KidsMatter Early Childhood
Connecting with the Early Childhood Education and Care National Quality Framework
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There is concerted agreement that the early years of a child’s life represent a vital period of growth, development and learning and that the quality of experiences in these years has a powerful impact—positively or negatively—on the individual’s long-term wellbeing and success (McCain & Mustard, 1999). Governments around the world have been convinced that investing in support for the families of young children and in high-quality education and care, brings substantial benefits for the individual and for society (Gallinsky, 2006).

A number of initiatives currently underway in Australia focus on improving early childhood education and care with these benefits in mind.

In July 2009, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) endorsed Australia’s first ever overarching national strategy for early childhood development. Investing in the Early Years: A National Early Childhood Development Strategy...outlines a shared vision...that by 2020...all children have the best start in life to create a better future for themselves and for the nation’ (COAG Early Childhood Development Steering Committee, 2009, p. 2).

A National Quality Framework for early childhood education and care was endorsed by COAG in December 2009 as a key mechanism for achieving the Strategy’s vision for young children in Australia. The National Quality Framework includes a National Quality Standard (NQS) and an Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) designed to raise quality in settings catering for young children.

KidsMatter Early Childhood has a potentially significant part to play in the national mission to enhance early childhood provision.

KidsMatter Early Childhood provides a continuous improvement framework to enable early childhood services to plan and implement evidence-based mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention strategies. The framework is based on a positive psychology philosophy and uses a risk and protective factor model to focus on areas where early childhood services can strengthen protective factors for improving children’s mental health and minimise the effects of any risk factors.

Nationally, we have a golden opportunity to strengthen connections between these initiatives for strategic efficiency and improved outcomes for children and families.

Purpose

This document aims to make explicit the connections between the KidsMatter Early Childhood Initiative and the National Quality Standard (NQS), which has the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) embedded within it.


Both of these agreements are based on research which affirms that children’s early social and emotional wellbeing underpins learning and life outcomes:

What, how and how much (children) learn at school will depend in large part on the social and emotional competence they have developed as preschoolers (The Child Mental Health Foundations and Agencies Network, 1999, Preface v).

The single best predictor of adult adaptation is not school grades, and not classroom behaviour, but rather the adequacy with which the child gets along with other children. Children...who cannot establish a place for themselves in the peer culture are seriously at risk (Hartup, 1992, p. 1, cited in Linke, 2011, p. 14).
KidsMatter Early Childhood has four components under which early childhood education and care services receive professional learning and resources which guide their planning for children’s mental health:

- Creating a sense of community
- Developing social and emotional skills
- Working with parents and carers
- Helping children who are experiencing mental health difficulties.

KidsMatter Early Childhood and the NQS, including the EYLF, have much in common. They both have ‘relationships’ at their core and aim to develop children’s social and emotional wellbeing and competence:

- KidsMatter specifically aims to develop children’s social and emotional skills; the EYLF acknowledges that social and emotional health and cognitive growth go hand in hand; and the emphasis in the NQS on relationships with children takes up the issues of social and emotional health strongly.

KidsMatter Early Childhood adds substantial value to the other initiatives because it provides a framework for explicitly teaching social and emotional skills and the knowledge, training and support that early childhood educators and families require so that they can intervene in a timely and appropriate way to enhance children’s mental health and social adjustment.

Data shows that children who are systematically taught social and emotional skills...have fewer problems such as substance abuse and violence, like school more and pay more attention in class—and score significantly better (11% on average) on academic achievement test scores (Goleman, 2008, p. 1).

This document maps the elements of the KidsMatter initiative onto the NQS, including the EYLF. It demonstrates that the KidsMatter initiative has considerable potential to enable early childhood services to implement key elements of the NQS and to achieve National Quality Standard level. The analysis of connections between the initiatives includes aspects of philosophical agreement and areas of direct congruence between goals and educators’ actions.
Supporting the National Quality Framework

**KidsMatter Early Childhood**
*Australian Early Childhood Mental Health Initiative*

- Creating a sense of community
- Developing children’s social and emotional skills
- Working with parents and carers
- Helping children who are experiencing mental health difficulties

**Early Years Learning Framework**
*Belonging, Being and Becoming*

**Learning Outcomes**
- Children have a strong sense of identity
- Children are connected with and contribute to their world
- Children have a strong sense of wellbeing
- Children are confident and involved learners
- Children are effective communicators

**National Quality Standards**

- Educational program and practice
- Children’s health and safety
  - Physical environment
  - Staffing arrangements
- Relationships with children
- Collaborative partnerships with families and communities
- Leadership and service management
Creating a sense of community with KMEC

When an early childhood education and care service participates in KidsMatter Early Childhood (KMEC), they review their practice and plan for the future under the four components that have been identified to benefit children’s mental health.

