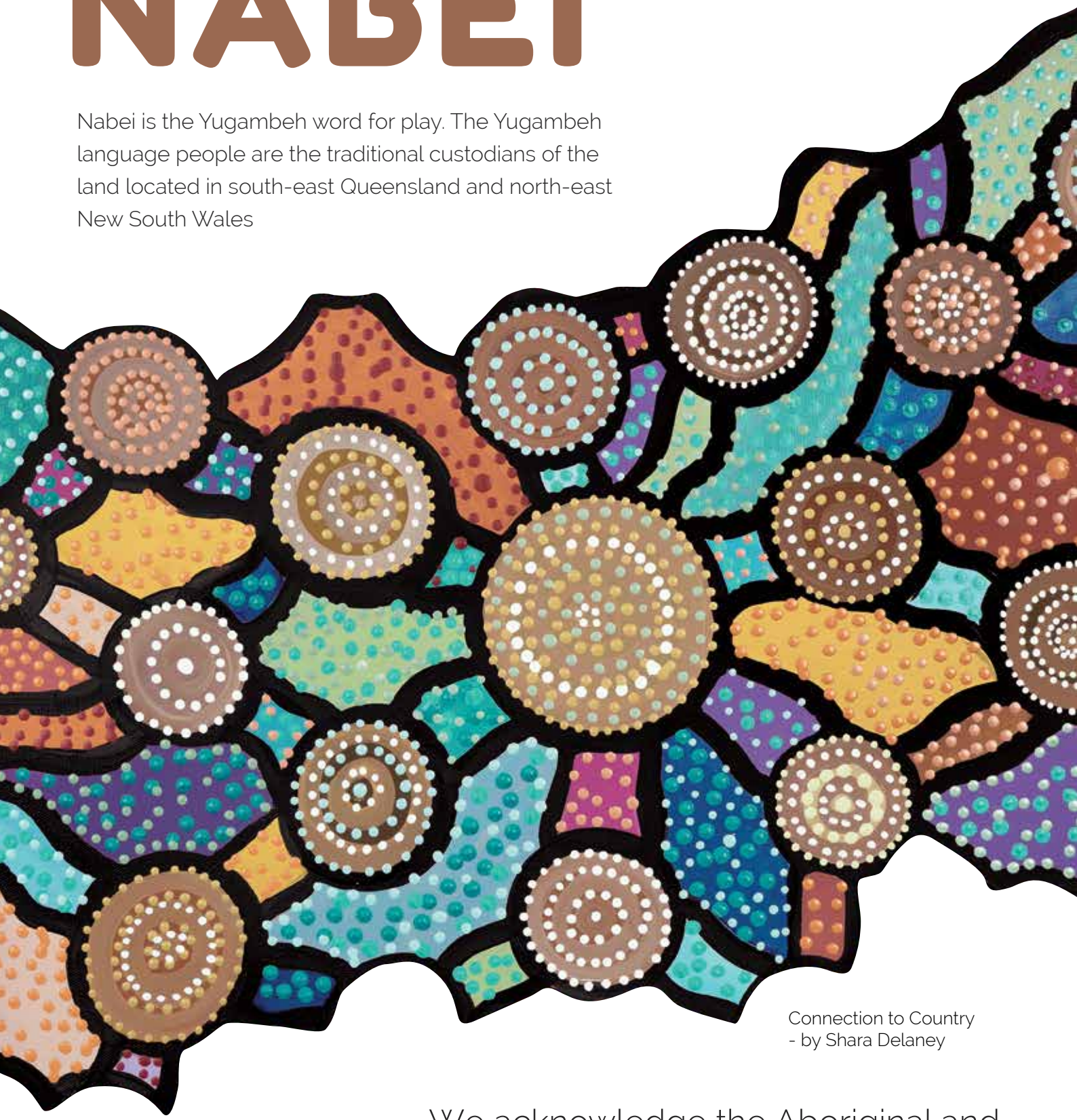
# Curriculum of Play

## MONTESSORI CURRICULUM AND PLANNING GUIDE

Montessori Garden
EARLY LEARNING CENTRE

# NABEI

Nabei is the Yugambeh word for play. The Yugambeh language people are the traditional custodians of the land located in south-east Queensland and north-east New South Wales



Connection to Country
- by Shara Delaney

We acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the Traditional owners of the land we meet and play on each day. We pay respect to the elders past, present and emerging.

