outcomes for all Victorian children aged birth to eight years;
- strengthened practices of all early childhood professionals, particularly in the areas of collaborative, effective and reflective practice as defined in the VEYLDF;
- a common language and improved partnerships and collaboration between early childhood professionals that support common ways of working together and with families to advance children's learning and development;
- strengthened understanding among families and communities of the importance of early years education;
- strengthened understanding by families of how they can further support children's learning and development at home and in the community; and
- strong and equal partnerships between all early childhood professionals.

Project

The Griffith University Early Childhood Education Centre was commissioned by the VCAA to conduct an independent state-wide process evaluation of the implementation of the VEYLDF from 2010 to 2011.

Aims

The aims of the evaluation were to:
- measure and report on the reach, engagement and impact of the implementation of the VEYLDF activities and resources; and
- identify enablers, inhibitors and barriers experienced by early childhood professionals and to identify emerging leadership.

Methods

The evaluation methodology involved three components across a period of ten months: Stage 1 (Survey 1), Stage 2 (in-depth interviews) and Stage 3 (Survey 2). The majority of the 1141 respondents to the two surveys and the 20 interviewees:

- were aged 40 years and above;
- had more than ten years' experience;
- worked within the universal services sector; and
- worked with children aged three to five years.

Analyses showed that the surveys and interviews provided a useful sample of early childhood professionals throughout Victoria, particularly in terms of geographical coverage. The demographic profile is generally representative of the sector given its recognised diversity. Across the two surveys, services from the universal, targeted and intensive services, and tertiary sector were represented.

The 20 in-depth interviews included early childhood professionals in family day care (FDC), long day care (LDC), outside school hours care (OSHC), kindergartens, supported playgroups, primary schools and early childhood intervention services throughout Victoria.

Parameters of the evaluation

This evaluation is intended as a formative rather than summative evaluation of the implementation of VEYLDF. The implementation of the VEYLDF represents a major change and this evaluation is only able to measure the initial stages of the implementation. For this reason, the main purpose of this evaluation is to inform the ongoing implementation of the VEYLDF.

Similarly, this evaluation does not claim to be based on comprehensive sources of information, and for this reason does not include conclusive findings. The report draws on data from implementation resources and activities in 2010–2011, providing snapshots of early childhood professionals' perceptions across a ten-month period in 2010–2011.

A limitation of the evaluation is the predominance of responses from a particular demographic, this being: aged 40-plus; with more than ten years' experience; from metropolitan regions; working within the universal services sector; and working with children aged three to five years. Reasons for the bias in the respondent profile may be explained in a number of ways, including access to the survey instrument, leadership roles and planning time.

It is recommended that the findings of this evaluation are triangulated with other data sources to further inform future VEYLDF implementation planning. This would include but not be limited to the views of professional learning consultants, evidence from VEYLDF implementation inquiry projects, and data from the National Quality Framework.

The overall evaluation findings confirm that the early childhood professionals who provided feedback regard the VEYLDF implementation activities and resources as a positive vehicle for change.

The evaluation outlines an Educational Change Model that describes three phases of incremental change across a reform period. This is based on a subjective analysis of early childhood perceptions within the evaluation and is provided to support ongoing VEYLDF implementation.

Theoretical framework

The evaluation was guided by research, in particular the Educational Change Model developed originally for reform processes in Australian middle schooling (Pendergast et al. 2005; Pendergast 2006). This model has been drawn from an educational scenario; however the principles underpinning the reform model are equally applicable to business, industry and community reform settings. The model has value for an individual, for a site or setting, and at a systemic level. At the individual level it can be used to assist individuals in determining the stage of reform at which they are operating by reflecting on their understandings and practices. Similarly, in a specific site the phase of reform can be determined by auditing the evidence presented across the site. At a systemic level the components of the phases outlined in the Educational Change Model support further progress in implementation. Hence, the adoption of the Educational Change Model (the Model) is applicable to the innovative change in early years reform in this project.

The Model proposes that programs of reform are typically established in three phases, gradually introducing particular core component changes, and spanning a total of about eight to 17 years, depending on circumstances. The Model, and the relevant literature, also recognises that educational reform takes longer than usually expected or normally allowed for in reform schedules. A guiding principle of the Model is the importance of developing 'lifelong learning' for both children and educators, a principle that is also central to the VEYLDF.
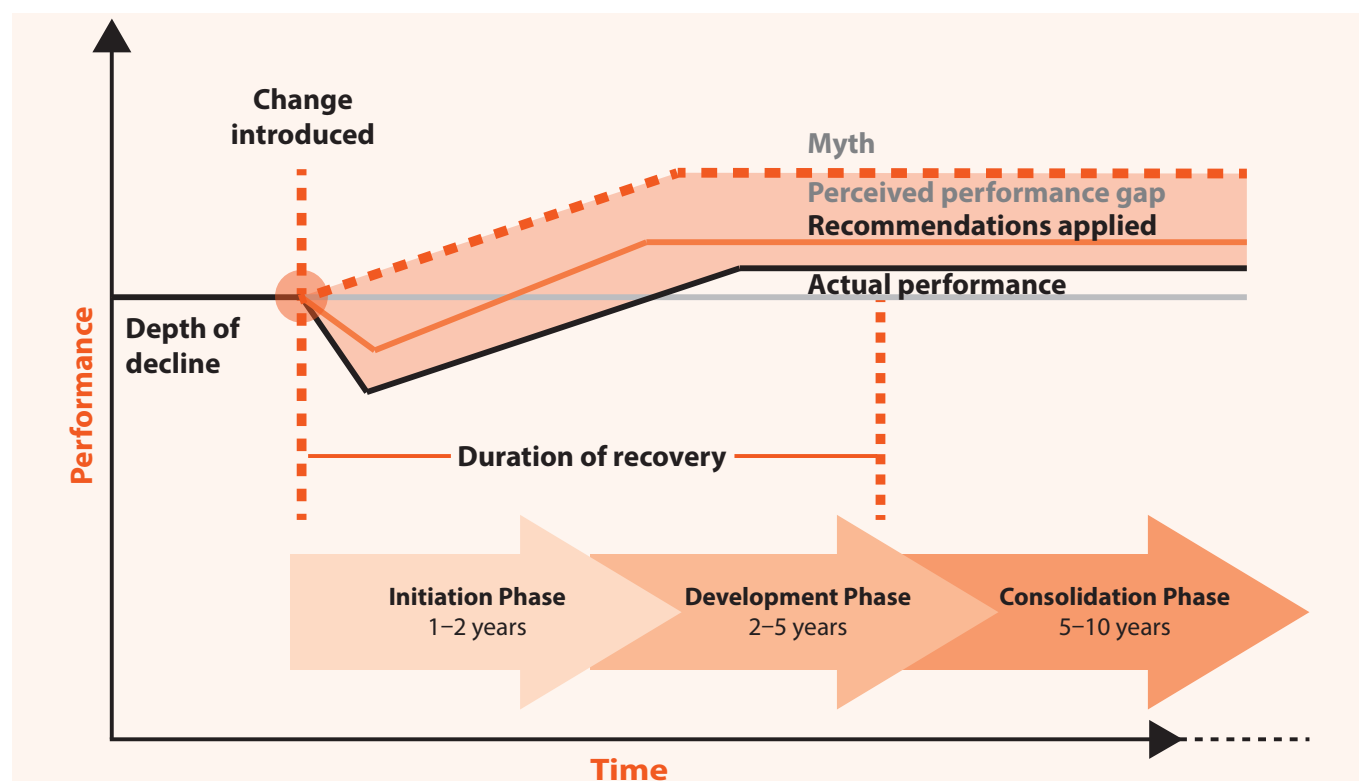
Educational Change Model mapped against a typical reform curve

The three broad phases can be mapped onto any major reform initiative, and feature indications of time taken to achieve each phase (see above). The Initiation phase typically occupies the first year or two; the Development phase typically consumes the next two to five years; and the Consolidation phase can last over a further five to ten years. The time periods associated with each of the three phases are indicative only and can be accelerated through the alignment of enablers. Similarly, inhibitors can lead to dips in the reform program, adding extra time to the overall reform process.

The staged implementation of the VEYLDF can be mapped to the Model, with initiatives throughout 2010–2011 corresponding to the Initiation phase of the Model. This phase is characterised by activities that include goal setting (e.g., development of vision statements), developing buy-in and information dissemination of the new reforms, what they entail and how they will be achieved (Pendergast et al. 2005, p. 7).

Evaluation of the VEYLDF implementation activities against key elements of the Model revealed:

- critical model elements of visioning, policy development, stakeholder engagement and information dissemination were achieved at a high level

- resources were produced from 2010 and made available to early childhood professionals in a range of formats and mediums

- the importance of early childhood professionals' leadership in educational change was recognised in the VEYLDF implementation

- inhibitors and enablers to the implementation of the VEYLDF were identified in anticipation of moving to the Development phase of the Model

- the staged evaluation of the implementation of the VEYLDF provided opportunities for progressive feedback on implementation successes and challenges.

Findings

To address the question 'Was implementation successful in achieving the project outcomes?' the evaluation examined the reach and engagement of the VEYLDF implementation activities. Following is a summary of the key findings with respect to reach and engagement.

Reach and engagement

For curriculum initiatives, there are multiple decision points at which an early childhood professional can choose to engage or reject an initiative (Rodgers 2003). These decisions occur during the Initiation phase of the Model and are affected by process, content and contextual factors.

In terms of reach, the VCAA and DEECD developed a wide range of implementation activities and resources for early childhood professionals to support the introduction of the VEYLDF. These included online and face-to-face implementation activities.

The evaluation found that reported knowledge, access and utilisation of resources and activities varied considerably, as could be expected with such a large and diverse audience. It was noted, however, that 94 per cent of Survey 1 respondents and 96 per cent of Survey 2 respondents had accessed at least one implementation resource and/or activity.

The most frequently attended activities were the regional information sessions and the state-wide modules. These face-to-face activities were considered useful as an opportunity for networking, but some respondents (28 per cent of respondents who attended those sessions) were disappointed that the content was too general.

Professional learning programs through the Bastow Institute of Educational Leadership received the highest mean rating for usefulness. The mean access rate is an average of the proportion of respondents who accessed that type of implementation activity. Fewer early childhood professionals attended the Bastow professional learning program than participated in the state-wide modules. Bastow participants were encouraged, as emerging leaders, to use their professional learning experience to provide support to colleagues and networks as part of ongoing implementation. This is reflected in the responses from Bastow participants to Survey 2.

The majority of respondents in Survey 1 supported themselves in the implementation of the VEYLDF by reading publications and accessing websites related to the VEYLDF (68 per cent), by working in a team that was actively interested in the VEYLDF (65 per cent) or by working in a service where the culture supported the VEYLDF (50 per cent).

These findings suggest that positive implementation of the VEYLDF is largely dependent on the existence of a community of learners at early childhood services who are actively engaged and interested in the VEYLDF. Strengthening this support base at early childhood services is recommended as a high priority for the next phase of the implementation program.

In answer to the key evaluation question 'To what extent have early years professionals utilised the implementation activities and resources, and what is their feedback?' the findings for reach suggest that:

- most respondents reported utilising at least some of the VEYLDF implementation activities and resources;

- the online resources were useful to many individuals for self-directed learning, especially if there was a supportive work environment; and

- face-to-face opportunities to learn about the VEYLDF, network and discuss issues were especially valued when the content was specific to the participant's work setting.

Within localised collaborative learning environments, external facilitators may play a central role in harnessing engagement with an initiative. This occurs through a balanced outside-in and inside-out relationship that moves practitioners to a higher level of reflection on practice (Easton 2008; Hargreaves & Shirley 2007). Early childhood professionals in this evaluation valued face-to-face implementation activities because they provided interactive engagement (for example, conversations, thinking, reflection and sharing of ideas). Frequent and challenging discussion on learning and development is a key characteristic across all effective forms of collaborative learning environments (Rusch 2005).

The online implementation activities had a mean access rate of 45 per cent compared to 32 per cent for face-to-face activities. The lower rate of access for face-to-face activities can be explained by the barriers of time, limited number of places and distance required to attend the face-to-face activities. The only barriers described by participants to accessing online activities were the availability of high-speed Internet connections and time to access the activities during work hours.

Online rates of engagement with implementation activities revealed that online communication about the VEYLDF was considered to be effective by early childhood professionals who have access to the Internet. Results showed:

- early childhood professionals found the following websites effective and/or very effective: Early Childhood Australia website (59 per cent), DEECD website (57 per cent), Gowrie Victoria website (42 per cent) and the VCAA website (40 per cent). Very few early childhood professionals accessed Facebook and wiki spaces for information about the VEYLDF; and

- the VCAA Early Years Alert and the *Early Years Exchange,* Editions 1–6 were rated highly for communicating with early childhood professionals about the VEYLDF.

Taken together these findings suggest that an effective format for future professional learning should combine both face-to-face presentations and Internet technology to provide wider access for early childhood professionals throughout Victoria.

To assist early childhood professionals to engage with the VEYLDF, survey respondents suggested that more plain language statements be used in printed materials. Early childhood professionals further suggested that communication with families could be facilitated by the creation of suitable resources for newsletters, information sheets and brochures. Respondents believed that families see government documents as 'authoritative' and these could be used to aid discussions between early childhood professionals and families, as well as be a source of information in their own right.

In answer to the key evaluation question 'What elements should be included in the next phase of implementation?' the findings suggest a greater focus is necessary on implementation resources and activities that provide opportunities for:

- self-assessment of current practice;
- examples of, and assistance with, enactment of the Practice Principles;
- examples of, and assistance with, planning for the Early Years Learning and Development Outcomes; and
- increased understanding about how to document and discuss children's learning.

In order to optimise the implementation of reform, a number of enablers and inhibitors to implementation were identified (see the following sections).

Enablers and inhibitors to implementation

The Model notes that a smoother transition from the Initiation phase to the Development phase of reform will occur if certain enablers are in place. In the context of schools these include the application of teacher teaming, the development of new models of *innovative leadership*, and a focus on both *social and academic outcomes of children*. These are also relevant in the early years context, from birth to eight years.

In contrast, the reform process may be slowed or derailed by inhibitors such as weak or inconsistent leadership, poorly conceived vision statements, insufficient funding and resistance from the community (Pendergast et al. 2005).

