

ANZSOG COAG Workshop: Early Childhood Development

Park Hyatt Hotel, Melbourne

May 22, 2009

Notes from Breakout Session 1:

With consideration of the reform outlined in the presentation by Vicki Rundle, Group leader, Early Childhood Development, DEEWR, re. 'What COAG is doing', what are the major implementation challenges?

1. Challenges:

- 1.1 Universal approach
- 1.2 Building on existing services
- 1.3 Community literacy
- 1.4 Outcomes-based
- 1.5 Resources – sustainability
- 1.6 Build on research
- 1.7 Workforce
- 1.8 Managing change
- 1.9 Terminology
- 1.10 Monitoring
- 1.11 Lifelong learning

1.1 Universal approach

- Take a proactive approach to universal services
 - National policy – Integrated approach re services
 - Need for funding reform
 - Tag funding? Funding could be targeted to child rather than services
 - Investment – defines and confines
- Provide core central services (specialist centres) providing expertise to the community, not standalone
- Link communities and continue to build relationship
- Improve transition
 - Childcare to pre-school
 - Pre-school to school entry
- Identify risk factors when considering universal approach. Identify what works before introducing a wholistic, systems approach
 - Children at risk
- Tension but scalable national desired outcomes versus local service delivery

- Broadbanding of funding place-based. Role of private/profit based provision within the broader funding and universal access provision
- Creation of Service Hubs
 - Functionality
 - Infrastructure location
 - Mapping of existing services
 - Governance
- What is universal?
 - Within the universal access, at risk and additional need
 - Issues of training
 - Expat educators and cultural change

1.2 Building on existing services

- Review policies and raise awareness of existing policy

1.3 Community literacy

- Identify opportunities to engage community

1.4 Outcomes-based

- Change current 'scattered' approach to outcomes based approach

1.5 Resources – sustainability

- Continuity and common elements related to quality

1.6 Build on research

- Need for evidence based research
 - Build on existing research
- Concentration on (birth) 0 – 3 years

1.7 Workforce

- What is an Early Childhood Development (ECD) professional?
- Workforce reform:
 - Requirement for multi-discipline teams
 - Need for ongoing professional development
 - Parent involvement
 - Enable community involvement
 - Retention of workforce – payment and status
 - Training (ECD competencies) – working with families and communities
 - Workforce levels

1.8 Managing change

- Build on existing services

1.9 Terminology

- Consistent communication – Need to resolve terminology. Agreement on the terminology to be used
- Finding appropriate label is difficult e.g. ECEC – Early Childhood Education and Care; ELEC – Early Learning, Early Childhood; Care and/or education

1.10 Monitoring

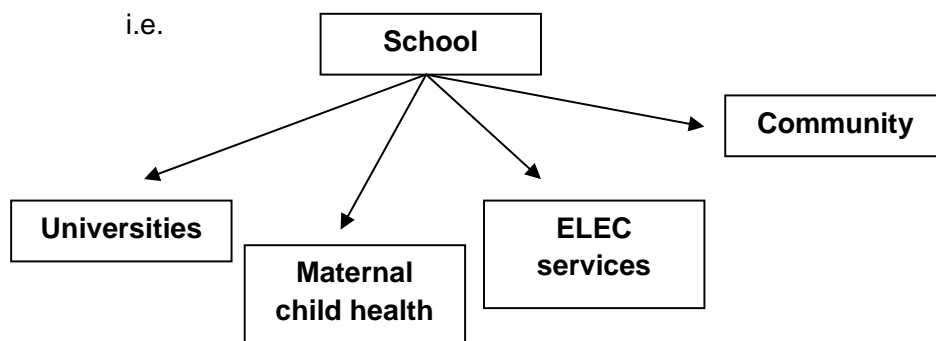
- From the NZ experience, recommendation to monitor initiatives and programs actively
- Introduce outcomes focus
- NZ found that great early years base can be eroded as child progresses through school years