In creating a sense of community under the KMEC framework, Smithdown Child Care Centre reviewed the four Target Areas of Belonging and connectedness, Positive relationships, Inclusion and Collaboration. The service staff identified what they already did well under each Target Area, and areas where they would like to do more.

For example, Smithdown Child Care Centre already invited new families to visit the service and attend an interview before they started, but during a planning session it was decided to try to begin even earlier, before families placed their name on the waiting list. They began inviting families to visit with the child and talk about their needs and the needs of the child, before placing their name on the waiting list. This gave the family the opportunity to view the environment, see other children ‘in action’ and ask questions. While on the waiting list, families would also be invited to centre functions.

Smithdown Child Care Centre was happy with its transition process. Once a family had a place, an interview would occur. The child would also come along to give educators an opportunity to observe the child in the setting and decide how to best manage the transition. Where possible, this would occur over several days so the family and child could become orientated within the centre before starting. During the transition into the early childhood service, shorter days would be encouraged in negotiation with families and a special item from home welcomed, to assist the child in feeling safe. There are several copies of a centre book with photos that families can borrow to share together.

The Director of Smithdown Child Care Centre wanted to extend this even further. An educator would be dedicated to each child and they would take responsibility for communicating the child’s progress to the family. Shifts would need to be changed to ensure the designated educator was there to greet the new child and family at the start of their enrolment. This would also help to maintain and build on their current practice, where information between families and educators was exchanged daily. Photos were taken and sent home to make connections.

The new strategies were implemented with new families and reviewed to see how effective they were in terms of the impact they had on the service’s sense of community.

In reflecting on their practice in these areas, the educators identified that they were also addressing many of the elements of the EYLF and National Quality Standard, particularly those related to children’s feelings of belonging and relationships with families.
Component 1 focuses on ‘creating a sense of community’.

The Target Areas of Component 1 connect with the overarching concepts of the EYLF—belonging, being and becoming—and with three of the key Principles which underpin effective pedagogy and practice in early childhood education and care—relationships, respect for diversity and partnerships.

Implementing KidsMatter supports children’s learning and development across all five EYLF Learning Outcomes and Component 1 links most strongly with EYLF Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity.

The KidsMatter approach overall and especially Component 1 are philosophically consistent with the six guiding principles that apply to all seven areas of the National Quality Standard.

Component 1 contributes particularly to the NQS Quality Area 1: Educational program and practice. It is also very relevant to NQS Quality Area 5: Relationships with children.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>KidsMatter Early Childhood</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Component 1: Creating a sense of community</strong></td>
<td><strong>EYLF overarching concepts:</strong></td>
<td><strong>NQS guiding principles:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Key Target Areas:</strong></td>
<td>Belonging—to family, culture and community is central to a strong sense of identity. Identity is built on relationships and shapes what children can become.</td>
<td>• The rights of the child are paramount</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Belonging and connectedness:</strong></td>
<td>Being—is about children enjoying the present, knowing themselves and meeting challenges.</td>
<td>• Children are successful, competent and capable learners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The early childhood service is welcoming, friendly and supportive of children, families and staff.</td>
<td>Becoming—is about how children’s identities, knowledge, capacities and skills change rapidly and significantly in the early years.</td>
<td>• Equity, inclusion and diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inclusion:</strong></td>
<td><strong>EYLF Principles:</strong></td>
<td>• Valuing Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures</td>
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<tr>
<td>The early childhood service addresses inclusion at a service level to help children, families and staff to feel valued across all areas of diversity.</td>
<td>Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships:</td>
<td>• The role of parents and families is respected and supported.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Positive relationships:</strong></td>
<td>‘Educators who are attuned to children’s thoughts and feelings, support the development of a strong sense of wellbeing’ (p. 12).</td>
<td>Quality Area 1: Educational program and practice</td>
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</table>
| Secure, responsive and respectful relationships are encouraged between staff and children; staff and families; staff; and staff and other professionals. | ‘The educational program and practice is stimulating, engaging and enhances children’s learning and development’ (NQS Draft, December 2009 p.12). | ""
### KidsMatter Early Childhood Early Years Learning Framework

**Respect for diversity:**

‘Respecting diversity means within the curriculum valuing and reflecting the practices, values and beliefs of families’ (p. 13).