Sustainable leadership and networking

Emerging leadership is starting to appear in the Initiation phase, with some early childhood professionals supporting and leading others in the implementation process.

Sustained leadership and supportive networks are keys to establishing and maintaining the conditions for effective implementation. Rogers (2003) suggests that an individual's interest or need governs the rate of implementation. In the Initiation phase, early childhood professionals provided examples of support and leadership from colleagues as they implemented the VEYLDF. In some early childhood services, time was allocated to allow early childhood professionals to deeply explore content within the VEYLDF together. This approach enhanced relationships between professionals and enabled knowledge building about the VEYLDF to be contextualised within practice. Early childhood professionals appeared to value opportunities for professional learning within their own service and setting.

Access to resources

The existence of contextual barriers to change may limit opportunities for developing collaborative learning environments. Early childhood professionals in the interviews and surveys listed a number of contextual barriers that limited their opportunity to access implementation activities. Barriers to face-to-face activities included: timing of activities (difficult to find and pay for relief staff, the timing of activities was not suitable); work conditions; capacity to access (limits on number of people who could attend); location (activities required the early childhood professional to travel to another location); and selection process (Bastow Institute).

Identified contextual barriers for online resources focused on finding computer access, work conditions, finding time to log online and accessing reliable Internet connections. Some early childhood professionals also listed their level of technical skill as a barrier to access.

Understanding the reforms

Early childhood professionals in this evaluation described varying levels of understanding of the VEYLDF resulting in practice change. The majority of respondents rated themselves to be highly confident and capable with the Learning and Development Outcomes and Practice Principles. Research suggests there are multiple decision points for early childhood professionals at different stages of change, some of which serve as enablers and some of which are inhibitors.

These decision points can be aligned with the Model previously described (Pendergast et al. 2005), which comprises three phases: Initiation, Development and Consolidation.

Some early childhood professionals in the interviews and surveys described examples of practice change that were occurring in each of their settings since implementing the VEYLDF, representing the final decision-making stage listed earlier. Changes in language use, and thinking of, and about, the VEYLDF, were the major themes. Examples used by the respondents repre-

sent change in beliefs (leading to practice change), and the early childhood professional being able to observe improvements in children's learning and development.

A full analysis reveals the majority of respondents are either at the end of the Initiation phase or beginning the Development phase as outlined in the Model. Investment in the establishment and maintenance of professional learning is essential for effective and sustained implementation as recommended by the Model. Commitment to professional learning, within the VEYLDF, is a key driver, as alignment of beliefs about the VEYLDF evolves across the early years sector.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made to effect support and continued and sustained implementation of the VEYLDF. This evaluation has identified that early childhood professionals are at varying stages of implementation; some are at the very early stages of the Initiation phase while the majority are transitioning into the Development phase. The Model identifies the needs of these two groups as different and therefore requiring different support to assist with their efforts to move towards full implementation. The phase most appropriate for the recommendation has been identified in parentheses. The recommendations are:

1. That the findings of this evaluation are triangulated with other data sources to further inform future VEYLDF implementation planning. This would include but is not limited to the views of professional learning consultants, evidence from VEYLDF implementation inquiry projects, and data from the National Quality Framework.

2. To articulate the differences and similarities of the various legislated and regulated Frameworks (VEYLDF, EYLF, FSAC and NQF) and the Australian Curriculum in schools (Initiation).

3. To facilitate professional learning activities and workshops that are large scale (Initiation) and then follow up with smaller local networking opportunities (Development).

4. To coordinate with the larger services and industry bodies to organise localised and integrated professional learning that may include elements of support that are service specific. Support consultants and regional offices to deliver personalised mentoring and or coaching for individual services (Development).

5. To stream workshops and seminars on the Internet so early childhood professionals in regional and rural areas can meet at hubs to watch the broadcast (Initiation). This doubles as a networking opportunity (Development).

6. To create plain language materials about the VEYLDF that double as professional learning for staff and information for parents (Initiation and Development).

7. To create resources demonstrating exemplar practices (Development).

8. To apply the Educational Change Model and continuous improvement theory, to support further progress within this period of implementation reform (Development).

Project Brief

Griffith University Early Childhood Education Centre was commissioned by the VCAA to conduct an independent state-wide process evaluation of the Implementation of the VEYLDF.

The aim of the evaluation was to:

- measure and report on the reach, engagement and impact of the implementation of the VEYLDF; and

- identify enablers, inhibitors and barriers experienced by early childhood professionals and to identify emerging leadership.

In particular, the evaluation was designed to:

- understand what is actually occurring in services during implementation, including who is reached (or not reached) by support activities;

- determine to what extent practice is aligned with the Practice Principles and Early Years Learning and Development Outcomes;

- assess what works, for whom and in what circumstances;

- assess which implementation activities and/or products were successful and to what extent; and

- identify any need for additional activities and/or products.

The evaluation comprises three components: Stage 1 survey; Stage 2 interviews; and a Stage 3 survey.

The Stage 1 survey was conducted from 5 October to 14 December 2010. It measured the reach, engagement and impact of the implementation activities at that point in time. The survey was completed by 405 early childhood professionals.

The Stage 2 in-depth interviews were conducted with 20 early childhood professionals in a range of early childhood services throughout Victoria in March 2011. Interviews provided a detailed understanding of the enablers and inhibitors that services experienced in relation to the implementation of the VEYLDF.

The Stage 3 survey was conducted from 18 July to 15 August 2011 to measure reach, engagement, practice change and emerging leadership in relation to implementation activities. The survey was completed by 736 early childhood professionals.

This evaluation report synthesises key findings within an Educational Change Model (Pendergast 2006) and provides strategic recommendations and tools for the next phase of implementation.

The Educational Change Model

Fast-tracking reform in early years

The introduction of the VEYLDF represents a significant change in early years education, enabling early childhood professionals to move towards a more evidence-based practice model and to facilitate communication about child learning and development across the relevant sectors and with families. When reform is introduced into any setting, on any scale, the performance trajectory of individuals and groups follows a predictable pattern.

In an examination of the introduction of middle schooling into Australian schools Pendergast et al. (2005) conceptualised three phases as individuals and groups move towards full implementation. This is known as the Educational Change Model (the Model). This model has been drawn from an educational scenario; however the principles underpinning the reform model are equally applicable to business, industry and community reform settings. The Model has value for an individual, for a site or setting, and at a systemic level. At the individual level it can be used to assist a person to determine the stage of reform at which they are operating by reflecting on their understandings and practices. Similarly, in a specific site the phase of reform can be determined by auditing the evidence presented across the site. At a systemic level the guidance required to scaffold individuals and sites to achieve reform can be tailored by utilising the components of the phases as an audit process. Hence, the adoption of the Model is applicable to the innovative change in early years reform within this project. This model is applicable to reform efforts in the early years context and was adopted to guide the evaluation project findings and recommendations.

The Model describes three phases: Initiation, Development and Consolidation. Whilst only the first phase, Initiation, directly corresponds to the implementation of the VEYLDF at this time, it is useful to briefly consider all three phases of the Model. Figure 1 shows how the Model maps against an implementation curve of performance.
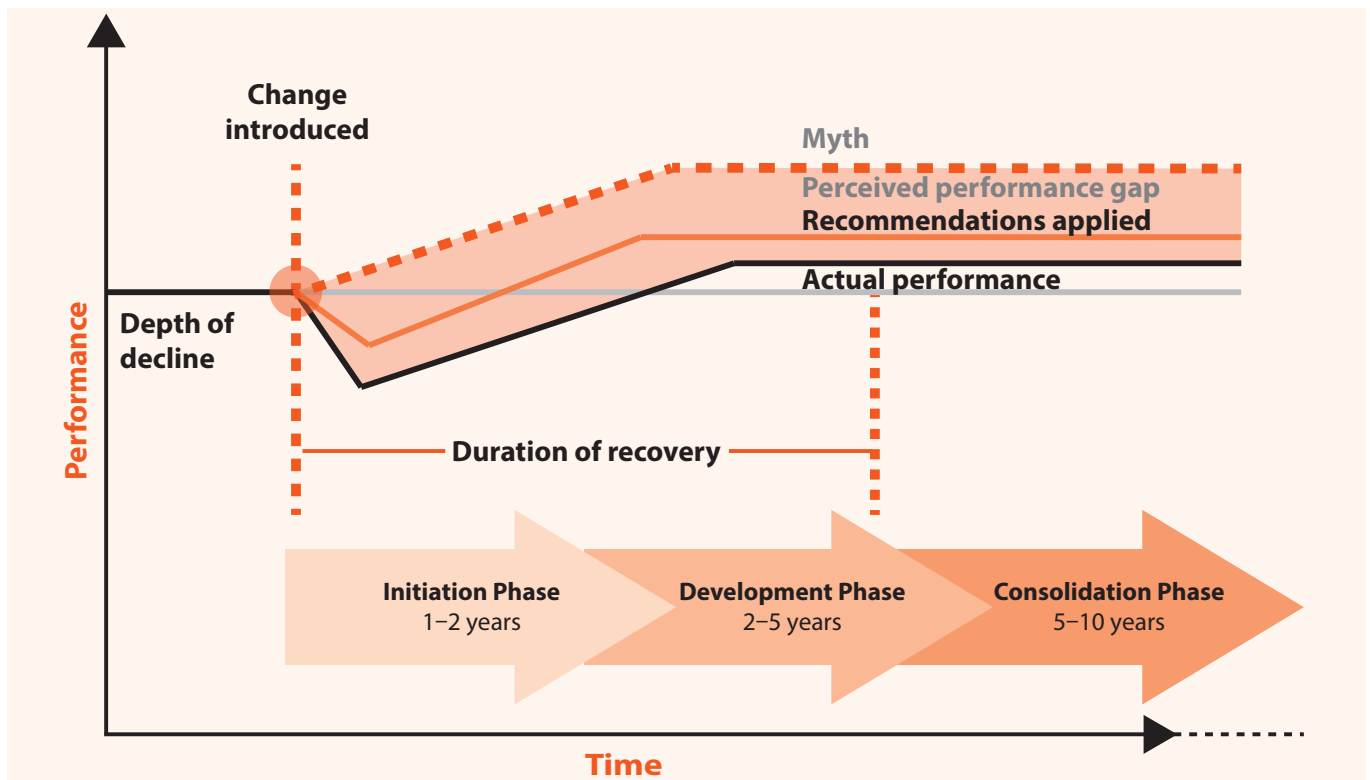
Figure 1: The Educational Change Model mapped against an implementation curve (Adapted from Pendergast et al. 2005)

During the Initiation phase reforming organisations are characterised by activities that include goal setting (for example, development of vision statements), developing buy-in and information dissemination of the new reforms, what they entail and how they will be achieved (Pendergast 2006). The focus for individuals is on understanding the new reforms and the implications for changes to their thinking, language and practices. The Initiation phase typically extends from one to two years.

During the Development phase, typically from years two to five, individuals and groups are deepening their understanding of the reforms and are implementing more and more new practices in accordance with the new reforms. This stage of exploration and experimentation yields many successes, but inevitably leads to some failed trials and experiments. This can sometimes result in frustration, despair and despondency with the new reforms and is accompanied by decreases in performance and perceived efficacy. This is identified in the literature as an implementation dip (Pendergast & Main, in press).

Factors that cause, exacerbate and/or lengthen the dip are known as inhibitors, while enablers are factors that aid effective implementation and shorten the dip. Pendergast et al. (2005) identified 13 inhibitors of reform in educational settings including weak or inconsistent leadership, poorly conceived vision statements, insufficient funding and resistance from the community (see Table 1). Typically, as organisations enter the Development phase, the organisational focus starts to

turn away from the reform efforts, with a corresponding drop in funding. Sustained commitment beyond the life of the initial reform notification is required to ensure continuity of focus.

Table 1: Inhibitors of reform in education settings (Pendergast et al. 2005)

Inhibitors

- weak or inconsistent leadership
- insufficient dispersal of leadership
- poorly conceived or poorly expressed vision statement
- uncooperative or non-supportive staff, inadequately trained staff
- discontinuity of staff, rigid traditionalism among staff majority
- failure to provide an appropriate support structure
- failure to redirect and redefine the school culture
- insufficient funding to provide essential equipment or to finance innovations
- failure to align curriculum, pedagogy and assessment
- resistance from the community
- dramatic upward or downward trends in student population
- impatience and loss of enthusiasm resulting from slow progress in the process of renewal

During the Consolidation phase, typically from years five to ten, individual and group understanding of the reform is much more closely aligned and practices have been largely bedded down. Organisations are further deepening their knowledge and the language and practices are becoming more automatic and widespread within the organisation. Individual reliance on experts and leadership decreases as their own expertise increases. Reform efforts have largely disappeared by this phase with the expectation that individuals are able to continuously improve, independent of external assistance, as individuals move towards more expert knowledge and a stronger practice base.

As individuals and groups progress along a reform trajectory, their understanding and ability to implement the reform changes over time. Because of these changes, the implementation activities must conform to the needs of the group during that particular phase. The more closely the activities are aligned with the needs of the individual, the more likely, and sooner, they move on a continuum towards full implementation.

An important dynamic presented in Figure 1 is the varied response to introducing change. There is a widespread myth that performance will automatically improve in response to change (the dotted line) when in fact actual performance generally experiences a dip following the introduction of change or reform. Applying appropriate enablers can reduce the depth of the decline or dip and also reduce the duration of recovery.

This is very important when applied to early years implementation initiatives, where a diverse sector is working together across the birth to eight years period, finding a new voice and beginning discussion and debate about practices. The transition from Initiation phase to Development phase can often involve a drop in confidence and a loss of momentum. As Pendergast et al (2005, p. 85) note:

Even with dynamic and consistent leadership … the effort required to maintain the momentum of reform is enormous, and it is not uncommon for enthusiasm to wane, especially if funding is not sufficient to meet adequately all of the very high costs usually associated with the quality of re-

newal required. Most … in the Development phase undergo a significant 'dip' in their implementation efforts and the efficiency with which they are able to operate.

This 'typical pattern' in confidence in implementing the reforms can be represented diagrammatically as in Figure 2.