1.11 Lifelong learning

- Look at pathways and transition

2. Priorities:

- Recognise and connect with existing services e.g. Funding for three year old programs
- Decide on appropriate focus
 - Formal care versus family
- Importance of dual generation approach – children and parents (improving life chances)
- Focus on (birth) 0 - 3 years
 - Interventions – approach as required, but quality approach
 - Intensive and comprehensive
 - Continuity and sustainability
- Interface of Early Learning Early Childhood and schools (transition and supports)
 - School as key hub (universal platform) to reach and meet needs
 - Pull together services – place based strategies



- Funding to use AED or postcode information to involve communities
- Evidence-based approach – tight outcomes / loose controls
 - Identify risk factors – unpack
 - What works? e.g. Assess resilience, not identify not only what doesn't work – enabling flexibility
 - Identified framework enables localised responses and community ownership
 - Recognition – grouping risk factors and not address
 - Discrete risk factors – cluster and holistic approach

3. Barriers:

- Holistic systems approach requires whole-of-government response
- e.g. Child well-being
 - > enable change at service level
 - > COAG
 - > State level
- Need for 'good' research

Notes from session ‘Evaluation of Current Services’

This session hosted facilitated discussion regarding the evaluation of current Early Childhood Development services and the evidence base for integrating service delivery for ECD to move forward.

- Nationalised systems
 - Data
 - Evaluation
 - Strategic approach
- } Evidence-based
- Monitoring
 - How good is the data collection?
- EPIA
- ‘Australian’ data needed
 - Create ‘beacon’ programs – quality programs
 - Do we currently have ‘beacon’ programs? – To some extent
 - Identify which ones are ‘beacon’.
 - Research base?
 - Identify relevant research and build on
 - Current program – University of Melbourne – longitudinal study
 - Programs and outputs/outcomes
- Resources necessary
- Involvement of community/parents in service provision?
 - Knowledge and wisdom
 - process of engagement
 - ownership
- Sustainability – How?
 - Identify what works
 - Local/national/international
- Funding – Federal and State
 - Community needs (qualitative data)
- Can learn from **New Zealand experience**

New Zealand experience

- Government strategic plan in place (10 year plan)
 - Sets out clear goals
 - Workforce (qualifications) vital part of plan
 - Evaluation of current services
 - Timeline created to evaluate services and over what period
 - Monitoring
 - Data collected
 - Indicators created
 - Multi method approach
 - Data / monitoring / evaluation
 - Identified gaps
 - Helps to manage and plan
 - NZ Early Childhood Strategy Plan focuses on early childhood learning

How do we keep 'measures' going?

- Broad development
 - Social / emotional – e.g. Do 8 year olds have same needs as 15 year olds?
 - Develop a framework to assist learning?
 - Incorporate 'belonging / autonomy / meaning'
- Collect meaningful data and 'evaluate'
 - Population-based
 - Specific focus
- There is a need for qualitative data – make it happen!
 - Broader Australia view (community) to engage
 - Reason
 - Purpose
 - Is data the way to engage with families and communities?
 - Creating the conversation
 - Studies (longitudinal) studies do exist e.g. ACER
 - Access data now as a first step
- **What do we need?**
 - Knowledge needed
 - Data collection (qualitative)
 - Identify what we aren't doing
- **What do I have available now?**
 - Get to the population
 - Measure what difference has been made to date
 - How do we service society?

} universal

- **Engagement**
 - Communities
 - Parents
 - Children
 - Workforce

 - **Create ‘beacons’ and controlled trials**

 - **What if something works?**
 - Moving forward – “be prepared” **“Action to follow success”**

 - **Does Australia need to accept ‘health’ focus?**
 - Next step for COAG agenda?
 - Randomised trials? (most reliable science)
 - Comparative studies
 - ‘matching’
- = establish policy

Notes from Breakout Session 2:

How do we address the major implementation challenges?