# CONTENTS

# INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the curriculum guide, a shared construction with children.

The purpose of this guide is to share the history of how we built our curriculum and more importantly- why.

If you are reading this guide you are most likely working with children, therefore respect, care and joy would be your best qualities.

In July 2021 our group of early learning professionals came together to create a curriculum that was constructed by, and for the children. The Curriculum and Planning Guide breaks down the learning cycle and highlights the required documentation at each point in the cycle. Most importantly it showcases the research about why we want to document this way with children and the science behind the value of an inquiry based curriculum that's truly lead by and for children, YES! There is science and research to demonstrate this.

We started the journey after listening to our educators. They were burnt out, feeling like their documentation wasn't valued and there was no joy in the 'box program'. After conducting an in-depth series of surveys, collaborative yarns and debates, the research showed these feelings translated into the following:

- We don't see the value in the documentation we are mass producing. We don't have the autonomy to create a program that represents my personal teaching style and pedagogy.
- Team members are spending too long on the iPads and children are viewing us through the lens of a camera. This is hindering our relationships and connection.
- We are feeling immense pressure to sustain the quota of documentation leadership have set for us each month (the good old 2 individual observations per child, 1 group observation per child, one learning story and follow-up per child per month (multiply this by the 40 children on my roll each month).
- How we are currently documenting does not represent the current research.
- Time spent on excessive documentation could be better spent with children.
- Why are we documenting so much about their day rather than capturing and including them in key moments to document?
- The curriculum isn't a true representation of our values and beliefs for children.

Our leadership team knew that this was going to be something different, something inspiring and something to have pride in. We were willing to look beyond, completely scrap the boxed weekly program and create something left field, something meaningful. We started with goals for the curriculum, 'must haves' and 'must not haves'. This lead us to focus on a powerful question by Anthony Semann from Semann and Slattery "What if our day of learning was planned on the children's ideas and not their interests?".

> Why are we creating a curriculum based on children's interests over ideas when the framework mentions interests 13 times and ideas 58 times (Dr Deb Harcourt).

Anthony Semann also invited us to research Ann Pelo's work and investigate the possibilities her thinking may provoke. "Curriculum ought to be an expression of pedagogy thought. When we bring our curriculum close to our pedagogy, we insert space for reflection and meaning making into the usual trajectory from observation to action. We make thinking rather than doing our priority. (Pelo, 2019, p.60).

Our community and families then became our next point of research, what did they value? What did they understand and how could we support them during the transition? Once we informed families of all the research and information about the new curriculum idea and what it will look like for their children, they could see the meaning behind our process and supported a smooth transition. We believe collaboration, communication and being open throughout the process was the key to its success.

It was coming through that our key elements and focuses were not a true representation of us, as early childhood professionals in our current curriculum (weekly box program).

- Why is there a weekly plan when children learn differently, and you can't put a timeline on that?
- If we are planning so many outcomes for children, how are we fostering their natural desire to learn outside these possibilities?
- If children are partners, how are we honouring that?
- Our ethics were not represented in the curriculum.
- Where does the educator sit as a researcher in this curriculum?

> "…. Curriculum is (A) teacher's responsibility, not children. People who hear the words emergent curriculum may wrongly assume that everything simply emerges from the children. The children's ideas are an important source of curriculum but only one of many possible sources… (Jones & Nimmo, 1994).

We deliberately and purposefully trialled each stage of the concept curriculum until we felt we had succeeded in finding the correct formula for our stakeholders. We pledge to continue to research and be an innovative force with our curriculum to ensure the very best outcomes for children and will focus on quality being our priority.

# THE MONTESSORI METHOD

The Montessori Method was developed by Doctor Maria Montessori, in the early 1900's. The Montessori method of education is a system that is specifically child centered and seeks to develop a child's individual and natural interests, in an environment of purpose made materials for work which children may use at their own developmental pace.

The Montessori Method empowers children in their pursuit of knowledge and acquisition of new skills.

Children have an innate desire to imitate the adults around them in completing routine tasks. This may initially commence with very basic skills like hand washing or dressing oneself, wiping a table to more complex tasks including preparing and cooking dinner.

As a child develops these skills, they also develop a belief in themselves and self-discipline, important skills when navigating life.