Figure 2: A 'typical' implementation trajectory in a reforming school (Adopted from Pendergast et al. 2005)

An implementation 'dip' or 'pit' experienced for 2–3 years
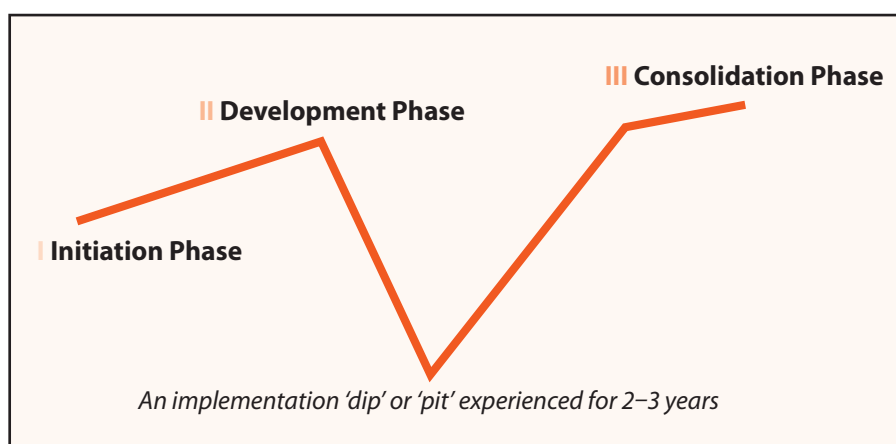
Pendergast et al (2005) also note that it is possible to move from the typical trajectory and facilitate a smoother transition in the reform process by actively pursuing a program that optimises 'fast-track' conditions. Research in the school sector indicates for some reforming schools (or indeed elements within a single school site) the implementation experience is often less traumatic, and teachers can experience smoother sailing. Usually this can occur only when several key factors are aligned and sustained:

- team membership across several years
- collegial, philosophically aligned dynamics among team members
- sensitive and sustained leadership
- early adoption and shared risk-taking among members who challenge each other to extend themselves
- a strong emphasis on team problem-posing and problem-solving
- effective use of research in evidence-based planning.

Under these optimal 'fast-track' conditions the pattern may look more like the one illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3: A 'fast-track' implementation trajectory in a reforming school (Adopted from Pendergast et al. 2005)

I Initiation Phase is steeper, riskier and perhaps longer

Recovery towards Phase **III** Consolidation is achieved and sustained earlier and easier

Briefer, less dramatic implementation dip in Phase **II**
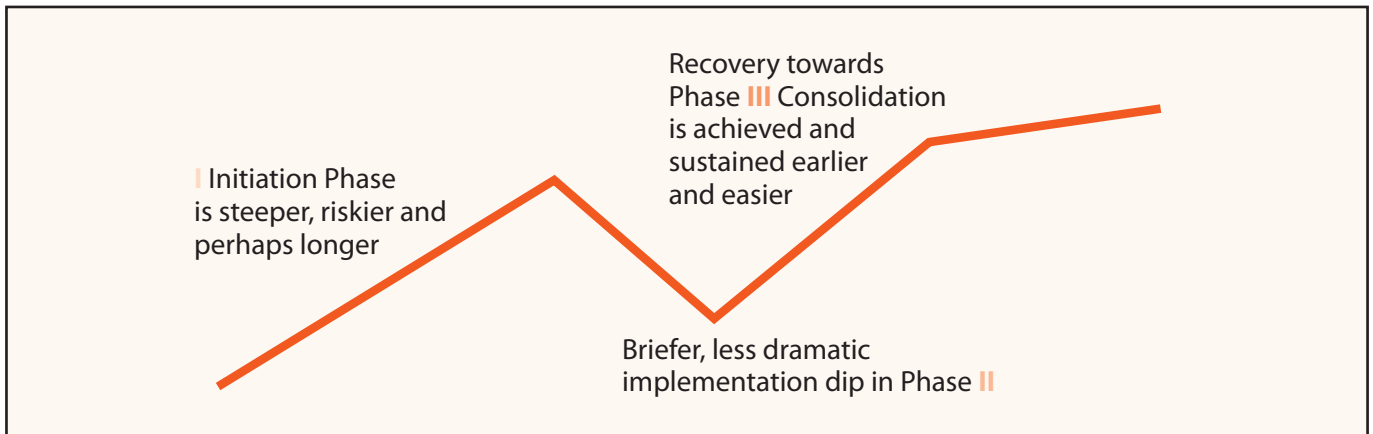
The recommendations of this evaluation, especially the early identification of inhibitors and enablers of the implementation of the VEYLDF, are intended to enhance the change process over the three phases of the model.

Table 2 briefly outlines how the implementation of the VEYLDF is aligned to the Model, noting that the timelines for each phase are only indicative and can be accelerated considerably by adopting the 'fast-track' factors described earlier.

This evaluation of implementation was also guided by the educational literature. A review of this literature now follows and is then linked to findings from the two surveys and face-to-face interviews.

Table 2: Implementation of the VEYLDF mapped to the Educational Change Model

Initiation Phase 1–2 years	Development Phase 2–5 years	Consolidation Phase 5–10 years
Model elements • Goal setting • Visioning • Transitions and transitioning processes • Developing buy-in • Information dissemination • Understanding new reforms • Implications for change • Innovative leadership • Auditing	Model elements • Improved alignment of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment systems • Sustainable innovations • Enhanced pedagogies, especially the provision of greater intellectual challenge • Professional learning communities, with early childhood professionals as learners • Evidence-based policy development	Model elements • Changing social and economic conditions demanding a broader skill set • Learner- and learning-focused programs • Child engagement in learning • Greater recognition of diversity in capabilities • Partnerships with families
Framework elements • Visioning • Policy • Resource creation • Information dissemination • Professional learning opportunities • Independent evaluation • Early identification of enablers and inhibitors	Framework elements • The elements should be determined through a synthesis of this evaluation, consultation with key stakeholders and relevant theory.	Framework elements • The elements should be determined through a synthesis of this evaluation, consultation with key stakeholders and relevant theory.

Literature Review

A variety of literature has framed the design, analysis and interpretation of the results of the evaluation of the VEYLDF implementation. Due to the paucity of published research specifically related to reform in the early years sector (birth to eight years), much of the literature presented is based on research conducted at primary and secondary education. However, many of the issues and principles identified in these contexts also apply to the early childhood context and so have been instrumental in shaping this evaluation. The authors are careful to note that this literature review may not accurately reflect the current situation in early childhood and suggest similar research be undertaken in the early childhood sector.

Decision points for early childhood educators

Research suggests there are multiple decision points for early childhood educators at different stages of curriculum/policy change. These include:

- Initiation, described as 'the process leading up to and including the decision to proceed with implementation' (Fullan 2001, p. 53)

- Persuasion, described as when the individual considers the particular characteristics of the initiative, such as the 'relative advance, compatibility, complexity' (Rogers 2003, p. 15)

- Implementation, described as when the individual decides to put an initiative into use through trialling and observing the results (Rogers 2003). If the results are favourable, a positive attitude will develop with further implementation likely to occur (Walsh & Gardner 2006). The individual has a transformation of beliefs, attitudes and knowledge (Fullan 2001).

Fullan's research about the stages of policy change reflects the Model closely with a particular focus on the Initiation and Development phases. As individuals move into the Development phase ('Implementation', using Fullan's terminology), early childhood professionals can choose to engage or reject an initiative (Rodgers 2003) based upon experiences with process, content and contextual factors. It is for this reason that Rogers (2003) suggests that an individual's interest or need governs the rate of implementation. The lack of motivation to use implementation activities as designed may adversely impact on the level of engagement, limiting it to a mechanical level (Hall & Hord 2001). The risk is a superficial implementation where the strategy is directly observed in some practices and policies with limited absorption to the underlying principles, contextualisation or integration. Other identified barriers to change include:

- the noninvolvement or lack of interest of key stakeholders (Stoll & Fink 1996);

- colleagues who have rejected initiatives (Anderson 1997; Hall & Hord 2001);

- a lack of knowledge of the change process (Easton 2008; Hall & Hord 2001); and

- a perceived lack of time (Little 2001).

Fullan (1999) warns that the timing of initiatives is important where multiple initiatives are being introduced in a short period of time. 'It is easy to experience overload, fragmentation and incoherence … [when] initiatives are introduced before previous ones are adequately implemented, the sheer presence of problems and multiple unconnected solutions are overwhelming' (p. 27).

Professional learning

Implementation activities are created by government agencies to help support the embedding of the new framework, policy or curriculum. Many of these activities can be aligned with the term professional learning. While few studies have explored professional learning in early childhood education compared to other sectors of education, interpretations can be made from the professional learning literature in primary and secondary school sectors.

DuFour and Eaker (1998, p. 256) claim 'the creation of professional learning communities requires a radical rethinking of the purpose and activities'. The process of rethinking begins with how stakeholders approach professional learning. According to Barab et al. (2001, p. 74), professional learning should be 'fostering a culture of sharing, and providing a sustained support for teachers (that is, knowledge networks) as they evaluate both their beliefs and practices'. This approach shifts away from the transmission model to a community model of professional learning and requires a focus on 'how the teachers learn' and not on 'how much the provider can teach' (Burns 2002, p. 302).

Contemporary principles of effective professional learning highlight the importance of:

- fostering coherence, including educator motivation that guides future direction;

- an embedded approach that promotes active learning;

- reform activities that acknowledge contextual structures such as time, location and leadership;

- collective participation to allow shared goals; and
- focus on the structures (duration, content).

For the purposes of this evaluation, professional learning has been categorised as being layered thinly or thickly. Thin layers of professional learning refer to those activities that are mainly concerned with one-way communication of information, information dissemination and broadcasting to a general audience. There is a more defined expert–novice divide between the trainers and trainees and this defines the relationship. Trainee knowledge is being established with little or no implementation of any reform agenda. This type of professional learning is typically undertaken at the commencement of a reform period (Initiation phase of the Model) to help inform trainees of the purposes and directions of the reform.

Thick layers of professional learning refer to those activities that are mainly concerned with dialogue, conversation and discussion. Early childhood professionals have begun to apply their new understanding of the reform agenda and are now seeking more one-to-one or small group guidance and support. These activities are often more localised, in smaller groups and context specific. Trainees are looking for answers to specific issues they encounter as they undertake the reform. Trainees are also looking for confirmatory support and assurance as they enter new territory. This type of professional learning is typically undertaken during the middle of a reform period (Development phase of the Model) to help trainees deepen their understanding of the reform and to bed down the new practices of the reform.

Reform activities versus traditional activities

Professional learning activities can be grouped into two categories: reform activities and traditional activities. Once again, this literature has been drawn from higher levels of schooling but should be read in the context of early years learning and development. Traditional activities include workshops, courses and conferences. Traditional workshops share similar characteristics of (Garet et al. 2001, p. 920):
- being placed outside of the teacher's school or classroom at scheduled times after school, on the weekend or during holidays; and
- involving leaders or leaders with special expertise and participants who attend at scheduled times.

Although traditional forms of professional learning are quite common, they are widely criticised for being ineffective in providing teachers with sufficient time, activities and content necessary for increasing teachers' knowledge to foster meaningful change in classroom practice (Loucks-Horsley, Hewson, Love & Stiles 1998). This would apply equally in any workplace setting. Such activities that may not be context specific fail to provide opportunities for teachers to reflect on their beliefs and practices (Lock 2006). As a result, there is growing interest in reform activities more generally.

Reform activities include study groups or mentoring and/or coaching programs and share general characteristics as described by Garet et al. (2001, p. 921):
- sessions take place within the teacher's regular work day;
- sessions may be conducted in the workplace, allowing immediate connections with the classroom context that may be easier to sustain over time; and
- this makes it easier to encourage collective participation of groups of educators from the same context.

Reform activities may be more responsive to how teachers learn (Ball 1996) and have more influence on changing teacher practice through context and content-specific approaches (Darling-Hammond 1996; Hargreaves & Fullan 1992). The transference of learning into practice is facilitated through workplace-based learning and support and is the ultimate objective. This is also complemented (and deepened) by access to expert knowledge and research.

Fostering coherence

Another feature of implementation activities concerns the coherence that is fostered within early childhood services. Coherence is defined as the extent to which professional learning activities are perceived to be a part of a systematic coherent program of learning (Garet et al. 2001). Fostering coherence promotes connections with goals and other activities and aligns standards with assessment. The process also encourages professional communication within staff groups that are engaged in similar efforts to reform their own practices. Professional communication enables the sharing of solutions to problems and reinforces the sense that improvement is possible over time. There is further evidence that individual and group motivation can be further sustained across networks involved in change (Lieberman & McLaughlin 1992).

Promoting active learning

The success of implementation depends on the promotion of active learning. Active learning can take a number of forms, including the opportunity to observe expert teachers and be observed teaching how to plan new programs and new methods to engage students in the classroom, and the opportunity to review student work and engage in discussions (Garet et al. 2001).

Collective participation

Professional learning activities that allow groups of people to work together have many recognised advantages, including the following:

- Early childhood professionals who work together are more likely to have the opportunities to discuss concepts, skills and problems that arise during their professional learning experiences.
- Early childhood professionals who work with the same children and families can collaborate to support learning.
- Early childhood professionals are provided with opportunities for discussion and debate.

Collective participation emphasises that reform is a challenge for individual learning as well as organisational learning and that organisational routines, and establishing a culture supportive of reform instruction, can facilitate individual change efforts (Knapp 1997). According to Wilson and Ryder (1996), groups become communities when they interact with each other and stay together long enough to form a set of habits or when they come to depend upon each other to accomplish certain ends.

Focus on structural features

The duration of professional learning activities is important to the sustainability of change. Activities conducted over a sustained period of time are more likely to provide an opportunity for in-depth discussion of content, children's views and pedagogical strategies. Activities that extend over time also allow teachers to try out new practices in the classroom and obtain feedback on their own (Garet 2001, p. 922). Fullan (1999) argued that 'we need far more intensive professional learning within a culture of continuous deliberation … it has to be tested by external ideas or standards about best practices'.

The depth of content within professional learning activities also features in the literature. Kennedy (1998) found that, compared to more general professional learning, professional learning that focuses on specific content and how children learn content or skills has larger positive effects on long-term outcomes for children.

