

# Lessons from Coaching in the VEYLDF

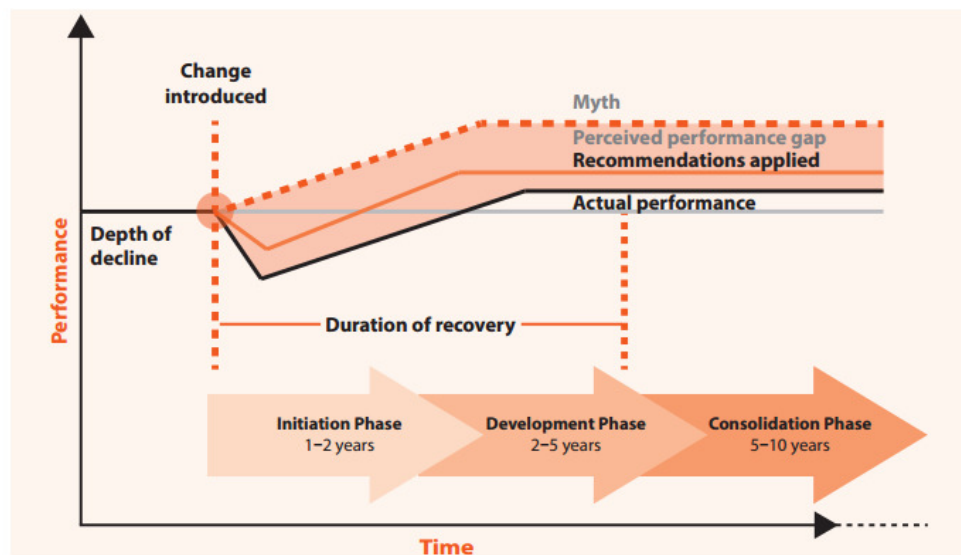
Response to the Evaluation of the  
Victorian Framework Coaching  
Program 2011-2013

## Introduction

### Context

In recent years the Victorian education and care sector has undergone rapid and significant change in response to the growing body of international evidence about the importance of the early years of a child's life. The National Quality Agenda brought the introduction of new early learning frameworks including the national Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF, 2009), and the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework for All Children from Birth to Eight Years (VEYLDF, 2009), as well as the National Law for Early Childhood Education and Care 2012.

It is important to note this context when considering early childhood services' progress in implementing new initiatives. Like any organisation, early childhood services move through various stages in response to change. Pendergast's Educational Change Model (Pendergast et al., 2005; Pendergast, 2006) defines these stages as 'Initiation', 'Development', and 'Consolidation'. According to Pendergast, most services will experience an 'implementation dip' in their practice or their self-efficacy while they come to terms with change and learn a new way of working. The depth of the 'dip' can be mitigated if the right supports are in place, as shown in the diagram below.



Educational Change Model mapped against a typical reform curve

Source: Pendergast et al., *Evaluation of the Implementation of the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework: For All Children from Birth to Eight Years Final Report*, Melbourne: Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2012, 6  
[www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Documents/earlyyears/EvaluationOfImplementationOfVELDF-FinalReport.pdf](http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Documents/earlyyears/EvaluationOfImplementationOfVELDF-FinalReport.pdf)

The evaluation report on implementation of the VEYLDF (Garvis, et al., 2012) reinforced that many Victorian early childhood services were at the 'initiation stage' in terms of their engagement with the VEYLDF and capacity to embed it into practice. The report recommended the continuation of a suite of professional learning initiatives that included coaching. The report also suggested that several key factors could support successful implementation of a new reform for services and mitigate the 'implementation dip':

- continuity of 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.

In Pendergast's model, the Initiation Phase (and the 'implementation dip') takes 1-2 years, and the Development Phase can last from year 2 to year 5 before the new practices begin to be consolidated. Accordingly, services reflecting on their progress in embedding the VEYLDF into practice should consider it as a long-term prospect that requires continued effort, enthusiasm, and a commitment to continuous improvement.

## Victorian Framework Coaching Program 2011-2013

The Coaching Program was initially piloted by the Department, in partnership with Gowrie Victoria in 2010-2011 with a cohort of 92 services, a review of which indicated the program was successful in supporting services to engage with the VEYLDF. In 2011 the Department engaged Gowrie Victoria to deliver the Coaching Program to another cohort of 54 services, concluding in 2013. Services were selected to be invited to submit an expression of interest for the program co-signed by the approved provider. The services invited were those identified as at 'initiation phase' of engagement with the VEYLDF using National Childcare Accreditation Council data and regulatory information and local regional knowledge. Considerations included: demonstrated need for intensive support in implementing an approved learning framework, willingness to engage in a quality improvement exercise using a coach, and current involvement in professional learning programs/interventions.