Maria Montessori held the belief that education begins at birth, describing the period of 0 – 6 years as the "Absorbent Mind", being the first plane of development. The first plane of development is further sub-divided into, the "Unconscious Absorbent Mind" being the period from 0 – 3 years, and the "Conscious Absorbent Mind" being the period 3 – 6 years.

The unconscious absorbent mind is more reactive than purposeful and absorbs the information from the world around the child. This is where there is no direct influence exerted over the child's own learning. The child's impressions of the world are constructed using their senses.

The conscious absorbent mind begins from 3 – 6 years and can begin to be influenced by others. It is during this sub plane of development that a child's brain will develop in a way that it begins to order and classify experiences.

# THE FOUR PLANES OF DEVELOPMENT

Montessori classrooms are multi-aged learning environments, based on Maria Montessori's theory of human development, which she referred to as "The Four Planes of Development". Maria Montessori outlined these four stages of development that make up a holistic look at the process of development and include social, cognitive, moral and biological changes.

The four stages begin at birth and extend through to adulthood:

**1. Infancy / Early Childhood (Birth to Age 6)**

It is in this stage that the child is an "unconscious creator". The infant is not conscious of learning but is creating who they will become. Activities are introduced that will support the psycho-sensory motor development of child at this phase, that will build their motor skills and their senses simultaneously strengthening the neural pathways of the brain through repetition of movement, enhancing the infant's potential in all areas of development.

As the child grows (usually around the age of 3) they become the "conscious worker", deliberately interacting with the world.

**2. Childhood (Age 6 – 12)**

In this stage of development child move from the "absorbent mind" to the "reasoning mind", wherein they want to learn more about the reason "why" behind things. It is also during this plane of development that children begin to become more aware of their role in life, which Maria Montessori referred to as "the cosmic plan".

**3. Adolescence (Age 12 – 18)**

Physical changes occur more intensely during this phase. Emotionally and psychologically, the teenager is very sensitive to criticism and is more acutely aware of and concerned with their social role in life. A teenager has a strong desire for independence though Montessori noted that it is during this phase that teenagers regress.

**4. Early Adulthood (Age 18 – 24)**

Physical and psychological growth and development continues in this phase, and it is here that the adult begins to think about their contribution to humanity.

One of the most discussed phrases in Montessori is "sensitive periods". In short, a sensitive period is a phase or window in a child's development when they are most capable of and responsive to absorbing a certain skill.

You will know when your child is in a sensitive period because they are engaged, passionate, and energized by working on this specific activity or skill, and often return to it again and again.

There are a variety of sensitive periods in childhood, but here are some that apply to toddlers. These include but are not limited to:

- Large Movement: birth to 2.5
- Language: birth to 6
- Toileting: 1 to 2.5
- Small objects: 1 to 3
- Order: 1.5 to 4
- Refinement of Senses: 2 to 6
- Grace and Courtesy: 2 to 6
- Refinement of Movement: 2.5 to 4.5
- Social Skills: 2.5 to 5
- Learning to Write: 3.5 to 4.5
- Learning to Read: 4.5 to 5.5
- Math: 4 to 6

# WHAT IS INQUIRY BASED LEARNING?

Inquiry-based learning is a pedagogical approach. It is a constructivist approach, where the overall goal for children is to find the meaning of something.

Educators and teachers guide the inquiry and provide provocations in the environment to spark the investigation, but ultimately the natural inquisitive nature of children guides them to discover their meaning.

'Inquiry is the dynamic process of being open to wonder and puzzlements and coming to know and understand the world' (Alberta Learning, 2004).

'Simply put, inquiry is the personal path of questioning, investigating, and reasoning that takes us from not knowing to knowing' (Ferlazzo & Boss, 2015).

Choosing what we wanted to document and why was difficult. Over the years as an early childhood professional, we were led to believe that more is better, and you get used to volume over quality or meaningfulness. 'Project' style curriculum creates an opportunity for peer-to-peer learning and group scaffolding. We wanted to have a way to display the children's learning in a way that was meaningful to them. To support the inquiry-based learning approach we focus on projects, these are called 'Learning Focuses'. We begin with questions, questions from the children and questions from the Educator.

Inquiry based learning sparks the natural curiosity of children. What is the benefit of this? When an idea sparks curiosity, there is increased activity in the hippocampus -the region of the brain responsible for memory creation. This means what the child is learning in the moment has strength to be retained. Inquiry based learning helps children feel rewarded during their learning, investigating, and finding the answer gives them a sense of accomplishment and builds a positive self-image as a learner.