Online communities

An online community involves 'a group of people who regularly interact online and share common goals, ideals or values' (Owston 1998, p. 60). According to Preece (2000), online communities consist of:

- people who interact socially as they try to satisfy their own needs to perform special roles;
- a shared purpose that provides the motive for the community;
- policies to guide the participants' interactions; and
- computer systems (for example, email, social media and Internet) to support and mediate the interactions and facilitate the sense of togetherness.

The development of online communities for learning is considered a suitable medium for professional learning for the following reasons (National Staff Development Council 2001, p. 7). It:

- alters the learning environment;
- provides new structure and media for reflecting, communicating and acting;
- facilitates modelling and visualisation;
- allows for construction and discovery of knowledge;
- expands access to information, networks, people and ideas;
- increases the flexibility of time and places for learning; and
- provides significant resources.

With the capacity to develop online communities, participants have opportunities to experience new roles and responsibilities because they engage and interact with groups of people within larger communities (Lock 2006). The challenge, according to Sherer et al. (2003, p. 184), is a matter of 'harnessing current technological capabilities and developing avenues for creating connected communities of learners'.

Early childhood service change

There are few studies of change in early childhood settings that relate to recent COAG reforms in early childhood. However, school-based research indicates that low-cost short-term group training can be the least effective professional learning strategy. Thornburn (2006, p. 364) argues that training 'certainly does not

appear to work when there is a need for a deeper pedagogical or professional transformation'.

In a recent study of New South Wales early childhood teachers (Burgess, Robertson & Patterson 2010), the way that curriculum initiatives were understood and implemented highlighted that even with well-designed quality packages, 'getting a new idea adopted, even when it has obvious advantages, is often very difficult' (Rogers 2003, p. 11).

Burgess, Robertson and Patterson (2010, p. 58) suggest three main factors for why early childhood teachers were not likely to engage with curriculum initiatives, including:

- process factors related to training and/or support structures that were not adequate for the successful initiation of the curriculum initiative

- contextual factors did not motivate the teachers' engagement with the curriculum initiative (the teachers' infrequent accessing of all packages suggests teachers were not motivated to adopt the intrinsic design of packages)

- contextual factors, such as intensification of teachers' work and/or timing of the initiatives' arrival, negatively impacted on implementation. An additional factor for the decline of positive attitude may be the phenomenon of innovation fatigue (Graham 1997).

This study is significant in that it is one of only a few that reports on early childhood teachers' opinions about curriculum initiatives. Key findings suggest that teachers who are not engaged at the commencement of the Initiation phase are unlikely to engage at a later stage.

In summary, the literature suggests that it is critical to engage and retain the interest of early childhood professionals during the Initiation phase of change and reform. This can best be achieved by fostering communities of learners and using a mixture of reform and traditional activities for professional learning. Collective participation via online communities is emerging as a viable medium for professional learning. In addition, face-to-face engagement opportunities must also be provided.

As the VEYLDF implementation at a systemic level moves from the Initiation to the Development phase, the Model emphasises the importance of all early childhood professionals in Victoria having an understanding of the new reforms and the implications of changes to their thinking, language, practices, and relationships with children, families and with other early childhood professionals. In the Development phase individuals and groups will deepen their understanding of the reforms and implement more and more new practices in accordance with the new reforms. The specific recommendations that will support early childhood professionals in implementing these reforms can be found in Table 8 on page 31, where recommendations by the Educational Change Model phase are expanded.

Implementation of the VEYLDF

The VEYLDF was developed by the VCAA in partnership with DEECD and was released on 27 November 2009 for state-wide implementation from 2010.

The VEYLDF is aligned with the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (EYLF, 2009), and linked to the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS, 2005) in the early years of schooling. It is intended that practitioners will gain confidence in their own practice through engagement with the VEYLDF and be able to identify ways to build upon their existing skill and knowledge base.

In the first stage of implementation the VCAA and DEECD provided a range of implementation activities and resources to support early childhood professionals in getting started with the VEYLDF. Implementation of the VEYLDF is a staged approach and additional resources and activities are being developed and released over time.

Table 3 summarises the activities and resources scheduled from the commencement of the evaluation in July 2010 until July 2011. Implementing the VEYLDF requires significant cultural change for all early childhood professionals. It is the first time the Learning and Development Outcomes and Practice Principles for Learning and Development have been universally articulated. It is also the first time all early childhood professionals from across the early years (birth to eight years) sector have been brought together, with a common purpose to advance children's learning and development.

A detailed description of each activity and resource is provided in Appendix 1. A key element of the evaluation process is to determine whether the activities and resources provided were utilised and their value to early childhood professionals.

Table 3: A list of the online and face-to-face implementation activities and resources as at July 2011

Online activities and resources	Face-to-face activities and resources
VCAA Early Years Exchange (the *EYE*), Editions 1–6, December 2009 to June 2010	2010 Early Childhood Education Conference (hosted by KPV and Gowrie Victoria) held in June
Early Years Alert – online publication through VCAA	Regional information sessions 2010
DEECD PowerPoint Presentation to Families on the Victorian Framework March 2010	Bastow Institute: Leading People in Early Childhood Settings, April–July 2010 and March–August 2011
2010 Early Childhood Education Conference (KPV and Gowrie Victoria) Online Papers, available from June 2010	Bastow Institute: Educational Leadership in Early Childhood Settings, May–June 2010 and May–August 2011
The Learning and Development Outcomes from the Victorian Framework linked to the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS), July 2010	State-wide Module 1 – An Introduction to the Victorian Framework and Reflective Practice, delivered May 2010–June 2011
Online Module 1 – An Introduction to the Victorian Framework and Reflective Practice, published October 2010	State-wide Module 2 – An Introduction to Collaborative Practice, delivered May 2010–June 2011
Online Module 2 – An Introduction to Collaborative Practice, published October 2010	State-wide Module 3 – An Introduction to Effective Practice, delivered May 2010–June 2011
Evidence Paper Practice Principle 8: Reflective Practice, published October 2010	State-wide Module 4 – Assessment for Learning and Development: the Early Years Planning Cycle, delivered May 2010–June 2011
Online Module 3 – An Introduction to Effective Practice, published April 2011	Bastow Institute: Contemporary Child Development Theory for Early Childhood Educators, July–December 2010
2011 Early Childhood Education Conference (KPV and Gowrie Victoria) Online Papers, available from June 2011	VCAA Learning and Development Outcomes Project, July 2010–June 2011
	Victorian Early Years Coaching Program, October 2010–December 2011

Description of the Sector

A diverse range of services and early childhood professionals operate in Victoria. A requirement of the evaluation project was for the evaluators to capture the way in which the VEYLDF has been applied in planning and practice '*across the breadth of early childhood services*'.

In Victoria, early childhood professionals can be classified as working in three sectors: universal services sector, targeted and intensive services sector, and the tertiary sector. Examples of early childhood professionals in each sector are presented in Table 4.

The roles of early childhood professionals can also be attributed to settings. The setting, as opposed to the sector, was chosen as a unit of analysis for the Stage 1 survey.

Table 4: Classification within sectors

Universal services sector	Targeted and intensive services sector	Tertiary sector
• early childhood educator • early childhood coordinator • early childhood manager • out of school hours care coordinator • Prep–Year 2 teachers • early childhood coordinator • assistant principal • principal • maternal & child health nurse • playgroup leader • primary school nurse • early childhood education officer, cultural organisation • family day care field worker	• early childhood intervention worker • early childhood intervention professional • family support worker • inclusion support facilitator • integration aide • Koorie education coordinator • Koorie engagement support officer • Koorie preschool assistant • student support service officer • play therapist • community health professional • preschool field officer • enhanced maternal and child health	• TAFE lecturer • university lecturer • teacher at a registered training organisation • early childhood consultant • student

Table 5 shows the roles described in Table 4 by setting.

Table 5: Roles reclassified according to setting

Setting	Roles
• family day care (FDC)	• FDC educator • FDC field worker • FDC coordinator
• long day care (LDC)	• LDC educators and coordinator
• outside school hours care	• OSHC educators and coordinator
• school	• Prep–Year 2 teacher • early childhood coordinator • assistant principal • principal • primary school nurse
• maternal and child health	• maternal child health nurse
• kindergarten	• all roles relating to funded programs
• targeted and intensive services	• all targeted and intensive service roles
• tertiary sector	• all tertiary sector roles
• other	• playgroup leader • early childhood education officer – cultural organisation • government

The Department of Education and Early Childhood is divided into nine regions across Victoria:

- North Metropolitan Region
- Southern Metropolitan Region
- Eastern Metropolitan Region
- Western Metropolitan Region
- Grampians Region
- Loddon Mallee Region
- Gippsland Region
- Barwon South West Region
- Hume Region.

Early childhood professionals from all nine regions participated in the two surveys and in-depth interviews, achieving representation across Victoria.

Methodology

Aims

The aims of the evaluation were: to measure and report on the reach, engagement and impact of the implementation of the VEYLDF, and to identify enablers, inhibitors and barriers experienced by early childhood professionals and to identify emerging leadership. The evaluation consisted of a survey in Stage 1, face-to-face interviews in Stage 2, and a second survey in Stage 3.

Stage 1 survey

The survey was distributed to early childhood professionals across all DEECD regions. Survey questions were developed to assess the implementation of the VEYLDF along three dimensions: Demographics, reach, engagement and impact. Appendix 2 presents the questions developed for each dimension.

Recruitment and data collection

Participants were recruited through communications from DEECD regional staff and through email, letters and phone calls. Initially only the online version of the survey was available. Completion of the survey was voluntary and no incentives were provided. A total of 1000 paper copies of the survey were also mailed to early childhood professionals in family day care, long day care and outside school hours care. Telephone calls were also made by the VCAA to encourage early childhood services to participate. As a result of barriers for some early childhood professionals in accessing the online survey, hard copies were also provided to some services on request.

The online survey was open from 5 October to 30 November 2010, and responses on paper were accepted until 14 December 2010.

Of the 405 fully completed responses to the survey, the majority (92 per cent) completed the online version. From the 1000 paper surveys mailed to early childhood professionals, 20 were returned, representing a 2 per cent response rate.

Sample characteristics

The majority of respondents:
- were aged 40 years and above (63 per cent)
- had more than ten years' experience (72 per cent)
- were from metropolitan regions (63 per cent), with 21 per cent from the Southern Metropolitan Region
- worked within the universal services sector (86 per cent) and 32.3 per cent were employed in kindergarten programs
- worked with children aged three to five years (75 per cent).

While the sample was robust in terms of state-wide representation, the fact that almost one-third of respondents were employed in kindergartens may limit some generalisations to the early childhood profession. These respondent characteristics, as previously described, are acknowledged to provide voice to the respondents in a way that does not capture those not typical of these characteristics. Ideally, a greater representation of the stratified workforce would be ideal. However, this should not affect the findings about reach, engagement and impacts of the VEYLDF implementation to date.

A summary of the interim report (Interim Report 1, May 2011), which outlines the findings from the Stage 1 survey and Stage 2 interviews is provided in Appendix 3. Findings from the interviews reinforce the findings in the Stage 1 survey.

Stage 2 interviews

Twenty participants were recruited throughout Victoria using stratified sampling. Stratification was based on geographic location, early childhood service, role in the service, years of experience and the age of the children with whom the participant worked. Stratification also represented community, public and private early childhood services. Participants were selected from a list generated from the Stage 1 survey, based on self-nomination and recommendations by DEECD regional staff. The 20 in-depth interviews were spread across all regions, with two interviews each from these regions:
- Southern Metropolitan Region (primary school and OSHC)
- Western Metropolitan Region (playgroup and FDC)
- North Metropolitan Region (primary school and FDC)
- Eastern Metropolitan Region (ECIS and early childhood coordinator)
- Grampians Region (early childhood university students and community-managed kindergarten)
- Barwon South West Region (community managed LDC and playgroup)
- Gippsland Region (ECIS in a school and kindergarten).

And three interviews each from these regions:
- Hume Region (private long day care, OSHC and FDC)
- Loddon Mallee Region (community-managed kindergarten, OSHC and cluster-managed kindergarten).

In-depth face-to-face 40-minute interviews were conducted by the Griffith University team during March 2011. Questions were semi-structured and based on the evaluation domain of enablers and barriers. Appendix 2 provides the interview schedule and links to the evaluative domains. Content analysis was used to determine the presence and frequency of certain words or concepts within the interviews. Findings were then organised according to four evaluative dimensions: demographics, reach, impact, enablers and barriers.

A summary of the interim analysis of Stage 2 in-depth interviews (Interim Report 2, August 2011) is presented in Appendix 5.

Stage 3 survey

The Stage 3 survey was conducted from 18 July to 15 August 2011 to identify change and difference, and emerging leadership as a result of accessing implementation activities so far. The survey was completed by 736 early childhood professionals.

Recruitment and data collection

Participants for the Stage 3 survey were recruited by communications with DEECD regional staff and through email, letters and phone calls. Completion of the survey was voluntary and incentivised by the chance to win a share of $1000 in prizes. A total of 1000 paper copies of the survey were also mailed to early childhood professionals in 100 family day care settings. Phone calls were also made by the VCAA to encourage early childhood services to participate.

Of the 736 respondents to the Stage 3 survey, 579 fully completed surveys were received (517 online and 62 from paper copies) with an additional 157 partially completed surveys, which were also used in the analysis. A further 169 responses were not analysed because they were incomplete.

Sample characteristics

The majority of respondents:
- were aged 40 years and above (64 per cent)
- had more than ten years' experience (74 per cent)
- from metropolitan regions (66 per cent)
- held a Bachelor degree (42 per cent)
- worked within the universal services sector (89 per cent) and 37 per cent were employed in kindergartens
- worked with children aged three to five years (59 per cent).

Similar to Survey 1 respondents, these characteristics are acknowledged to provide voice to the respondents in a way that does not capture those not typical of these characteristics. Ideally, a greater representation of the stratified workforce would be ideal.

Findings

This section describes the overall findings from all stages of analysis in this evaluation. It is not surprising that in a theory of change model more qualified and experienced early childhood professionals responded to the evaluation surveys. Over time, further evidence of increased confidence and capacity to discuss, contribute opinion and debate would be expected. This further supports the strategy that evaluation data should be triangulated with other specific data sources.