**Partnerships:**

Educators’ create a welcoming environment where all children and families are respected and actively encouraged to collaborate...about curriculum decisions...

**Learning Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity**

1.1 Children feel safe, secure and supported.
1.2 Children develop their emerging autonomy, interdependence, resilience and sense of agency.
1.3 Children develop knowledgeable and confident self identities.
1.4 Children learn to interact in relation to others with care, empathy and respect.

### National Quality Standard Elements

**Standards and elements:**

1.1 The *Early Years Learning Framework* (or other approved learning framework) informs the development of a program for each child that enhances their learning and development.

1.1.2 Curriculum decision-making is informed by the context, setting and cultural diversity of the families and the community.

1.2 The program for each child takes into account their strengths, capabilities, culture, interests and experiences.

1.2.1 Each child’s current knowledge, ideas, culture and interests form the foundation for the program.

**Quality Area 5: Relationships with children**

‘Relationships that are responsive, respectful and promote children’s sense of security and belonging free them to explore the environment and engage in learning’ (NQS Draft, December, 2009 p. 25).

**Standards and elements:**

5.1 Respectful and equitable relationships are developed and maintained with each child.

5.2 Each child is supported to build and maintain sensitive and responsive relationships with other children and adults.

5.3 Each child’s behaviour, interactions and relationships are guided effectively.
Component 2 focuses on ‘developing children’s social and emotional skills’.

The evidence for the importance of social and emotional learning is overwhelming.

*Emotional skills are about learning to manage and express feelings appropriately. Social skills are about relating to others.*

*Without social and emotional skills children cannot learn as effectively and cannot make the most of their learning.*

[These skills]…need to be taught in a planned way as well as through modelling and capitalising on teaching opportunities (Linke, 2011, p. 15).

KidsMatter Component 2 complements two key Principles of the EYLF—relationships and reflective practice—and two EYLF Practices—responsiveness to children and intentional teaching. Component 2 has clear links with EYLF Learning Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing; with Learning Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world; and with Outcome 1.4: Children learn to interact in relation to others with care, empathy and respect. As educators plan and interact to enhance children’s social and emotional skills, they are building children’s capacity to become ‘Confident and involved learners’ (Outcome 4).

Working with Component 2 of KidsMatter contributes particularly to achieving the Standard level in NQS Quality Area 2: Children’s health and safety, to Quality Area 3: Physical environment and to Quality Area 5: Relationships with children.

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| Component 2: Developing children’s social and emotional skills | **EYLF Principles:**  
Secure, respectful and responsive relationships:  
(as per Component 1)  
Ongoing learning and reflective practice:  
‘Educators continually seek ways to build their professional knowledge and develop learning communities’ (p. 13).  
**EYLF Practices:**  
Responsiveness to children:  
‘Educators are responsive to all children’s strengths, abilities and interests’ (p. 14). ‘Responsive learning relationships are strengthened as educators and children learn together and share decisions, respect and trust’ (p. 15). | **NQS Quality Area 2:**  
Children’s health and safety Standards and elements:  
2.1 Each child’s health needs are supported.  
2.1.2 Each child’s comfort is provided for and there are appropriate opportunities to meet each child’s need for sleep, rest and relaxation.  
2.2 Healthy eating and physical activity are embedded in the program for children.  
2.2.2 Physical activity is promoted through planned and spontaneous experiences and is appropriate to the age of the child.  
2.3 Each child is protected.  
2.3.4 Action is taken to respond to every child at risk of abuse and/or neglect. |
| **Key Target Areas:**  
Relationships between children and staff:  
Warm, responsive and trusting relationships between children and staff provide a foundation that allows children to learn and develop social and emotional skills. | | |
| Children’s social and emotional skill development opportunities:  
The service provides opportunities for children to develop and practise social and emotional skills in their daily interactions with staff and peers. | | |
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| **Staff development and support:**  
Staff knowledge, skills and capacity to foster children’s developing social and emotional skills are enhanced at the service. | **Intentional teaching:**  
‘Educators who engage in intentional teaching recognise that learning occurs in social contexts and that interactions and conversations are vitally important for learning’ (p. 15). | **NQS Quality Area 3:**  
**Physical environment**  
**Standards and elements:**  
3.1 The design and location of the premises is appropriate for the operation of the service.  
3.1.3 Outdoor spaces include natural elements and materials which allow multiple uses.  
3.2 The environment is inclusive, promotes competence, independent exploration and learning through play. |
| **Learning environments:**  
‘Environments that support learning are vibrant and flexible spaces that are responsive to the interests and abilities of each child’ (p. 15). | **Learning Outcome 1:**  
**Children have a strong sense of identity**  
1.4 Children learn to interact in relation to others with care, empathy and respect. | **Quality Area 5:**  
**Relationships with children**  
**Standards and elements:**  
5.1 Respectful and equitable relationships are developed and maintained with each child.  
5.2 Each child is supported to build and maintain sensitive and responsive relationships with other children and adults.  
5.3 Each child’s behaviour, interactions and relationships are guided effectively. |
| **Learning Outcome 2:**  
**Children are connected with and contribute to their world**  
2.2 Children develop a sense of belonging to groups and communities and an understanding of the reciprocal rights and responsibilities necessary for active community participation.  
2.4 Children become socially responsible and show respect for the environment. | | |
| **Learning Outcome 3:**  
**Children have a strong sense of wellbeing**  
3.1 Children become strong in their social and emotional wellbeing’.  
3.2 Children take increasing responsibility for their own health and physical wellbeing. | | |
| **Learning Outcome 4:**  
**Children are confident and involved learners** | | |
Component 3 focuses on ‘working with parents and carers’.