1. Priorities

- Continue measuring
 - Long-term outcomes
- Holistic approach

2. Workforce

- Pedagogical strategies
 - Range of strategies
 - Skills
 - Child-focused
 - Importance of 'the language'
- What are they in ECD
- Transition stages

3. Research

- Identify target audience
- Convey research in appropriate language
- Document the 'stories'

4. Cultural competency

- Mono-cultural } needs to change } Core business
- Mono-lingual } }
- No documentation on engagement on new and emerging communities

NB: Refer DEECD website re. action research for the above

- Needed conversations with each other
 - Australian government business – parent business
- Pedagogy – ECD (must acknowledge range of pedagogies)
- Funding —————>sustainability
 - Accessing funding a challenge
- How do we do things in Australia to engage Australian parents (community)?
 - Different communities
 - Rural /suburban / inner city

5. Where do we start?

- Identify needs
 - Suggested start – metropolitan area with disadvantaged families
 - Listen to community
 - Try out ideas
 - What are the processes to engage?
- We need to.....
 - Support (voices in the community)
 - Positive culture
- Research / evaluation / review
 - Not to be confused
- Refer to current South Australian work in ECD
 - Research connected to national strategy
 - Workforce
 - National/state partnerships
 - MUST be clear re. intentions
- Parental expectations
 - Where do parents fit?
 - Cultural practice
 - Disposition to learning
 - Habits
 - Interaction between home and early childhood learning
 - Attributes of settings
 - ECD programs – different expectations to government?
- How do components of programs provide maximum effect?
 - What produces positive outcomes?
- Health – important for education
 - Linkages to data
 - Health data
 - Linkages with health services and data (to enable intervention)
- Professional development – moves afoot to revisit existing data
 - Analyse, then act – “Stop navel gazing”
- Link projects
- Outcomes framework (results)
 - Take indicators and build
 - Make use of info and create strategy
 - Feedback to community = understanding
- Gaps: e.g. Research in indigenous populations

6. Any other implementation challenges?

- Change management

7. Need

AUSTRALIAN EARLY DEVELOPMENT INDEX

- How do we use the data?
 - Connection to policy
- Health – important!
- Change agents – more needed!
- Pulling together (Workforce issues)
- Maintain focus
- Economic climate – importance of evaluation
 - Value of programs
- Change to social discourse
- Indigenous mortality – research needed
- Voices – need to be heard
- Different models of community practice
- Different funding mixes
- Funding – the right allocation for outcomes
- Social discourse – parenting practice; early childhood
- Sort re. ECD programs – What to keep?
 - Build on what remains
- Research required
 - Workforce
 - Policy
- Collaboration
 - Research / policy / practice
 - Translate to ‘doing’
- Priorities
 - Birth (0) – 3 years old
 - Maternal health —————> moving onwards
 - Linkages —————> community development
- Build support base
- Funding – Get it right!
 - Investment (workforce programs/ ECD programs)
- Leadership – quality of people implementing
 - Early childhood workforce leaders
 - Incentives
- Quality
 - Workforce
 - Curriculum – learning health centres

8. Comment: Dr. Joe Sparling

- Social messaging – social marketing
 - The ‘quality’ Early Childhood Development experience
 - Builds support

9. Wrap up: Peter Dawkins

Joe Sparling spoke about

- The importance of 0 – 3yrs
- The risk factors involved re not addressing needs in the above ages (e.g. Related to mother’s education)
- Need for quality programs

Frank Oberklaid spoke about

- Universal platforms
- Tiered approach
 - Universal —————> target funding
 - Provided evidence

Vicki Rundle spoke about

- Universal access (15 hours access to EC learning)
- Quality – standards
- Targets e.g. Indigenous – antenatal
- Priorities – Implementation
 - Integration
 - Workforce

10. Next steps:

- Value for current investment
- Adequate resources to be provided
 - Federal and state
- Evaluation and research – important!
= rationale (researchers and policy makers)
 - Randomised trials and research required + place based
 - Data collection
 - Strategy
 - Review
- Discourse – social and parenting
- Engaging communities

Joe Sparling commented: Families who have special needs (vulnerable families) can do well.

Frank Oberklaid commented: A challenge is how to make the ‘middle tier’ work. Must be proactive.