It is important to note that analysis based upon the service type (for example, the needs of early years professionals in family day care versus the needs of early years professionals in long day care settings) was not possible as the limited numbers of respondents in the service types did not allow for statistical modelling. Analyses based upon location (for example, metropolitan services versus regional and rural services) revealed homogeneity in ratings of the implementation activities and themes in comments. Because of the homogeneity in the data, the entire cohort of responses is treated as representing one group.

Engagement

Online implementation activities were accessed more than face-to-face activities. Face-to-face activities were rated more useful.

The online implementation activities had a mean access rate of 45 per cent compared to 32 per cent for face-to-face activities. The lower rate of access can be explained by the barriers of time, limited number of places and distance required to attend the face-to-face activities. The barriers described by participants to access the online activities were the availability of high speed Internet connections and time to access the activities during work hours.

While the online implementation activities were accessed more, the face-to-face activities were, on average, rated more highly, though the difference is only slight. The advantage of face-to-face activities is evident in respondent comments.

'To participate in face-to-face sessions and discuss all aspects of the frameworks is extremely effective and valuable. We are all very busy and time poor so we have to choose very carefully the programs we hope will assist us and our co-workers. The time frames suited me and were evenly spaced. I only had to travel to Melbourne for the VCAA Outcomes Project.' (Long day care)

'These types of training work as we can have open discussions with other professionals. I find it difficult to allocate time for online training as I find a lot is in my families [sic] time.' (Cluster-managed kindergarten)

'I consider the benefit of face-to-face far outweighs any online work.' (Government school)

'Great level of information, included national information as well. Followed up by online.' (Privately owned FDC service)

Network meetings are an interesting case in point. Respondents indicated network meetings allowed for discussion, a sharing of ideas, immediate feedback in addressing questions and concerns, establishing and maintaining professional networks and reflection on practice. In addition to information sharing, respondents also saw these meetings as a source of support and reassurance as they come to understand and implement the VEYLDF.

Figure 4 shows the usefulness ratings of the face-to-face implementation activities. When combining the ratings of 'very useful' and 'useful' for each activity, the perceived usefulness of these activities is high (that is, averaging in the 70 to 80 per cent range).

Figure 4: Usefulness ratings for the face-to-face implementation activities

Legend:
- Not useful
- Somewhat useful
- Useful
- Very useful

Categories (x-axis):
- Bastow: Educational Leadership (81)
- Bastow: Leading People (66)
- Module 4 (257)
- 2011 ECE conference (114)
- 2012 ECE conference (122)
- Network meetings (360)
- Bastow: Contemporary Child Development (74)
- Coaching Program (57)
- Module 3 (260)
- Module 2 (278)
- Outcomes Project (86)
- Module 1 (320)
- Regional information sessions (345)
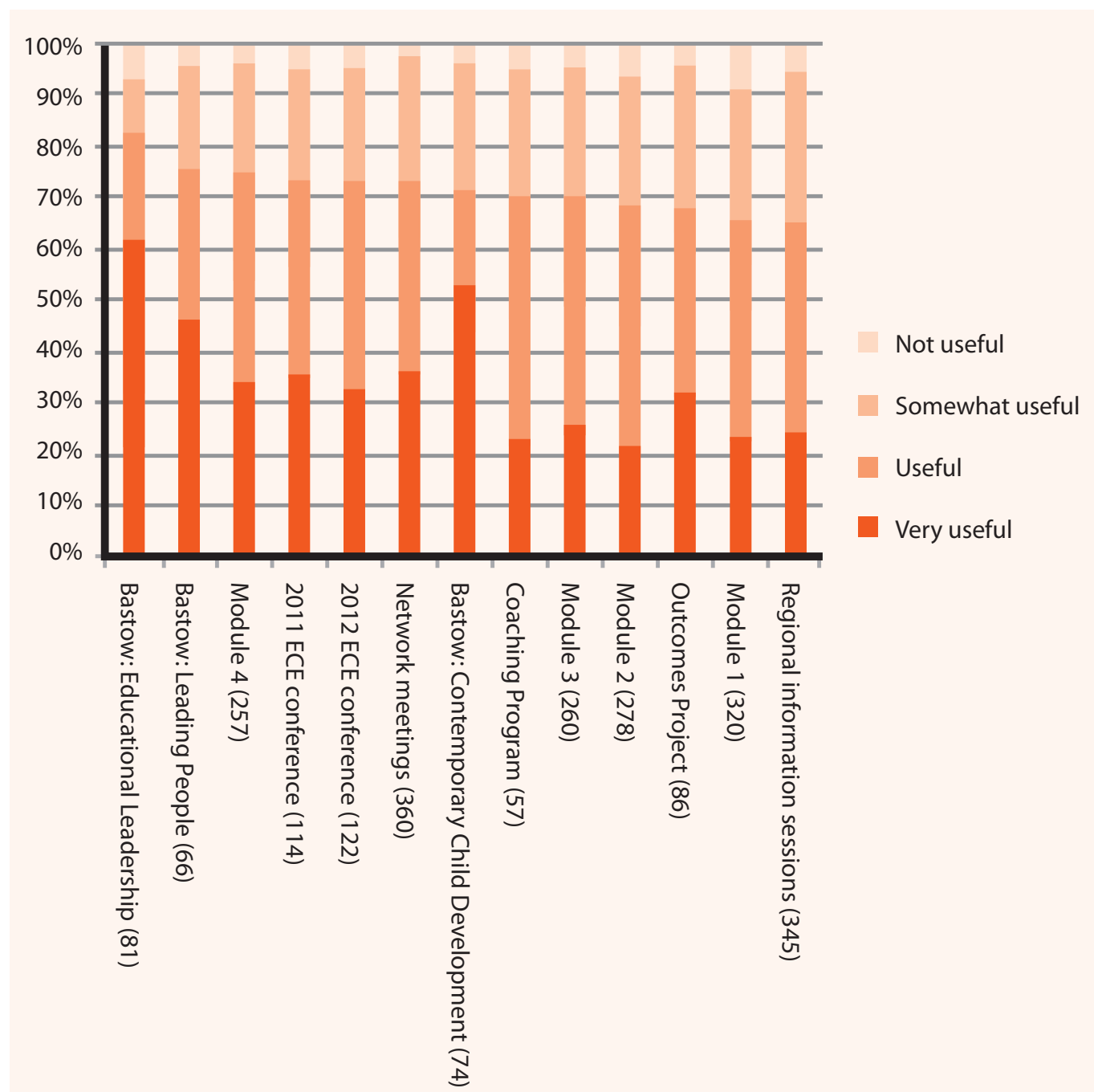
Note: number of respondents is shown in brackets

Figure 5 shows the usefulness ratings of the online implementation activities. When the 'very useful' and 'useful' ratings are combined for each activity, the perceived usefulness of these activities are moderate (that is, averaging in the 60 to 70 per cent range). Overall, it could be concluded that the face-to-face activities were perceived to be more useful.

Figure 5: Usefulness ratings for online implementation activities
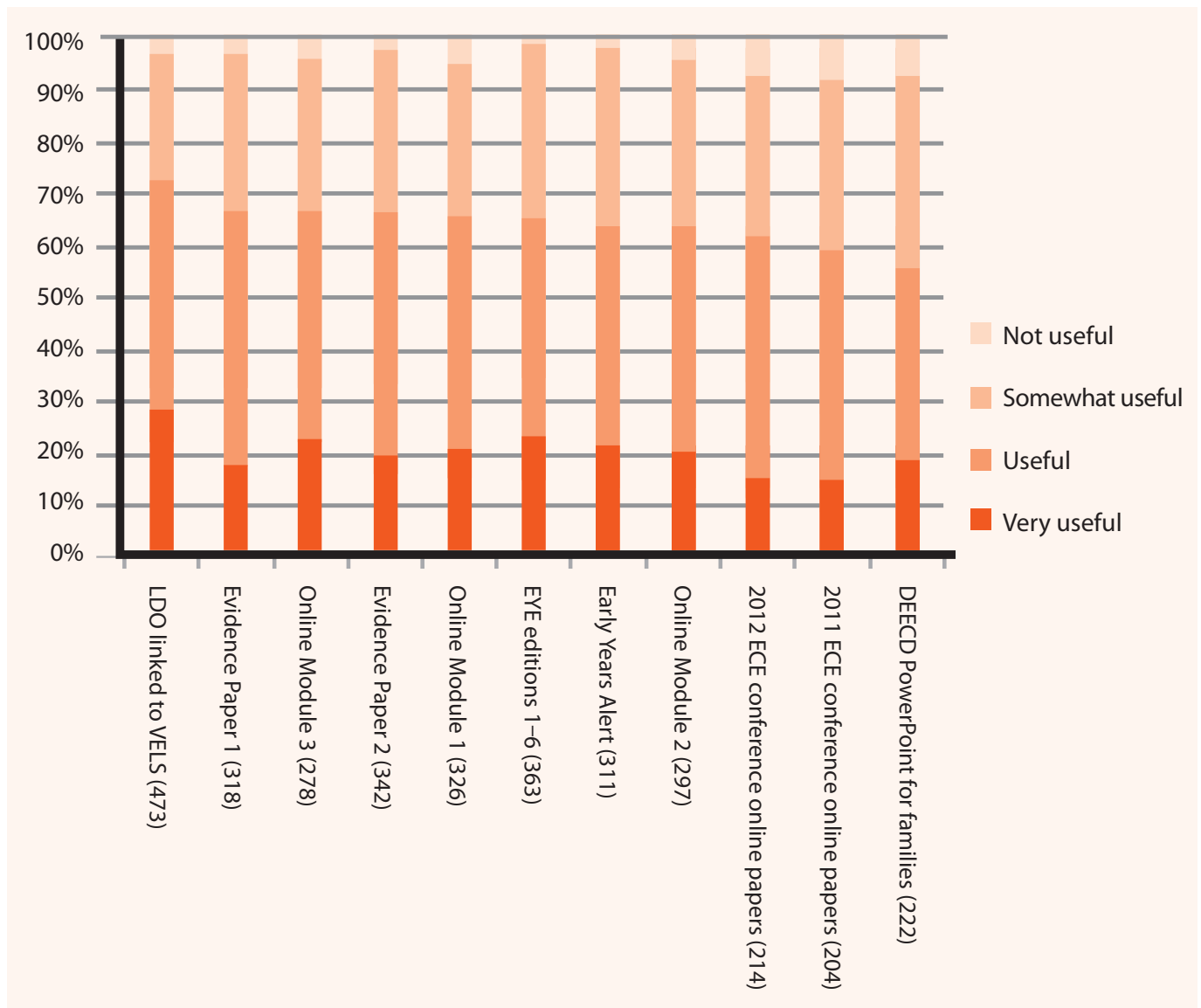
Note: number of respondents is shown in brackets

Some early childhood professionals reported that the language in the VEYLDF and support materials was potentially difficult to comprehend for professionals and families.

Engaging with the VEYLDF was difficult for some early childhood professionals due to perceived high literacy demands of the documents. This was expressed by early childhood professionals themselves and also those in managerial roles who found their staff having difficulty in engaging with the materials. Respondent suggestions included the following:

'Copies of the handouts in translated languages to pass on to my FDC educators as they are unable to attend the sessions.' (Family day care)

'More bilingual resources. More basic brochures. More access to translated material in various community languages – in particular outcomes to link to documentation so that parents can share this in [their] own languages.' (Long day care)

'Need very basic info with no jargon to explain as most [parents] aren't interested or don't really get it.' (Cluster-managed kindergarten)

Respondents recommended materials be provided in plain language so they can be more easily understood and could then also fulfil the purpose of informing parents about the VEYLDF.

The following quotes include suggestions for resource materials:

'Resources designed for families that detail the changes and initiatives that services and educators are working towards and implementing. It is crucial that families independently receive regular and effective information regarding the VEYLDF so that they are informed, aware and understand the workings that are being implemented across all early childhood settings and the professionalising of roles within services. Families need to be informed about the industry that is educating their children.' (Long day care)

'Needs to be more parent information on these. Maybe little books with examples of the outcomes you see in children and why they are being worked towards. Lots of photos.' (Kindergarten)

'… A booklet from the department that is small, user friendly and answers questions and poses questions. This could become part of the Annual General Meeting information folder we provide to parents the year before they commence.'
(Kindergarten)

There is uncertainty about the distinction between early childhood frameworks (VEYLDF, EYLF, NQF and FSAC) and which should be implemented. This is a key communication matter.

There are several frameworks currently being implemented in Victorian early childhood settings. The approved frameworks in addition to the VEYLDF are the EYLF and FSAC. When respondents were asked questions specifically about the implementation of the VEYLDF they sometimes responded in reference to the other frameworks. This may be due to some early childhood professionals not making a clear distinction in their minds about the various frameworks or simply not being aware of the difference.

Some early childhood professionals in the interviews and surveys described confusion and what they perceived as competition between the implementation of the EYLF and VEYLDF. Some early childhood professionals were unaware of how the documents were related and sought professional learning on which document was most appropriate for their context. The following quotes highlight this confusion:

'Where is it going to fit with the National Curriculum? Is the National Curriculum going to be fairly similar to the Victorian framework or are we going to be looking at a shift again?' (Long day care)

'I guess I was a little confused as to why it came out at such a similar time as the national framework and how there's a lot of similarities which in a way is great … But some confusion as to before having a national one, why do we need a state one?' (Out of school hours care)

'Again there's been conflict. We've been told at the professional development that we need to make sure that we're covering practice principles but that we're looking to make sure that the children achieve some of the outcomes. [Others] are telling us to ignore the outcomes, don't even worry about the outcomes – it's all about the practice principles. That the outcomes won't be achieved until a child reaches school and further down the track. So that's a conflict.' (Kindergarten)

'I think the idea of the framework's great. I think it's frustrating that we have to deal with the Victorian Framework and the National Framework.' (Private school)

'… my staff probably like the Victorian one [VEYLDF] a little bit better than the national one [EYLF]. But it still is two that we need to get our heads around. You have the Victorian Government sending you supporting documents for the Victorian one. Then you have the national sending you support and it's just – you get to the point that you think hang on, which one's this supposed to be supporting? It's the same with the regulations. I don't understand why there just can't be one set of regulations that's countrywide in regards to the ratios, in regards to hours of preschool, minimum age of staff – everything. Just one set that we have to deal with instead of the two sets because when the national standards come in we're going to be cruising along and think the national standards and then we'll think oh, hang on the Victorian one's stricter there so we need to slot that in there. It just puts more pressure. There's enough pressure on staff in early childhood without adding to it.' (Cluster-managed family day care)

'I just find it a lot easier to follow than the Victorian one [VEYLDF], so I haven't been using the Victorian one – only until this year. At work, we thought okay, we'll use the Victorian one instead of the national one [EYLF], so I'm a bit confused which one to use.' (Long day care)

An underlying factor for consideration in relation to these beliefs may be the presence of the phenomenon of innovation fatigue (Graham 1997). Early childhood professionals may be fatigued from the level of reform

within early childhood, for example, the 2009 regulation changes and the introduction of the National Quality Standards from 2012.