The Coaching Program 2011-2013 was specifically designed to support services at initiation stage, including those that may not have yet engaged with the VEYLDF. It was intended to facilitate engagement with the VEYLDF and create a culture of reflective practice that would continue beyond the life of the program. To do this, it also attempted to address foundational operational, governance and leadership conditions necessary for services to effectively engage in a program focussed on educational program and practice. The program, which was initially piloted in 2010-2011, was revised to include a consultancy component, comprising two extra days of tailored support at the beginning of the program, intended to:

- build leadership capacity and a governance platform on which to build a quality service
- develop/revise the service Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) and support its implementation.

Based on their observations the consultants were to recommend services for progression to the coaching component of the program, where service conditions were suitable. Consultants recommended that all services progress to coaching.

## Evaluation of the Coaching Program

The Department and Gowrie Victoria commissioned independent evaluator Dr Delwyn Goodrick to evaluate the 2011-2013 Coaching Program to determine its effectiveness in achieving the stated outcomes. The guiding question for the evaluation was: 'How, if at all, did the Coaching Program support services to embed the VEYLDF into practice?'

The full report can be found on the Department's website at:

[www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/edcare/Pages/veylfproflearn.aspx](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/edcare/Pages/veylfproflearn.aspx)

The results of the evaluation of the Victorian Framework Coaching Program indicated that participants valued the program, and that the program was found to be effective in increasing the visibility of the VEYLDF and its implications for practice. The report also stated that the coaching program worked most effectively with services that were highly engaged, had strong leadership supportive of the VEYLDF, and experienced few operational and service level barriers that would inhibit practice change.

Below is a response from the Department against each of the report's recommendations. The Department is committed to working with early childhood professionals, services, families and the community to improve learning and development outcomes for children through evidence-based policy and practice. The findings of the evaluation report will inform policy and planning for quality improvement in both the Department and Gowrie Victoria. We also commend the report to other organisations and professionals engaged in practice improvement at all levels in the early childhood education and care sector.

The Department would like to thank Helen Lawrence, Julie Barron, Melodie Davies and the coaches and consultants of Gowrie Victoria for their contribution to this project. We also thank the early childhood services and professionals who participated in the evaluation and contributed their feedback, and Dr Delwyn Goodrick, who conducted the evaluation.

## Evaluation Recommendations and Actions

Recommendation	DEECD Response
Design and scope of interventions	
<p>That criteria for selection of services that may benefit from coaching be more tightly specified to maximise the return on investment.</p> <p>Diagnostic criteria may include evidence of existing leadership and good governance. Other interventions may be more appropriate for services experiencing significant operational or structural barriers.</p>	<p>The evaluation found that “the coaching program worked most effectively with services that were highly engaged, had strong leadership supportive of the VEYLDF, and experienced few operational and service level barriers that would inhibit practice change.” Service level barriers identified in the report included high staff turnover, low educator morale, low levels of engagement or commitment, and group dynamics or educational leadership within the service that inhibited practice change.</p> <p>In response to this recommendation, the Department has developed a self-assessment rubric using elements from the National Quality Standards that relate most closely to the enablers and barriers identified in the report (Attachment 1). Services considering hiring a coach can use the rubric to determine their readiness for coaching in the VEYLDF and to assist them to get the maximum benefit from the services of a coach.</p> <p>The National Quality Framework Quality Assessment and Rating process is hugely valuable for assisting early childhood services to better understand which areas they perform well in, and which require focussed attention. As part of their Quality Improvement Plan, services can self-assess their progress against the standards and elements, and use that assessment to determine what additional resources to seek, such as the services of a coach or other professional learning.</p>
<p>That coaching interventions be tailored to the different needs and requirements of services. Shorter, more intensive periods of coaching may be warranted to support specified actions agreed by the educational team and to maintain the momentum of change in some service contexts.</p>	<p>Services planning to engage a coach should discuss the most appropriate frequency and intensity of coaching as a team and with their coach.</p>
<p>That professional learning opportunities be extended to educational leaders to enhance pedagogical skills and enhance leadership skills within the service. Enhancing educational leaders’ skill base will potentially strengthen the sustainability of support interventions across the service.</p>	<p>Supportive and effective leadership in early childhood services is critical for services to align their practice with the VEYLDF. The evaluation suggests that focussing on agents of change within the sector may be the most efficient and effective way of encouraging practice improvement across the sector. Professional learning programs are available to educational leaders through the Bastow Institute of Educational Leadership. For further information go to: <a href="http://www.bastow.vic.edu.au">www.bastow.vic.edu.au</a></p>
Strengthening Educator Outcomes	
<p>That further opportunities (such as use of social media or educator service visits) be</p>	<p>Encouraging partnerships with professionals and collaboration is an important principle of the VEYLDF and underpins the</p>