It's important to us to intertwine The 8 Ways Framework into our curriculum for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children. We approach this with our familiar understanding and our willingness to grow and learn with it.

"We learn more by looking for the answer to a question and not finding the answer itself"

(Lloyd Alexander)

# THE LEARNING CYCLE

The National Quality Standards and the Early Years Learning Framework guides our curriculum decision making and is referred to by all educators during their planning cycle.

All forms of documentation are linked to the approved frameworks learning outcomes.


Image: The Assessment and Planning Cycle from National Quality Framework: Standard 1.3

Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory views child development as a complex system of relationships affected by multiple levels of the surrounding environment, from immediate settings of family and school to broad cultural values, laws, and customs.

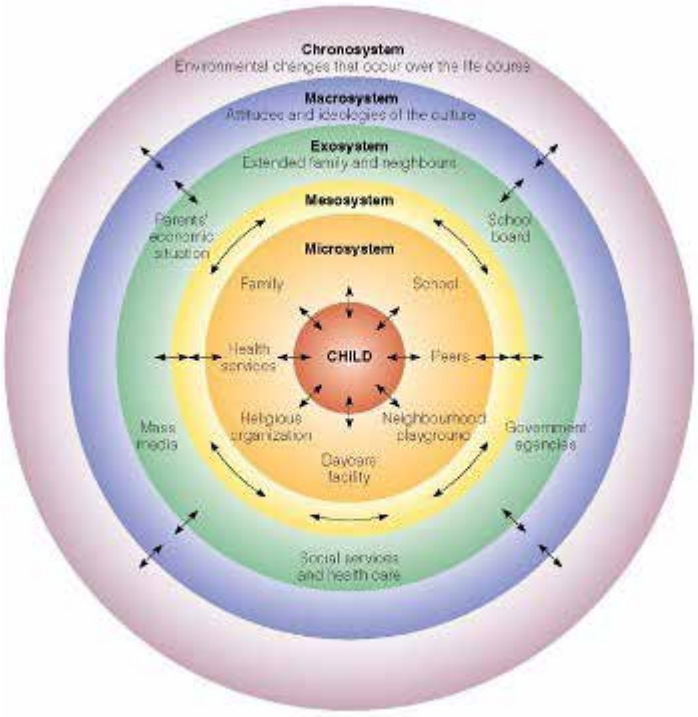


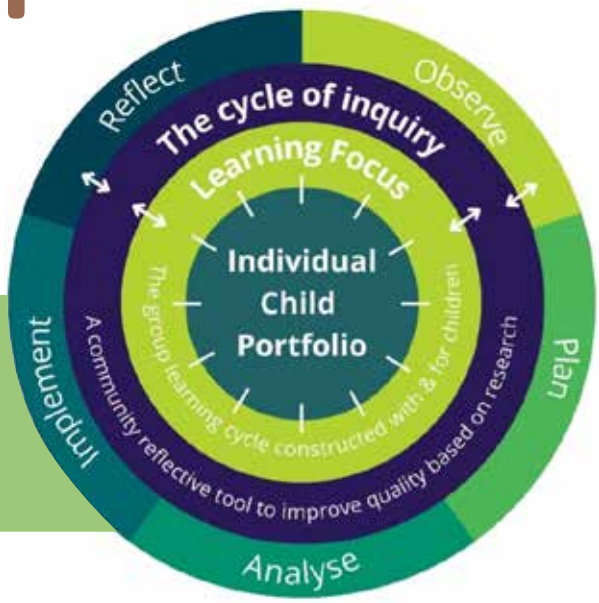

Image: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model

Our curriculum is constructed with 3 learning cycles. The Cycle of Inquiry, the Learning Focus and the Individual Program for each child. This structure is based on the Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. We wanted the Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory to inform our practices around education. Each cycle influences and contributes to the others, overlapping and intertwining.

Learning is easier when experiences are interconnected rather than isolated subject areas (Howard 2006).

# THE EMERGENT CURRICULUM

Every system and level is interconnected. Data from each informs the others.