Innovation fatigue was evident in respondent comments that referred to the VEYLDF as 'reinventing the wheel' or 'it's what we've always done, just different language'. The belief that the VEYLDF is not perceived as useful will reduce engagement with it. Future communication about the VEYLDF should highlight its benefits in terms that directly relate to the everyday work of early childhood professionals and the complementary nature of the three frameworks: VEYLDF, EYLF and FSAC. Future communication could be supported by case studies of early childhood professionals who are fully implementing the VEYLDF.

Reach

Implementation activities did not reach the majority of early childhood professionals.

The reach of the implementation activities reported in Survey 1 and Survey 2 were accessed on average by fewer than 50 per cent of early childhood professionals. Online implementation activities were accessed on average by 45 per cent of respondents and face-to-face implementation activities by 32 per cent. Face-to-face rates were influenced by a variety of factors, particularly distance and communication.

To support implementation, DEECD planning for professional learning opportunities took into account a range of locations throughout the regions, provided a monetary contribution to backfill positions and ensured low cost registration for professional learning opportunities.

Respondents reported a range of factors affecting their ability to engage with implementation activities. Some early childhood professionals in regional and rural areas reported that distance from the activities was an issue. For some, the time commitment and financial cost of attendance at conferences was reported to limit participation.

Reportedly, the financial cost of some implementation activities also contributed to some early childhood professionals being unable to attend the activities. While funding support was provided by the DEECD for professional learning opportunities, other factors may influence participant capacity in a period of significant reform. Early childhood professionals reported a range of factors including timely access to information, lines of communication and their service's capacity to respond to professional learning opportunities as issues.

It is suggested that reviewing communication with services will further support the reach of professional learning opportunities.

Respondents were asked to rate a variety of websites for their effectiveness in communicating about the VEYLDF. The websites were accessed on average by 57 per cent of respondents. The websites accessed most frequently for information on the VEYLDF were the DEECD and Early Childhood Australia websites. They were also rated as effective. Information and static websites were accessed more often than social media websites. This may be due to the cohort's lack of awareness of the potential of social media websites to facilitate discussions on the VEYLDF, or to their preference for other forms of receiving information on the VEYLDF. The strategies for other communications about the VEYLDF were also rated for effectiveness.

Table 6 shows the list of strategies for communication about the VEYLDF, the number of participants (N) who had received communication via the strategy, the mean rating (M) expressed as a number on a scale from 0 (not effective at all) to 3 (very effective), and the standard deviation (SD) for the rating. Participants who had not been exposed to a type of communication strategy were excluded from this analysis. The strategies for communication are listed in descending order of rating. The highest ranked strategy for communication about the VEYLDF was the face-to-face sessions with 483 participants giving the strategy a mean rating of 2.28 out of 3.

Table 6: Effectiveness of the strategies used in communicating the VEYLDF

Strategies for communication	N	M	SD
Face-to-face sessions, for example, professional learning workshops	483	2.28	0.724
Other, e.g. networking with peers, further education, educational consultants	49	2.18	0.808
Regional network meetings	354	1.93	0.755
Dedicated implementation email	346	1.83	0.735
State-wide information sessions	387	1.82	0.748
VCAA Early Years Alert	405	1.80	0.746
DEECD eBulletin Early Childhood	402	1.76	0.737
DEECD/VCAA letters to services	384	1.68	0.732
DEECD/VCAA School eBulletin	200	1.56	0.728

Note: N – number of participants who responded to the item, M – mean rating expressed as a number on a scale from 0 (not effective at all) to 3 (very effective), SD – standard deviation.

The common feature of the highest rated communication strategies (that is, face-to-face sessions, other and regional network meetings) is their face-to-face element. The 'other' communication strategies were predominantly training sessions provided by independent consultants, meetings organised by industry bodies or meetings organised by the various services. Responses indicate face-to-face communication allows opportunities for participants to ask questions in the moment, deepening the discussion that is taking place, sharing ideas and enhancing personal understanding.

'Workshop presentation better for sharing ideas with others face to face.' (Family day care)

'The networks that have been set up are an invaluable means of sharing ideas with colleagues.' (Kindergarten)

'Was good to meet with other professionals and see that they had similar issues and got ideas from them.' (Government school)

'Was able to share experiences with peers and also hear their stories.' (Community-owned out of school hours care)

Similarly, respondents were asked to rate the effectiveness of a variety of websites and social media in communicating about the VEYLDF.

Table 7 shows the list of websites and social media, the number of people (N) who had accessed that website or social media platform, the mean rating (M) expressed as a number on a scale from 0 (not effective at all) to 3 (very effective), and the standard deviation (SD). The websites and social media are listed in descending order according to their mean rating. 'Other websites', the Early Childhood Australia (ECA) website and Facebook were rated as the most effective websites or social media in communicating about the VEYLDF.

Table 7: Effectiveness ratings of websites in communicating the VEYLDF

Websites and Social Media	N	M	SD
Other websites e.g. Community Child Care, early childhood forums, EYLF website, Kathy Walker website	42	2.14	0.814
Early Childhood Australia website	464	2.00	0.744
Facebook	125	2.00	0.741
DEECD website	513	1.85	0.729
Gowrie Victoria website	380	1.84	0.726
DEEWR website	360	1.79	0.767
VCAA website	388	1.77	0.737
Wiki spaces	43	1.72	0.797

Note: N – number of participants who responded to the item, M – mean rating expressed as a number on a scale from 0 (not effective at all) to 3 (very effective), SD – standard deviation.

The high ratings for these websites should be treated with caution. A closer examination of the other websites and the ECA website reveals little or no information about the VEYLDF on these websites. It is speculated that the respondents have simply identified and rated websites they generally access for early years information and resources, including the EYLF and the NQF, as opposed to websites that specifically mention the VEYLDF.

Impact

It is evident that some early childhood professionals are at the Initiation phase, some are at the Development phase and others are at the Consolidation phase.

The impact of the implementation activities was assessed in two ways. Firstly, respondents indicated their level of understanding and implementation of the Practice Principles and Learning and Development Outcomes in Survey 1 and Survey 2. Differences in the ratings between Survey 1 and Survey 2 are an indicator of the degree of impact of the implementation activities. Secondly, respondents indicated through their comments to various questions their stage of implementation in the context of the Model. These responses were then categorised as being in the Initiation, Development or Consolidation phases.

Comparisons between respondent ratings of their levels of understanding and implementation of the Practice Principles and Learning and Development Outcomes does not indicate a difference or change in understanding and practice change between the two surveys. It can be speculated that very little change was reported for a number of reasons. For example, one

possibility is that the implementation activities have little to no effect. A second possibility is that responses to the second survey represent a different cohort so that pre- and post-close analysis is not possible. Some respondents commented that 'we've been doing this all along' or 'this is the same stuff repackaged'.

An analysis of respondent comments, however, provides a more detailed picture. It is evident from the comments that some early childhood professionals are at the Initiation phase (learning the language of the VEYLDF, developing a personal and shared understanding of the VEYLDF), some are at the Development phase (implementing new ideas and practices, discussing with others, reflecting upon their practice) and others are at the Consolidation phase (practices are well established, they are supporting and guiding others). It is therefore imperative that any further implementation activities cater for the diversity in early years uptake that exists and fosters continuous improvement for all.

One of the particular strengths of the VEYLDF evaluation of activities and resources was its ability to provide opportunities for progressive feedback on implementation successes and challenges, as well as supporting a culture of reflective practice and continuous improvement.

Enablers

Respondents value professional learning that is easily understood, practical, service specific and presented by knowledgeable presenters.

An analysis of respondent comments to the type of implementation activities they had accessed reveals three common themes. Early childhood professionals preferred professional learning that was delivered in language and terms they understood; offered practical advice and suggestions on how to implement the VEYLDF which was specific to their service; and was presented by knowledgeable presenters.

The implementation activities most valued were small and localised. At these activities early childhood professionals were able to share, collaborate, discuss and reflect upon their own practice. Participants not only gained practical tips and reassurance but were also able to strengthen and form new professional networks. Many respondents from a variety of service types described the need to access resources, templates, proformas, 'practices that work' to be able to implement the VEYLDF and to meet reporting requirements.

To follow up on professional learning, respondents described overwhelmingly (83 per cent of respondents to this item) that they rely on formal (initiated by their service, regional office or industry body) and informal (initiated by individuals, across services) networking opportunities. These follow-up sessions are critical in terms of supporting early childhood professionals as they move forward in the implementation of the VEYLDF.

Inhibitors

Access of early childhood professionals to implementation activities is restricted by time, location, computer equipment, availability and capacity.

The existence of contextual barriers to change may limit opportunities for developing collaborative learning environments. Early childhood professionals in the interviews and surveys listed many contextual barriers that limited their opportunity to access implementation activities. For face-to-face activities, barriers included: timing of activities (difficult to find and unsuitable timing of activities); work conditions; access to activities (limits on number of people who could attend); location (activities required the early childhood professional to travel to another location); and leadership self-selection process (Bastow Institute).

Identified contextual barriers for online resources included limited computer access, work conditions, finding time to go online, and access to reliable Internet connections. Some early childhood professionals also listed their level of technical skill as a barrier to access.

Leadership

Initial pockets of early childhood leadership are starting to emerge in the Initiation phase, with some early childhood professionals supporting and leading others in the implementation process.

Sustained leadership and supportive networks are keys to establishing and maintaining the conditions for effective implementation. Rogers (2003) suggests that an individual's interest or need governs the rate of implementation. This need for interest in reform can be heavily influenced by sustained leadership and supportive networks. In this Initiation phase, some early childhood professionals listed examples of support and leadership from colleagues, in helping with the implementation of the VEYLDF, that represented an embedding of the implementation of the VEYLDF. In some early childhood services, time was allocated for staff to deeply explore content within the VEYLDF with colleagues. This approach allowed enhanced staff relationships and knowledge building about the VEYLDF to be contextualised within the early years services. Early childhood professionals appeared to value opportunities for professional learning within the early childhood service.

Recommendations

Findings to date indicate that the VEYLDF implementation has been successful in achieving project aims. Most respondents have an awareness of the VEYLDF and have accessed at least one of the resources made available by the VCAA and DEECD. Early childhood professionals report confidence in their performance with the Practice Principles and engagement with the Early Years Learning and Development Outcomes. Practice change is emerging in the Initiation phase of implementation of the VEYLDF.

It is also expected that with further implementation of the VEYLDF, there will be signs of an increased ability, confidence and willingness to engage in discussion and debate about practices and the impact on outcomes for children.

The outcomes provide a new way of thinking about children's learning across the birth to eight years period. Where there are professional learning opportunities with an emphasis on inquiry and reflection, it is expected that both practice and professional confidence in practice will be strengthened. This takes time and many opportunities for experimentation, critical reflection and review of practice. The beginnings of this are seen in emerging leadership indicators, for example in the Bastow Institute programs and other inquiry professional learning opportunities such as the Outcomes Project.

The Model supports an auditing process that can be applied within a continuous improvement model and provides the opportunity to build in specific steps to support change.

Analysis of the data indicates that the phase that early childhood professionals have reached can be plotted. The majority of early childhood professionals are at the end of the Initiation phase and at the beginning of the Development phase. There are a few early childhood professionals who are in the middle-to-late Development phase. Due to this diversity, early childhood professionals from a range of service settings across birth to eight years require a range of approaches to support continuous improvement.

Early childhood professionals in the Initiation phase require continued generalised professional development that explains the big picture and introduces the new language and practices. Early childhood professionals in the Development phase require a number of supports. They require more tailored professional learning to their contexts but also opportunities to network, discuss, share and reflect on their new practices. These networks are characterised by their non-judgmental supportive nature as early childhood professionals incorporate their new language and practices into their praxis.

Early childhood professionals in the Consolidation phase require less support than those in the development phase as they move towards refining and finessing their practice. Early childhood professionals in the Consolidation phase should also be encouraged to support those in earlier stages. Providing this leadership and support will help deepen and consolidate their understanding of the VEYLDF.

Based upon this multi-pronged approach, the recommendations of this report are aligned to the three phases of the Model (see Figure 1). The needs of individuals and groups change as they progress through the phases. Therefore the focus of any implementation efforts changes to reflect the needs of individuals and groups.

Table 8 presents the recommendations of this report by phase with more detailed descriptions provided in the text following. The recommendations for the Consolidation phase are not expanded upon at this point in time. Some respondents self-identified as being in the Consolidation phase. This demonstrates the limitations of self-reporting.

Table 8: Recommendations by phase in the Educational Change Model

Initiation phase	Development phase	Consolidation phase
• Creation of plain language materials around the VEYLDF • Large-scale information dissemination professional learning sessions – broadcast to hubs in regional and rural centres • Development of partnerships with registered training organisations to fully develop pre-service and in-service early childhood professionals' understanding of the VEYLDF • Articulation of differences and similarities of the various learning and development frameworks	• Targeted context-specific professional learning • Development of partnerships with larger services, industry bodies, consultants to provide context-specific guidance and professional learning in small groups • Through partnerships, establish and maintain local context-specific networks of educators • Creation of resources to support implementation	• Targeted context-specific professional learning • Encouragement of emerging leaders to provide support and assistance to others • Establishment of 'lighthouses' of best practice

The determination of the phase in which the majority of early childhood professionals are located is based upon a subjective analysis of their comments during the evaluation and matching this with the projected timelines of the phases and the elements of the Model (Pendergast et al. 2005).