KidsMatter, the EYLF and the NQS all recognise that children live in an ecological system and thrive best when all elements in the system—particularly all of the adults who care for them—act in concert to maximise their welfare.

KidsMatter Component 3 relates particularly to the EYLF Principle of ‘partnerships’, to the Practice of ‘cultural competence’ and to Learning Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world. This connection to Outcome 2 recognises that children learn about trust, empathy and compassion through seeing the adults around them model, demonstrate and live those ways of being together. It acknowledges that collaborative partnerships between educators, related professionals and families are essential for children’s wellbeing and learning achievement.

Working with parents and carers requires time and effort and KidsMatter offers the support that educators need to develop their skills, confidence and commitment to building partnerships with parents and carers.

Component 3 is particularly relevant to meeting the NQS Standard in Quality Area 6: Collaborative partnerships with families and communities.

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<tr>
<td><strong>Component 3: Working with parents and carers</strong></td>
<td><strong>EYLF Principles:</strong> <strong>Partnerships:</strong></td>
<td><strong>NQS Quality Area 6: Collaborative partnerships with families and communities</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Key Target Areas:</strong></td>
<td>In genuine partnerships, families and early childhood educators:</td>
<td><strong>Standards and elements:</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Collaborative partnerships with families:</strong></td>
<td>• value each other’s knowledge of each child</td>
<td>6.1 Respectful supportive relationships with families are developed and maintained.</td>
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<td>Developing a culture of partnership between staff and parents and carers.</td>
<td>• value each other’s contributions to and roles in each child’s life</td>
<td>6.2 Families are supported in their parenting role and their values and beliefs about child rearing are respected.</td>
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<td><strong>Connecting families:</strong></td>
<td>• trust each other</td>
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<td>Supporting families to connect with each other and with the service.</td>
<td>• communicate freely and respectfully with each other</td>
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<td><strong>Supporting parenting:</strong></td>
<td>• share insights and perspectives about each child</td>
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<tr>
<td>Working with families to facilitate access to high-quality parenting resources.</td>
<td>• engage in shared decision-making.</td>
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<td><strong>EYLF Practices:</strong> <strong>Cultural competence:</strong></td>
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<td>'Cultural competence...is the ability to understand, communicate with, and effectively interact with people across cultures’ (p. 16).</td>
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<td>Learning Outcome 2:</td>
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<td>Children are connected</td>
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<td>with and contribute to</td>
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<td>their world</td>
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<td>2.1 Children develop a</td>
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<td>sense of belonging to</td>
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<td>groups and communities.</td>
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<td>2.2 Children respond to</td>
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<td>diversity with respect.</td>
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**Component 4 focuses on ‘helping children who are experiencing mental health difficulties’**

This is an area where early childhood educators traditionally may feel ‘out of their depth’. KidsMatter Early Childhood provides the tools and resources to support services in assessing their strengths and focusing on areas for further action in relation to children’s mental health and wellbeing. The initiative gives educators the understanding about mental health to recognise and respond to early signs of difficulty and the confidence to seek help for children and families.