## CYCLE OF INQUIRY (MESO SYSTEM)

| Observe | Analyse | Plan | Implement | Reflect |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Everyone contributes to observations over a 2 week period. | Observations are analysed in comparison to gathered research, theories & data. | Strategies are made to improve practice based on research. | Plan is implemented across the service. | Implementation and outcomes are reflected on by all educators. |

## LEARNING FOCUS (MICROSYSTEM)

| Observe | Analyse | Plan | Implement | Reflect |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| • Observe children's ideas, interests and questions.<br>• Capture learning snaps<br>• Weekly learning updates | • Analyse the key learning behind the ideas to build your learning focus question. | • Plan future learning possibilities<br>• Build your floorbook & OWNA program. | • Implement learning possibilites.<br>• Scaffold learning.<br>• Update floorbook with extentions & contributions. | • Reflect on the children's learning & outcomes<br>• Evaluate the program on OWNA.<br>• Room Yarns |

## INDIVIDUAL CHILD PORTFOLIO (CHILD)

| Observe | Analyse | Plan | Implement | Reflect |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| • Capture work samples<br>• Learning snaps<br>• Photos & videos<br>• Observations | • Create goals<br>• Track development milestones<br>• Development Summaries | • Plan strategies to achieve goals and extend learning outcomes.<br>• Parent meetings & communication | • Implement strategies to support the child's learning & development.<br>• Changes to the physical environment<br>• Support plans | • Team and individual reflections on OWNA.<br>• Program evaluation on OWNA |

# THE NATIONAL QUALITY FRAMEWORK PLANNING CYCLE (EXOSYSTEMIC)

Our Curriculum and Planning documentation model has been designed to ensure that all facets of documentation reflect the National Quality Framework's planning cycle, as depicted in the Early Years Learning Framework.

As the curriculum was evolving, we realised that each layer of documentation is closely related to and impacted by the other. For instance, the Child Portfolio showing the development of the child and their ideas and interests, impact greatly on the emergent topics that create the Learning Focuses within the next layer of documentation. After leadership critically reflected on this, the observation relates closely to Urie Bronfenbrenner Ecological Systems Theory regarding the systems surrounding a child that impact their learning and development.

From this we can see how the interconnectedness of these systems, or layers of documentation can be used to positively shape and impact the child's outcomes in life.

As depicted in the National Quality Framework's planning cycle, the curriculum follows through each section; Observe, Analyse, Plan, Implement and Reflect.

We partner this with **The 8 Ways Framework**:


# CYCLE OF INQUIRY (MESOSYSTEM)

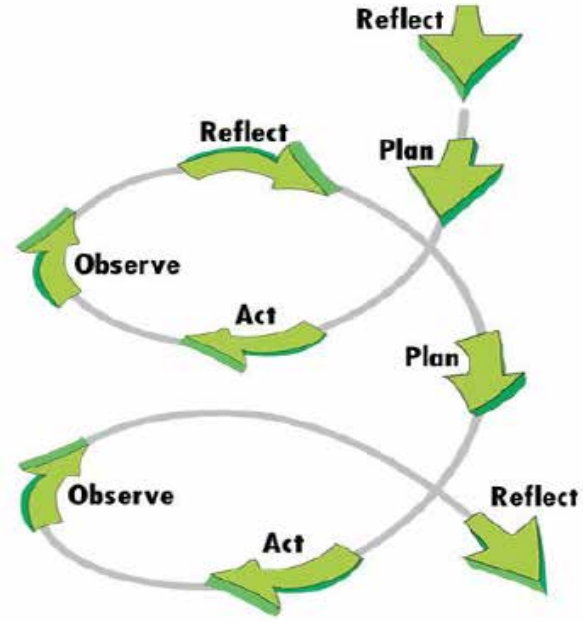
## WHAT IS THE INQUIRY CYCLE?

The Inquiry Cycle is an innovative way to look at reflective questioning and problem solving. Our organisation was introduced to this through opportunities to connect with the Department of Education and Dr. Melinda Miller through an ongoing mentoring program with one of our Educational Leaders. The Inquiry Cycle process is all about looking deeply at a problem, issue, or area of improvement, and over a specified period of time undertaking a reflective journey leading to positive change. This is something that has been used in schools around Australia and the benefits are enormous. It has been recognised that an inquiry cycle can be used very effectively in early childhood services as well.

**Explore the benefits that the Inquiry Cycle brings to us as Educators....**

Note: The Inquiry Cycle is sometimes reffered to as 'Action Research'. These are the same thing, just different names.