Recommendation	DEECD Response
<p>promoted to support services to network and cross-pollinate ideas, strategies and experiences. These opportunities could be explicitly linked with and reinforce existing print form or online resources that support educators' professional practice.</p>	<p>professional learning resources and programs delivered in the implementation of the VEYLDF.</p> <p>In partnership with the Department, the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority has studied models of collaborative learning with multidisciplinary networks of early childhood professionals. Two practitioner research studies are available on the VCAA website: <i>Report on the Assessment for Learning and Development Project 2012: Transforming Practice in the Early Years</i>, and <i>Shining a Light on Children's Learning: Report on the Outcomes Project 2010-2011</i>. Their conclusions might prove useful for early childhood professionals exploring the VEYLDF through collaborative networks.</p> <p>The findings of a third project: <i>Inquiry to Implementation (IIP) 2013</i> (due September 2014) provide guidance on setting up collaborative networks for cross-pollinating ideas, strategies and experiences.</p>
<p>That coaching be supplemented by provision of structured materials or resource books that can be used for record keeping and maintained after program conclusion to promote sustainability.</p>	<p>To keep records of progress the Department recommends educators in early childhood settings use their service quality improvement plan required under the National Quality Framework, as a 'living' record of their professional learning and a tool for tracking continuous improvement.</p> <p>Numerous resources for professionals to continue their professional learning in the VEYLDF are available at <a href="http://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/edcare/pages/veyladf.aspx">www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/edcare/pages/veyladf.aspx</a></p> <p>Resources include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence Papers on the Practice Principles</li> <li>• Practice Guides to the Practice Principles</li> <li>• VEYLDF Online Modules</li> </ul>
<p>Monitoring and Evaluating Coaching Interventions</p>	
<p>That a tool or series of tools be developed to enable a more robust and trackable evidence base of educator level or service level change. Ideally, this tool would enable both numerical and narrative comparison of service status and change relevant to service improvement over time.</p>	<p>As more services undergo the National Quality Standard assessment and rating process more data will be available to monitor practice change in early childhood services over time. The assessment and rating system provides a robust and detailed indication of service quality across the seven quality areas.</p> <p>Other validated tools for assessing service quality include the <i>Reflect Respect Relate: Assessment for Learning and Development in the Early Years Using Observation Scales</i>, the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS-R) and the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS).</p>

## Conclusion

Under the right conditions, coaching can be an effective catalyst and support for embedding the VEYLDF in practice. The effectiveness of coaching in the VEYLDF depends on a number of conditions, including:

- the willing engagement of all members of a service team at all levels,
- supportive leadership,
- sound operational and governance practices, or 'organisational maturity'.

Embedding any new practice takes time, enthusiasm, collective effort and persistence. Self-assessment against the National Quality Standards and Elements is a useful way for services to identify where to focus quality improvement efforts, and what resources might be helpful. If you are considering engaging a coach to support your service to put the VEYLDF into practice, read on for a suggested approach to getting the best out of a coach's services and links to helpful resources.

## References

Pendergast, D. et al., *Evaluation of the Implementation of the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework: For All Children from Birth to Eight Years Final Report*, Melbourne: Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2012.

Goodrick, D., *Evaluation of the Victorian Framework Coaching Program 2011-2013*, Melbourne, Victoria: Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2014.

Pendergast, D. et al., *Developing lifelong learners in the middle years of schooling: A report about the practices, process, strategies and structures that best promote 'lifelong learning' and the development of 'lifelong learners' in the middle years of schooling*, Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, Brisbane, 2005.

Pendergast, D., 'Fast-tracking middle schooling reform: A model for sustainability', *Australian Journal of Middle Schooling*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2006, pp. 13–18.

# Readiness for Coaching

## Organisational Maturity and the National Quality Standard

In response to the Coaching Program evaluation report recommendation that “*criteria for the selection of services that will engage in a coaching program be clearly specified to ensure that base conditions support program success*”, this document proposes an approach for services to use to determine their readiness to use a coach to support their engagement with the VEYLDF.

The report on the Evaluation of the Victorian Framework Coaching Program suggested that services in which coaching was successful had usually reached a certain organisational development maturity level. This organisational maturity was characterised by strong educational leadership, engaged educators and few operational and service level barriers that would inhibit practice change. On the other hand, a range of issues were identified in the report as inhibiting proper implementation of coaching and were signalled as “service barriers”. These barriers can be grouped under four variables that are commonly used in assessing an organisation’s maturity level: goals and objectives, culture, process and governance.