The Educational Change Model provides specific detail that individuals and services can use to determine their current phase of implementation and to plan from this. Based upon that analysis, recommendations similar to those presented above could be crafted to match the needs of services in that phase. Services would then have more specific information about the kinds of activities to best support staff groups and individuals in their understanding and implementation of the reforms.

The following eight recommendations are presented as an outcome of the research project:

1. **It is recommended that the findings of this evaluation are triangulated with other data sources to further inform future VEYLDF implementation planning. This would include but is not limited to the views of professional learning consultants, evidence from VEYLDF implementation inquiry projects, and data from the NQF.**

This project was conducted across a period of ten months: Stage 1 (Survey 1), Stage 2 (in-depth interviews) and Stage 3 (Survey 2). The majority of the 1141 respondents to the two surveys and the 20 interviewees: were

aged 40 years and above; had more than ten years' experience; worked within the universal services sector; and worked with children aged three to five years. Hence, a limitation of the study is the predominance of respondents from these demographics. By triangulating with other data sources, greater representation is possible.

2. **Articulation of differences and similarities of the various frameworks (VEYLDF, EYLF, FSAC and NQF) and the Australian Curriculum in schools (Initiation phase).**

There is some confusion in Victoria, within early childhood, about the relationship between the EYLF and the VEYLDF. This was evident in responses that spoke about other frameworks when the question specifically asked about the VEYLDF. Some early childhood professionals indicate they are using the EYLF and have responded to the survey as if it were a survey about the EYLF. The VEYLDF supports collaboration across the birth to eight years period and this is a distinction worth highlighting in future VEYLDF communication plans. The EYLF and the VEYLDF documents are complementary and resources can be harnessed from both EYLF and VEYLDF to support a depth of understanding in relation to the five outcomes and to practice. The VEYLDF is linked to the current VELS curriculum in the school sector and this is an important feature to be highlighted with the Australian Curriculum in schools. The ecosystem of frameworks should be clarified to support the sector to move forward.

3. **Professional learning activities and workshops that are large scale (Initiation phase) should be followed up with smaller local networking opportunities (Development phase).**

This recommendation ties into the notion of thin and thick levels of professional learning, both of which are needed to achieve full implementation of any initiative. The large professional learning opportunities are effective at reaching many early childhood professionals in a time- and cost-efficient manner. These should typically occur in the Initiation phase. Many individuals still identify as being in the Initiation phase so communication about the framework should continue. The professional learning opportunities provide overviews of the VEYLDF, build in discussion and support engagement within reform. As individuals and groups move into the Development phase, smaller local networking opportunities are required. These smaller networks are service specific and discuss the VEYLDF in detail and unpack it in context: How should the VEYLDF be interpreted in our context? What are considered best practices in our context in implementing the VEYLDF?

4. **Coordinate with larger services and industry bodies to organise localised and integrated professional learning that may include elements of support that are service specific. Support consultants and regional offices to be able to deliver personalised mentoring and/or coaching for individual services (Development phase).**

Professional learning opportunities, including inquiry research, policy directions and implementation communication strategies, would continue to be developed by DEECD and VCAA. Ongoing connections to services industry bodies and early years consultants will support other opportunities to access professional learning. Respondents clearly identified industry bodies and consultants as a key source of information about the VEYLDF. These context- and setting-specific meetings should be a key feature of the Development phase. The benefit of this strategy is early childhood professionals are receiving targeted and specific professional learning in a local setting. The DEECD and VCAA should continue to communicate and collaborate with professional networks, services, industry bodies and early years consultants.

5. **Stream (and then archive) workshops and seminars on the Internet – early childhood professionals in regional and rural areas can meet at hubs (such as local TAFE institutes) to watch the broadcast (in the Initiation and Development phases)**

The results from this evaluation indicate the online resources are being accessed more often than the face-to-face activities. Attendance at the face-to-face activities is limited by a variety of factors but early childhood professionals find them more effective than the online material. These two issues can be addressed if the thin layers of professional learning can be broadcast to local hubs where early childhood professionals can meet to view the streamed material. The broadcasting medium would be a product such as Blackboard Collaborate (formerly Elluminate Live). These can then be archived for later viewing. Archiving involves the storage of the material in a repository for future reference. This strategy addresses the issue of distance some early childhood professionals face in attending professional learning and also allows early childhood professionals to meet one another in their local area. If the hub meetings are organised by the regional offices, they will be able to establish and maintain their professional networks with the services in their region.

The hub meetings are a key recommendation of this evaluation. Feedback on the network meetings identified them as safe places to express ideas in a nonthreatening environment. Network meetings were described as providing opportunities to discuss, brainstorm and problem solve with other early childhood professionals from similar contexts. This is not only a recommendation of the Model for individuals and groups in the Development phase but also identified by respondents to the surveys.

6. **Creation of plain language materials around the VEYLDF that double as professional development for staff and information for parents (Initiation phase).**

Some early childhood professionals expressed the view that the literacy demands of documents supporting the VEYLDF make them inaccessible to some early childhood professionals. It is recommended that resources around the elements of the VEYLDF are written in plain language to facilitate understanding. This is particularly important at this stage of implementation as many early childhood professionals indicate they are still developing their personal and shared understanding of the VEYLDF as they move towards full implementation. These plain language resources can also be used in the development of materials to assist services in communicating the VEYLDF to parents and caregivers.

7. **Creation of resources (practices that work, templates, proforma, computer programs) to assist with and to streamline the documentation of children's learning and development (Development phase).**

Early childhood professionals in the Development phase can be further supported through the provision of resources and materials that outline how the services can move towards full implementation. The EYLF has prominence among some services due to the support provided by Early Childhood Australia and the variety of support materials that explain the EYLF and provide practical suggestions on how the requirement for the documentation of children's learning and development can be met. The current strategy used by the VCAA and DEECD to coordinate information dissemination with the training sector could be reviewed.

8. **Apply the Educational Change Model and continuous improvement theory to support further transition into implementation (Development and Consolidation phases).**

To allow individuals and services to plot their positions in the reform process, they must be able to realistically assess their current phase of implementation. Support for auditing as a process is recommended for both internal and external assessments of the current phase of implementation. This would support individuals and services to identify activities and resources that will be most effective in supporting progress and transition into the consolidation phase. An auditing process should then be grounded clearly within a continuous improvement model as outlined in the National Quality Standard.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Descriptions of the online and face-to-face activities

Online activities

Early Childhood Education Conference 2010

Kindergarten Parents Victoria in partnership with Gowrie Victoria presented the Together We Grow conference with an emphasis on 'building partnerships'. The conference was sponsored by DEECD and held on 4–5 June in Melbourne. Around 853 early childhood professionals attended the conference. Conference presentations are available online at:

www.togetherwegrow.com.au/2010speakernotes.html

Early Childhood Education Conference 2011

Kindergarten Parents Victoria in partnership with Gowrie Victoria presented the Together We Grow – Achieving Sustainable Practices conference. The conference was sponsored by DEECD and held on 3–4 June in Melbourne. Around 900 delegates attended the conference. Conference presentations are available online at:

www.togetherwegrow.com.au/2011speakernotes.html

Early Years Exchange (the EYE), Editions 1–6 (online), December 2009 to June 2010

A series of six online publications were released between December 2009 and July 2010 to familiarise early childhood professionals with the VEYLDF. The *EYE* is designed to support thinking, discussions and planning with families, colleagues and children. Each *EYE* begins with a focus on one of the Practice Principles from the VEYLDF. Each edition includes: a video of an early childhood professional from a different setting discussing how they are incorporating the principles into their practice; snapshots of planning and reflecting on children's learning and development; a myth about the early childhood reform agenda that is addressed within a 'Mythbuster' article; and tools for early childhood teams to use in discussing, mapping, reflecting and planning their professional practice.

www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/earlyyears/eye/index.html

Evidence Papers on the Practice Principles (online)

A series of papers that document the evidence that underpins each of the eight Practice Principles are in development for publication on the DEECD website. The Evidence Papers address the 'what', 'why' and 'how' of each Practice Principle. They are intended to be used by early childhood professionals seeking a deeper understanding of the research that informs each Practice Principle. At the time of Stages 1 and 2, two papers had been published:

- *Evidence Paper Practice Principle 1: Family-Centred Practice* (October 2010)
- *Evidence Paper Practice Principle 8: Reflective Practice* (October 2010)

By Stage 3 of the evaluation of implementation, two additional papers had been published:

- *Evidence Paper Practice Principle 3: High Expectations for Every Child* (August 2011)
- *Evidence Paper Practice Principle 5: Respectful Relationships and Responsive Engagement* (June 2011)

www.education.vic.gov.au/earlylearning/eyldf/profresources.htm

From 2011, a series of practice guides will be developed from the evidence papers. These guides will provide practical advice to early childhood professionals about how to integrate the Practice Principles into their practice.

PowerPoint Presentation for Families (online), March 2010

A PowerPoint presentation for early childhood professionals is currently on the DEECD website. This presentation can be used to discuss the VEYLDF with families.

www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/earlylearning/veyldf-pres-for-families.ppt

State-wide Modules 1–4 on the VEYLDF (online)

A four-module professional development program on the VEYLDF has been developed by DEECD. The modules help early childhood professionals embed the VEYLDF into their daily practice. To facilitate access to the training, the modules have been provided via online delivery. At the time of this study, three modules were published online:

- Module 1 – An Introduction to the VEYLDF and Reflective Practice, online from October 2010
- Module 2 – An Introduction to Collaborative Practice, online from October 2010
- Module 3 – An Introduction to Effective Practice, online from April 2010

www.education.vic.gov.au/earlylearning/eyldf/profdevel.htm

The Early Years Alert

This online publication provides updates about implementation of the VEYLDF. It also provides information on resources, conferences and professional development of relevance to early childhood professionals. Subscription online is required at:

www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/earlyyears/subscribe.html

The Learning and Development Outcomes from the VEYLDF linked to the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (online) from March 2010

This online document provides electronic links between the Learning and Development Outcomes from the VEYLDF to the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS). The links are intended to support early childhood professionals in designing experiences and opportunities for advancing children's learning and development.

www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/earlyyears/vfldoutcomes/index.html

Face-to-face implementation activities

Bastow Institute of Educational Leadership Professional Learning Programs, July 2010– August 2011

The Bastow Institute of Educational Leadership delivered three professional learning programs for early childhood professionals in 2010–2011.

- Contemporary Child Development Theory for Early Childhood Educators: This program consisted of five professional learning days, comprising a two-day and a three-day intensive, and a three-week work-based Curriculum Investigation project. Participants could choose to undertake additional assessment, which could be used as credit for graduate or postgraduate level study (subject to university entry requirements). The program was designed for participants who are pedagogical leaders directly responsible for planning the learning program for a group of children and who are required to make best practice curriculum decisions.

- Educational Leadership in Early Childhood Settings: This program consisted of pre- and post-program data collection, three core learning days held in Melbourne one month apart, an inquiry-based project undertaken by the participant in his or her workplace, a mentor site visit and teleconference conducted between the learning days, and a peer cluster mentoring and/or coaching meeting held after the final learning day.

- Leading People in Early Childhood Settings: This program structure included a pre-program leadership survey; three professional learning workshops held approximately one month apart; a work-based leadership development project undertaken with the support of program facilitators; a minimum of two one-hour teleconferences led by the program facilitators; and additional peer learning group activities.

www.bastow.vic.edu.au

Early Childhood Education Conference 2010

Kindergarten Parents Victoria in partnership with Gowrie Victoria presented the Together We Grow conference with an emphasis on 'building partnerships'. The conference was sponsored by DEECD and held on 4–5 June in Melbourne. Around 853 early childhood professionals attended the conference. Conference presentations are available at:

www.togetherwegrow.com.au/2010speakernotes.html

Early Childhood Education Conference 2011

Kindergarten Parents Victoria in partnership with Gowrie Victoria presented the Together We Grow – Achieving Sustainable Practices conference. The conference was sponsored by DEECD and held on 3–4 June in Melbourne. Around 900 early childhood professionals attended the conference. Conference presentations are available at:

www.togetherwegrow.com.au/2011speakernotes.html

Regional Information Sessions 2010

Information sessions were held across Victoria between February and April 2010. The information sessions focused on key national and state early childhood education and care reforms including:

- Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework
- National Quality Reform Agenda (including National Quality Standard, licensing and accreditation)
- Update on children's services regulations
- Universal access to 15 hours of kindergarten
- Transition: A Positive Start to School initiative and support for the early childhood workforce.

The information sessions were for early childhood professionals from early childhood settings, primary schools, early childhood intervention services, school nursing, maternal and child health nursing, DEECD regional offices and other interested agencies.

State-wide Modules 1–4 on the VEYLDF, May 2010–June 2011

Four professional learning modules on the VEYLDF were presented in metropolitan and rural areas across Victoria for early childhood professionals. Each module consisted of 3 hours' contact time.

- Module 1 – An Introduction to the VEYLDF and Reflective Practice
- Module 2 – An Introduction to Collaborative Practice
- Module 3 – An Introduction to Effective Practice
- Module 4 – Assessment for Learning and Development: The Early Childhood Planning Cycle.

VCAA Learning and Development Outcomes Project, July 2010–May 2011

This project was a key implementation activity that used an inquiry-based model of professional learning to:

- consider what children are demonstrating in the five Learning and Development Outcomes from birth to eight years
- examine and analyse in-depth the Learning and Development Outcomes
- use a range of resources to support documentation and analysis of children's learning.

Fifty participants attended six one-day workshops from July 2010 to May 2011. The workshops were facilitated by early childhood project leaders.

Victorian Early Childhood Coaching program, October 2010–December 2011

The Victorian Early Childhood Coaching Program is funded by DEECD and in 2010–2011 delivered by Gowrie Victoria to 92 services across the state. The objectives of the program are to:

- support educators to embed the EYLF and VEYLDF into everyday practice with children, families and other professionals
- document the practice change and serve as a case study to other services
- promote the process of change to other early childhood professionals.

The program includes six days of face-to-face contact with the coach, monthly phone contact, networking opportunities and an online forum open to all participants. The coaching is managed through each service's pedagogical leader, who is the primary contact, however all service staff participate in the program.