In our organisation the Inquiry Cycle is an overarching aspect of our curriculum program, encompassing all other documentation that we undertake. The Inquiry Cycle is a process of reflection where services look closely and deeply at a topic- literally 'make inquiries' about something to determine their understanding of that topic and if there is something more that can be done- or something should change- in connection to that topic. The inquiry cycle works best when educators address their own biases and are truly reflective and open to learning. As humans, we sometimes think we know everything there is to know but undertaking an inquiry cycle can help us to see where the gaps may lie and where we can improve our practice. It's okay to not know everything, and it is ok to be wrong. Therefore, the inquiry cycle can be so valuable, because when educators admit vulnerability, they place themselves into a beautiful place of growth.




Explore this visual interpretation of the inquiry cycle and feel the fluid nature of learning that it creates

Completing an inquiry cycle is an opportunity to learn and grow. It is not about being right or wrong, it is about questioning and improvement. It is an opportunity to explore how services can do better next time. When a service explores a topic such as 'Interactions with Children' what they are really asking is 'am I meeting children's needs effectively? Can I do something different? Have I fallen into habits or routines that are ineffective? Are there new things I can learn and try?'. When looking at the world through this perspective, educators are more open to learning together.

Each service chooses an Inquiry Cycle topic that is relevant to their unique contexts and individual Centre community. This topic will be chosen based upon reflective questioning and observations of practice. The cycle of inquiry has five phases, which we have called observation, research, plan, implement and reflect. We generally designate 1-2 weeks for each phase to be completed, however these time frames are flexible. One of the key points Dr. Miller highlights is the suggestion that this process should take about 4 to 8 full weeks- rarely less, but sometimes more. Giving time to complete the process fully ensures that the changes made will be meaningful and more likely to become embedded. Change does not happen overnight.

https://2019.ecaconference.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Miller_Melinda.pdf

## PHASE ONE: OBSERVATION

During the observation phase, which usually lasts two weeks, educators observe and take notes about their own and their peers' current practice. During this phase educators do not make any changes, they simply record data. At the end of this phase, each team should feel confident in identifying the strengths evident related to the topic, and also the priority challenges that have arisen and potential causes of these challenges.

## PHASE TWO: RESEARCH

This phase is all about asking questions. Educators collaborate within and outside of their services, asking other educators, community members, and families for solutions or suggestions. We will look at data and research articles to identify what other options are available to us. We will be layering experience and knowledge of others, broader perspectives and theory and literature to question what is happening and why. It will usually last for two weeks.

## PHASE THREE: PLAN

Teams spend approximately 1-2 weeks creating a plan based upon what they have learned in phase two. This will be specific to each service community and will be communicated across the whole service. It is essential that plans are transparent and understood across the whole service community, as all educators and relevant community members are responsible for ensuring the plan meets the wider needs of the service.

## PHASE FOUR: IMPLEMENTATION

This phase generally lasts a minimum of two weeks and is where each team member will implement and follow the plan. It is essential that the plan is followed for a minimum of two weeks, by every single team member involved, so that the new practice can become embedded.

## PHASE FIVE: REFLECTION

A robust and thoughtful reflection period must occur to ensure that all outcomes of the Inquiry Cycle are considered. This is where we can adjust the plan if needed, or where we decide that the process has been successful, and our new practice is embedded. We can then reflect on how far we have come over the lifetime of the cycle and celebrate our successes.

# LEARNING FOCUS (MICROSYSTEM)

The Learning Focus is a primary source of physical documentation highlighting children's inquiry-based learning while at the service. The creation of the Learning Focus was a collaborative process between stakeholders across the organisation, and has been inspired by a range of documentation processes used in Early Childhood (including Reggio Emilia 'Project Work'). With a focus on children's ideas and learning, and an exploration into how children learn through inquiry-based opportunities, we made the decision to introduce what has become known as a 'Learning Focus'. The Learning Focus is a whole-group collaborative approach to learning which values the input of each child within the service, with educators embracing children's ideas and learning in order to extend development.

Developing a 'topic' for the Learning Focus involves in-depth questioning and discussion about what the children in the group have been engaged with, what they have been showing passion for, where their ideas and interests lie, and what they are learning. The Learning Focus topic will be based upon meaningful observation, and should encompass an overarching question or theme for further inquiry-based learning.


## Here is an example of how one educator discovered their Learning Focus topic:

**What questions are the children asking?**

Nursery: the children have enjoyed exploring water. This is a typical behaviour for the babies and will always be on the curriculum. An educator noticed that the babies were fascinated by the water dripping out of a pipe in the garden. The educator also mentioned that the children enjoy splashing the water to see what happens. This led to us questioning if they were curious about cause and effect- how can I splash the water? Why does the water drip? What impact can I have on the way the water moves?