### Goals and Objectives

A service philosophy that was not regularly reviewed and did not reflect an approved learning framework

### Culture

Irregularity of staff meetings.

Poor staff dynamics (for example, evidence of poor communication, low morale among educators)

### Process

Staff and leadership turnover, which contributed to instability and disruption for children and educator

A service philosophy that was not regularly reviewed and did not reflect an approved learning framework.

### Governance

Poor staff dynamics (for example, evidence of poor communication, low morale among educators)

Inconsistency in support for professional development from service leaders and/or management

Inconsistency in discussion or development of Quality Improvement Plans

Poor knowledge of the VEYLDF

Inconsistency in discussion or development of Quality Improvement Plans

These variables align well with several elements in the National Quality Standards as listed below.

### Goals and Objectives

7.2.1 A statement of philosophy is developed and guides all aspects of the service’s operations.

## **Culture**

4.2.2 Educators, co-ordinators and staff members work collaboratively and affirm, challenge, support and learn from each other to further develop their skills, to improve practice and relationships.

4.2.3 Interactions convey mutual respect, equity and recognition of each other's strengths and skills.

## **Process**

7.1.3 Every effort is made to promote continuity of educators and co-ordinators at the service.

7.3.5 Service practices are based on effectively documented policies and procedures that are available at the service and reviewed regularly.

## **Governance**

7.2.2 The performance of educators, co-ordinators and staff members is evaluated and individual development plans are in place to support performance improvement.

7.2.3 An effective self-assessment and quality improvement process is in place

Examining their performance against these elements of the NQS could provide early childhood services with a proxy of their organisational maturity level. Services interested in engaging a coach to work specifically on embedding the VEYLDF in practice can use their performance in these elements to determine their readiness for coaching, and to plan what other improvement strategies to put in place in order to get the maximum benefit from a coach.

The rubric below is a self-assessment tool to provide early childhood professionals with an indication of their service's organisational maturity in order to assist with planning professional learning and quality improvement strategies. Remember that planning processes like this are best done together through open and collaborative discussions. For more on team reflection and partnerships, take a look at the VEYLDF Practice Guides for Reflective Practice and Partnerships with Professionals at:

[www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/edcare/Pages/profresource.aspx](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/edcare/Pages/profresource.aspx)

It is also important to remember when using the self-assessment rubric that all the elements in the NQS are interdependent, and are all required for a well functioning, high quality service. The elements selected below are provided as possible indicators of organisational maturity to support early childhood professionals to determine their service's readiness for coaching on the VEYLDF.



## Getting the best from Coaching in the VEYLDF: A Self-Assessment Rubric

For each of the following elements, identify which of the three categories (A-B-C) best represents your service. Tick one of the white boxes for each line.

NQS Elements that correspond to the best conditions for effectively using a coach in the VEYLDF	Suggested Self-Assessment rubric for services		
	A	B	C
7.2.1 A statement of philosophy is developed and guides all aspects of the service's operations.	<p>There is a written statement of philosophy that outlines the principles under which the service operates. This statement:</p> <p>a) effectively guides practices, and b) is available for the community to consult, and c) is known and understood by educators.</p> <input type="checkbox"/>	<p>There is a written statement of philosophy that outlines the principles under which the service operates, but this statement either:</p> <p>a) is not effectively guiding practice, or b) is not available for the community, or c) is not known and understood by educators.</p> <input type="checkbox"/>	<p>There is no written statement of philosophy that outlines the principles under which the service operates.</p> <input type="checkbox"/>
4.2.2 Educators, co-ordinators and staff members work collaboratively and affirm, challenge, support and learn from each other to further develop their skills, to improve practice and relationships.	<p>There is clear evidence of staff members working together cooperatively towards common goals and:</p> <p>a) joint planning is usual, and b) there are regular team meetings, and c) staff share tasks and responsibilities, and d) staff usually offer assistance to each other.</p> <input type="checkbox"/>	<p>There is some evidence of staff members working together cooperatively towards common goals, but one of the following statements is true:</p> <p>a) joint planning is unusual, or b) there are no regular meetings, or c) staff do not share tasks and responsibilities, or d) staff don't offer assistance to each other.</p> <input type="checkbox"/>	<p>There is no evidence of staff members working together or Although there is some evidence of collaboration, two or more of the following are true: a) joint planning is unusual, or b) there are no regular meetings, or c) staff don't share tasks and responsibilities, or d) staff don't usually offer assistance to each other.</p> <input type="checkbox"/>
4.2.3 Interactions convey mutual respect, equity and recognition of each other's strengths and skills.	<p>Educators, co-ordinators and staff members respect and value the diverse contributions and perspectives of their colleagues and this is evident in their interactions with each other.</p> <input type="checkbox"/>	<p>There is no evidence of interactions being disrespectful or unfair but there is no evidence of educators, co-ordinators and staff members being respectful and valuing the contributions and perspectives of their colleagues.</p> <input type="checkbox"/>	<p>There is evidence of unfair treatment between staff members or There is evidence of disrespectful behaviour between educators, co-ordinators and staff members.</p> <input type="checkbox"/>