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### KidsMatter Early Childhood Early Years Learning Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component 4: Helping children who are experiencing mental health difficulties</th>
<th>Key Target Areas:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key Target Areas:</strong></td>
<td>Understanding children’s mental health and wellbeing:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff have an understanding of mental health difficulties in early childhood including common signs and symptoms, its impact on children and families, and factors that put children at risk.</td>
<td>Responding to children who may be experiencing mental health difficulties:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The service has protocols and processes for recognising and responding to children who may be experiencing mental health difficulties.</td>
<td>The service has good working relationships and clear referral pathways with support services.</td>
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### EYLF Practices:

**Holistic approaches:**

‘When early childhood educators take a holistic approach they pay attention to children’s physical, personal, social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing as well as cognitive aspects of learning’ (p. 14).

**Continuity of learning and transitions:**

‘Transitions, including from home to early childhood settings, between settings, and from early childhood settings to school, offer opportunities and challenges’.

‘[Educators]…assist children to understand the traditions, routines and practices of the settings to which they are moving and to feel comfortable with the process of change’ (p. 16).

### National Quality Standard Elements

**NQS Quality Area 5: Relationships with children Standards and elements:**

5.1 Respectful and equitable relationships are developed and maintained with each child.

5.2 Each child is supported to build and maintain sensitive and responsive relationships with other children and adults.

5.3 Each child’s behaviour, interactions and relationships are guided effectively.
**Assessment for learning:**

‘Assessment for learning... is important because it enables educators and other professionals to...identify children who may need additional support...providing that support or assisting families to access specialist help’ (p. 17).

**Learning Outcome 1:**  
Children have a strong sense of identity

**Learning Outcome 4:**  
Children are confident and involved learners

4.1 Children develop dispositions such as curiosity, cooperation, confidence, creativity, commitment, enthusiasm, persistence, imagination and reflexivity.

**Learning Outcome 5:**  
Children are effective communicators

5.1 Children interact verbally and non-verbally with others for a range of purposes.

5.3 Children express ideas and make meaning using a range of media.

**NQS Quality Area 4:**  
Staffing arrangements

Standards and elements:

4.2 Educators, coordinators and staff have the skills and knowledge to support children's learning, health, safety and wellbeing.

4.3 Educators, coordinators and staff are respectful and ethical.

**NQS Quality Area 7:**  
Leadership and service management

Standards and elements:

7.1 Effective leadership promotes a positive organisational culture and builds a professional learning community.

7.2 There is a commitment to continuous improvement.
Conclusion

From this ‘mapping’ of some connections between KidsMatter Early Childhood, the Early Years Learning Framework and the National Quality Standard, it is apparent that ‘relationships’ are the key to achieving the goals of all three—relationships between educators and children; between children and their peers; and relationships between educators, allied professionals and families.

The National Quality Framework and its Standard give priority to relationships between educators and children and educators and families. The EYLF has ‘Relationships with children’ and ‘Partnerships with families’ as two key Principles.

Only KidsMatter addresses both educators and families directly in its framework. KidsMatter provides the knowledge and skills for both sets of adults to support children, including vulnerable and at risk children.

Australia’s Fourth National Mental Health Plan (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009 p.22) aims ‘to promote the mental health and wellbeing of the Australian community and, where possible, prevent the development of mental health problems and mental illness’. In its Summary of actions (p. 32) the Plan specifically intends to ‘implement targeted prevention and early intervention programs for children and their families through partnerships between mental health, maternal and child health services, schools and other related organisations’.

Population trends indicate ‘troubling rates of children’s susceptibility to mental health problems’ (KidsMatter Overview, 2010 p.5).

It is therefore imperative to recognise that KidsMatter Early Childhood is designed to provide:

... an effective platform for supporting children, families and services in strengthening children’s mental health and wellbeing (KidsMatter Overview, 2010 p5).

The National Quality Standard, including the EYLF, aims to improve outcomes for children and families and implementing KidsMatter helps services to achieve the National Quality Standard and to make a direct and substantial contribution to the improvement agenda of the National Early Childhood Development Strategy.
References


COAG Early Childhood Development Steering Committee (Draft 2009). National Quality Standard for Early Education and Care and School Age Care.


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