Appendix 2: Alignment Between Evaluative Dimension and Question Statements for Survey 1 (Stage 1)

Table 9: Appendix 2

Evaluative dimension	Question statements
Demographics	**1** Please indicate your age range. **2** How many years of experience do you have in the early childhood sector? **3** What is your highest level of qualification in early childhood? **4** What is your current role in the early childhood sector? **5** What is the postcode of the service/school where you work the most hours? **6** How old are the children with whom you work?

Reach	**7** There are three parts to this question.
	    a) Indicate how useful the activities were that you accessed/attended.
	    b) How were they useful?
	    c) If you selected 'other benefits' or 'none of the above' as an option in the question above, can you please elaborate or explain your choice?
	 8 Would you like to make any further comments about the implementation activities?
	 9 There are two parts to this question.
	    a) What else has supported you in getting started with the VEYLDF? Please choose all that apply.
	    b) What other implementation activities have you attended?

Impact	**10, 11 and 12 assess participant's enactment of Practice Principles 1, 5 and 6 respectively. All have the following question stem.** The left-hand column provides the elements of each Practice Principle from the VEYLDF. The row across the top describes a continuum of curriculum implementation from left to right. Please choose one description that best applies to you at this time. **13** What further assistance would help you incorporate the Practice Principles into your practice? **14 and 15 assess participant's enactment of Learning and Development Outcomes 1 and 3. Both have the following question stem.** After reading each element from Learning and Development Outcome 1, please select the statement that best describes your position in planning to achieve this outcome. The row across the top describes a continuum of curriculum implementation from left to right. Please choose one description that best applies to you at this time. **16** What further assistance would help you in planning to the Learning and Development Outcomes? **17** There are a number of ways in which information about the VEYLDF is currently being communicated. How effectively are the following communication methods working for you? (Please choose all that apply.) **18** How are you currently introducing the VEYLDF to families? (Please choose all that apply.)

Appendix 3: Summary of Interim Report 1: May 2011

Interim findings for the framework implementation were organised according to four evaluative dimensions: demographics, reach, impact, and enablers and barriers.

Demographics

The Stage 1 survey and initial findings from Stage 2 interviews provided a representation of early years professionals throughout Victoria, particularly in terms of geographical coverage. The demographic profile appears representative of the sector given its recognised diversity. For example, the 20 in-depth interviews included early years professionals in family day care, long day care, outside school hours care, kindergartens, playgroups, primary schools and early childhood intervention services throughout Victoria.

Reach

In terms of reach, the VCAA and the DEECD developed a wide range of implementation activities and resources for early years professionals to assist with introducing the framework. These included online and face-to-face initiatives.

Stage 1 of the evaluation found that reported knowledge, and access and utilisation of resources and activities varied considerably, as could be expected with such a large and diverse audience. It was noted that of the 405 survey respondents, only 23 (or 6 per cent) had not accessed any activities or resources.

The most frequently attended activities were the regional information sessions and the state-wide modules. These face-to-face activities were considered useful as an opportunity for networking, but many respondents were disappointed that the content was too general.

Professional learning at the Bastow Institute of Educational Leadership received the highest mean rating for usefulness, though only a relatively small number of early years professionals were able to access this activity.

The majority of respondents in the survey supported themselves in the implementation of the framework by reading publications and accessing websites related to the framework (68 per cent), by working in a team that was actively interested in the framework (65 per cent) or by working in a service where the culture supported the framework (50 per cent).

These findings strongly suggest that positive implementation of the framework is largely dependent on the existence of a community of learners at early years services who are actively engaged and interested in the framework. Strengthening this support base at early years services is recommended as a high priority for the next phase of the implementation program.

In answer to the key evaluation question 'To what extent have early years professionals utilised the implementation framework activities and resources, and what is their feedback?' the findings for 'reach' suggest the following:

- Most early years professionals in Victoria appear to have utilised at least some of the framework activities and resources, based on sample survey results.
- The online resources were useful to many individuals for self-directed learning, especially if there was a supportive work environment.
- Face-to-face opportunities to learn about the framework, to network and to discuss issues were especially valued when the content was specific to the participants' work setting.

Impact

Survey respondents were asked to self-report the extent to which they had implemented the Practice Principles for Learning and Development within their context. Overall, participants expressed high confidence in their delivery of the Practice Principles. However, a detailed analysis of the pattern of responses suggested that confidence ratings might be inflated at this point in time due to early years professionals not having had a practical opportunity to assess their own practice against the Practice Principles.

Asked about assistance required with the Practice Principles, respondents suggested the need for more localised workshops that were context specific.

Similarly, when asked to report the extent to which they had enacted the elements of the Learning and Development Outcomes within their context respondents expressed high levels of confidence. A note of caution was raised since respondents have not had an opportunity to assess their understanding and practices in relation to the Outcomes.

Assistance required with the Outcomes involved help with planning, and also time allocated for planning.

When asked about the specific topic of introducing the VEYLDF to families, respondents mostly communicated through 'talking with families' (65 per cent), 'presentations to families' (65 per cent) or 'meetings' (52 per cent). The least used communication method was 'discussion or documentation of children's learning' (9 per cent), a finding that raised professional development issues in the implementation of the framework.

Finally, survey respondents were asked to rate the effectiveness of the communication methods used by the VCAA and DEECD in the framework implementation. Replies indicated that the communication process was generally very effective. In particular, professional development workshops were held to be the most effective, followed by websites, email and network meetings.

In answer to the key evaluation question 'What elements should be included in the next phase of implementation?' the findings for 'impact' suggest a greater focus is necessary on implementation resources and activities that provide opportunities for:

- self-assessment of current practice

- examples of and assistance with enactment of the Practice Principles

- examples of and assistance with planning with the Learning and Development Outcomes

- increasing understanding about how to document and discuss children's learning.

Enablers and barriers

In both the survey and the interviews early years professionals were asked about enablers and barriers to implementing the VEYLDF.

Enablers that were identified included supportive early years settings with strong leadership and time for planning.

Barriers identified included the reach of the VEYLDF into early years service education/training, lack of accessibility, the way information had been disseminated and workforce conditions.

To address the barriers and utilise potential enablers, respondents suggested:

- having a mentor or expert enter into their early years service and provide guidance and feedback about the implementation

- having access to professional learning activities that were context specific to the early years service setting, ideally workshops conducted by people who understand each of the different early years settings and are able to provide examples unique to that setting

- the development of additional resources, such as DVDs, brochures and templates that would help with the implementation of the framework, especially in the critical area of parent engagement and working with families as partners in their children's development.

In summary, findings to date suggest that the VEYLDF implementation has been generally successful in achieving project outcomes. Most survey respondents had an awareness of the framework and have accessed at least one of the resources made available by the VCAA and DEECD. Early years professionals report confidence in their performance with the Practice Principles and engagement with the Learning and Development Outcomes. Feedback to inform improvement and to ascertain what is required for further implementation across the diverse range of services and early childhood professionals has focused on strengthening the learning and leadership base in service settings, providing workshops, mentoring and/or coaching and other face-to-face opportunities for early years professionals to understand, discuss and practise their setting-specific implementation of the VEYLDF.

Recommendations

1. Early years professionals should be further supported to implement the VEYLDF through a staged or incremental process that has a primary focus on training via face-to-face workshops, mentoring and or coaching and group engagement with different sectors so that they can apply the framework directly to their practices.

2. The training should be supported by the refinement of existing resources, such as developing practical guides from the evidence papers, as well as producing working tools such as brochures and templates that early years professionals can use to work with families.

3. The Stage 3 survey should be expanded to ensure full representation of all early years professional services, and to examine in-depth what is actually occurring in different service areas during the implementation phase, especially ways to strengthen the implementation strategy for each early years service.

4. Specific recommendations related to training:

  – More professional development workshops should be made available to enhance the implementation of the framework.

  – These workshops should be led by people who have a working background in specific settings so that they can provide concrete advice and guidance to early years professionals.

  – A mentoring and/or coaching program should be introduced where experienced practitioners can visit early years settings to work with staff on implementing Practice Principles and enacting Learning and Development Outcomes.

  – Use the communication methods found to be effective to date (professional development workshops, websites, email, network meetings) to increase awareness and utilisation of the implementation resources available.

Appendix 4: Interview Schedule Stage 2: March 2011

Question	Possible prompts	Intention	Stem
1. Tell us how you are implementing the VEYLDF? – Is everyone at this site familiar with the VEYLDF? – How are you working with other staff/coworkers?	Practice change prompts Service integration Changes in children's learning Collaboration with staff	Documentation of implementation activities Access and application of framework Practice Principles	Implementation delivery Reach and adoption
2. In the first year of implementation, what resources/professional learning have you been able to access? – How have they been helpful? – What has been problematic about the resources/ activities? – (If no access, what have been the difficulties/barriers for you?)	Prompt with list of implementation activities Identify each activity attended Rate each activity – helpful? Useful for others?	Allocation of resource provided	Implementation delivery Engagement/ satisfaction/impact
3. What difference has the VEYLDF made to your work so far?	Changes in … • Planning • Attitude • How you work – with parents, children, colleagues • Professional development	Documentation of potential change in practice	Reach and adoption
4. Who do you go to for further assistance about the VEYLDF?	People within the centre People outside the centre Websites Print resources	Establish if support networks have been established	Implementation Sustainability
5. What would support your further access for the next phase of implementation in 2011–2012 ? – What do you think would assist your colleagues in your service/in your networks/in your region?		Advice from intended audience about future sustainability	Sustainability

Question	Possible prompts	Intention	Stem
6. Of the resources and activities provided so far, which have assisted you in understanding and implementing the Practice Principles? (Prompt for examples.) – How have the resources and activities assisted you? – What's different now? – What would assist you with understanding and implementing the Practice Principles?	Prompt for artefacts/ evidence	Access and application of framework Practice Principles	Reach and adoption
7. Of the resources and activities provided so far, which have assisted you in understanding and implementing the Learning and Development Outcomes ? (Prompt for examples.) – How have the resources and activities assisted you ? – What's different now? – What would assist you in understanding and implementing the Learning and Development Outcomes?	Prompt with: • Interacting with children • Interating with parents • Types of activities • Planning • Assessing	Access and application of framework Learning and Development Outcomes	Reach and adoption Sustainability
8. Have any implementation resources/activities supported your work with families? – What else do you need?	Prompt with list of support resources from VCAA and DEECD.	Access and application of framework Practice Principles	Implementation delivery
9. What are the barriers to your implementation of the VEYLDF (local issues/ leadership)? Please list. What would help reduce these barriers?		Clarifying barriers	Impacts Sustainability Reach and adoption Implementation delivery
10. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your experiences with the implementation of the VEYLDF?		Any aditional information	All

Appendix 5: Summary of Interim Report 2 (In-depth interview analysis stage 2): August 2011

Introduction

The semi-structured interviews conducted with 22 early years professionals represent Stage 2 of this project. The majority of interviewees (18) were from universal services settings with the majority of those being in managerial positions. Interviewees ranged in age from early 30s to early 60s with all regions and all service types represented. Interviewees were asked questions to examine the four evaluative domains: reach, impact, enablers and barriers. Two independent coders found responses fell into three main themes, each with sub-themes as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: The themes and subthemes discovered in the interviews

Barriers to implementation	Enablers of implementation	Other issues
Access to resources	Interviewee suggestions*	Communication with families
Awareness of the resources	Departmental enablers	The Practice Principles
Appropriateness of the resources	Field enablers	Changing one's practice
Funding		Engaging with the Learning and Development Outcomes
Confusion over the various frameworks		
Staff factors		

*Suggestions made by interviewees were coded in the subtheme of 'interviewee suggestion' to provide one group of independent suggestions.

Barriers to implementation

1. Distances required to attend workshops and availability of places were issues with workshops.
2. Online resources were difficult to gain access to either due to their size or not being available.
3. Age of computer equipment on-site and regional Internet speeds were also concerns.
4. Some interviewees were not aware that some of the resources were available.
5. There were also issues of how quickly information filtered through official channels.
6. Some of the information presented at some workshops was too general, or pitched at the wrong level to be directly applicable.
7. The ability of services to fund staff professional development was a concern for some interviewees, particularly for the lowest qualified early year professionals in services.
8. Staff were largely required to engage in personal development (PD) in their own time rather than work time. This is not realistic, given many have outside-of-work commitments.
9. The release of both the EYLF and the VEYLDF in 2009 caused confusion and frustration in some interviewees.
10. Staff motivation to engage with the framework was an issue for some interviewees
11. Some interviewees stated this may be due to the difficulty of the language in the framework, particularly in services that employ early years professionals with English as an additional language.

Enablers of implementation

1. Professional development offered by the Bastow Institute was repeatedly commended for its impact.

2. Favourable comments were made about the third state-wide module, the Bastow Institute and the *Early Years Exchange*.

3. The quality of the material and the presenters are the strength of the Bastow Institute.

4. The 'easy to digest' format of the materials is the strength of the *EYE*.

5. Implementation (that is, discussion, dissemination of materials, planning with the framework) was most successful in services with strong leadership.

6. Strong local support networks (for example, cluster meetings) and industry-supplied PD (for example, Family Day care Victoria) were seen to enable implementation.

7. Early years professionals being able to come together in a forum aided discussion and a sharing of ideas.

8. Some interviewees were accessing additional online materials (for example, Early Childhood Australia website).

9. Having strong relationships with regional offices was seen as an enabler; the 'Practice Champions' initiative from 2010 was mentioned.

Impact

1. Some services were using the Practice Principles to plan, implement and report on child learning and development.

2. Many were not at the stage of implementing the Practice Principles.

3. There are three major forms of change experienced as a result of engaging with implementation activities: increased awareness, a shift in thinking and language change.

4. This is a similar situation with the Learning and Development Outcomes.

Communication with families

1. Some services were using the supplied materials to communicate the framework to parents through established communication channels.

2. In some services, parents showed little interest in learning about the framework – the wellbeing of the child was of more immediate concern.

Interviewee recommendations

1. A more personalised approach (face-to-face, small group, local, discussion) to personal development

2. Mentoring and or coaching of individual services

3. Workshops that were tailored more to specific service types

4. Materials provided in both plain language and other languages

5. Better integration with industry peak bodies (for example. Playgroup Victoria).