7.1.3 Every effort is made to promote continuity of educators and co-ordinators at the service.	The service values and proactively supports continuity of members and develops strategies to retain staff which results in low staff turnover. <input type="checkbox"/>	The service values continuity but has no strategies in place to retain staff, which results in turnover. <input type="checkbox"/>	The service does not seem to value continuity and there is high turnover among staff. <input type="checkbox"/>
7.3.5 Service practices are based on effectively documented policies and procedures that are available at the service and reviewed regularly.	Service practices are always developed in accordance with well-documented and clear policies and procedures. These policies are a) known and followed by service staff, and b) are accessible for families, and c) are reviewed collectively on a regular basis. <input type="checkbox"/>	There are well documented and clear policies and procedures, but they are a) not regularly followed by service staff, or b) not accessible for families and staff, or c) not reviewed collectively on a regular basis. <input type="checkbox"/>	There are no well documented policies and procedures. <input type="checkbox"/>
7.1 Effective leadership promotes a positive organisational culture and builds a professional learning community.	Leadership in the service actively fosters an organisational culture that results in a professional workplace in which all staff: a) can communicate openly, b) participate in respectful debate, and c) take steps to further their professional learning. <input type="checkbox"/>	Leadership in the service actively fosters an organisational culture that results in a professional workplace, but a) staff cannot communicate openly or b) there is no possibility of engaging in respectful debate, or c) no attention is given to professional learning <input type="checkbox"/>	Leadership is either inexistent or fails to achieve a positive organisational culture. <input type="checkbox"/>
7.2.2 The performance of educators, co-ordinators and staff members is evaluated and individual development plans are in place to support performance improvement.	Performance reviews for all educators, co-ordinators and staff members are conducted regularly and include a process for reviewing and updating professional development plans based on an evaluation of individual staff member professional strengths, interests and goals. <input type="checkbox"/>	Performance reviews for all educators, co-ordinators and staff members are conducted regularly but do not include a process for reviewing and updating professional development plans. <input type="checkbox"/>	Performance reviews are not regular, or not developed for all staff, or No performance reviews are developed in the service. <input type="checkbox"/>
7.2.3 An effective self-assessment and quality improvement process is in place.	The service regularly monitors and reviews their performance to guide their planning and this monitoring considers informed judgment about performance against the National Quality Standard and includes a review of outcomes for children against an approved learning framework. <input type="checkbox"/>	The service regularly monitors and reviews their performance to guide their planning but it either does not consider the National Quality Standard as a reference or does not include a review of children's outcomes against an approved framework. <input type="checkbox"/>	The service is not monitoring and reviewing their performance, or The monitoring and review process is not done on a regular basis. <input type="checkbox"/>

## How to interpret your results:

Count the number of As, Bs and Cs. If your service obtained:

A majority of elements in the A category and no element in the C category	You are ready to engage in coaching in the VEYLDF or other approved learning framework.
A majority of elements in the A category and one or more C, Or A majority of B	Before engaging a coach to focus on the VEYLDF, work with your team to plan what practices to start or change in order to improve in those areas in which you scored a C. Use the description in the A column as a guide. Consider what other resources – e.g. professional learning or otherwise – might support you. Work towards meeting in full elements in which you obtained a B to get the most benefit from coaching in the VEYLDF.
If your service obtained mostly C	You need to address the issues in which you obtained C scores before engaging in coaching in the VEYLDF. Use your service Quality Improvement Plan as the basis for team discussion, planning and review. You may wish to use the descriptions in column A to identify what success would look like. Consider what professional learning might be useful to support your service to improve in these areas.

## Choosing a coach

In choosing a coach, consider the strengths and interests of your educators and service as a whole. Together with your team, identify the areas your service will work on with a coach. The evaluation of the coaching program identified the relationship between coach and educators as critical to the effectiveness of the coaching. Consider what kind of a coach would be best fit for your service and what characteristics they would have.

With your team, you may wish to develop selection criteria and shortlist several coaches to interview to find the right coach for your service.