**The focus is less on the water itself, and more on the children's questions about how water moves.**

This is where the learning focus starts. This ties in with the children's secondary observed play involving the trajectory schema- watching movement of balls when thrown. The educator settled on the learning focus of 'What causes water to leak out from the pipes?' which is a more specific question than the topic of 'Water'. It can lead us to look at a range of 'cause and effect' opportunities and explore motion in everyday experiences.

**The Learning Focus consists of three separate parts: the Floorbook, the Curriculum Program on OWNA, and the Weekly Learning Update.**

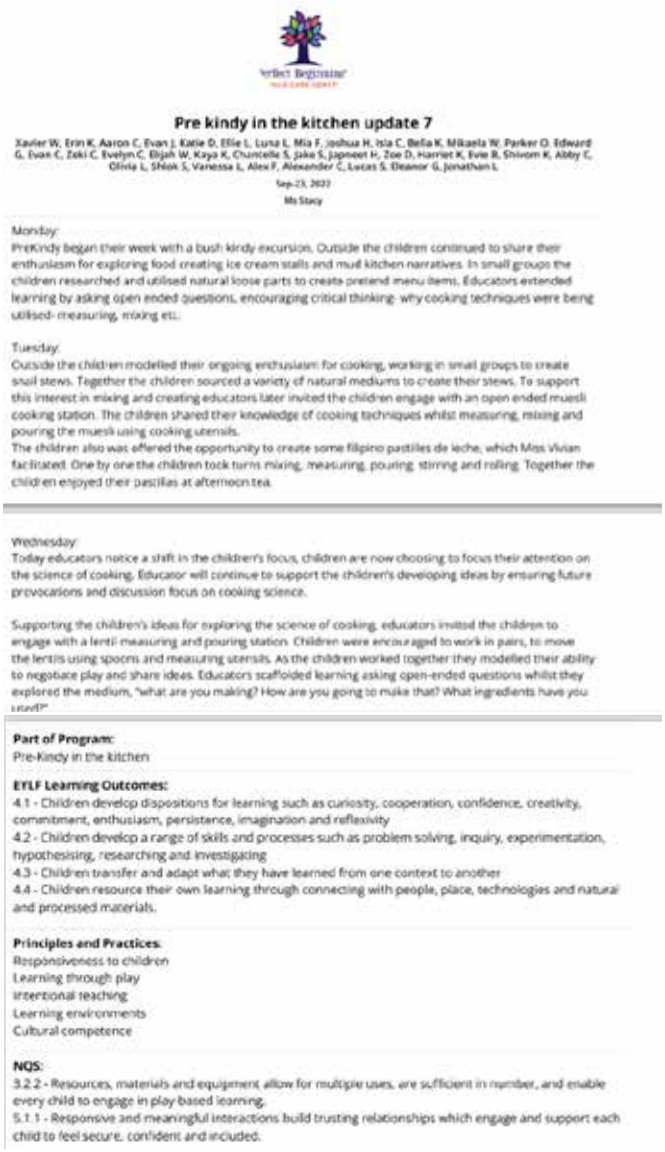
# CURRICULUM TOOLS

## FLOOR BOOK

This is where educators and children work together to physically document learning. Using creative freedom and imagination, educators and children use words, images, physical objects, photos, graphs, and other details to document the learning occurring connected to their Learning Focus topic. Children must always be involved in this process, with the inquiry becoming full of questioning and collaboration.

## WEEKLY LEARNING UPDATE

The Weekly Learning Update is uploaded to OWNA as a way to track children's learning week-by-week. This update utilises text and photographs to show all the learning that occurs connected to the Learning Focus over a one week period. These Weekly Learning Updates provide a unique opportunity for readers to visualise how the children's learning is growing and the direction their ideas are heading.



**Pre kindy in the kitchen update 7**

Xavier W, Erin K, Aaron C, Evan J, Katie D, Ellie L, Luna L, Mia F, Joshua H, Isla C, Bella K, Mikaela W, Parker O, Edward G, Evan C, Zeki C, Evelyn C, Elijah W, Kaya K, Chantelle S, Jake S, Japneet H, Zoe D, Harriet K, Evie R, Shivom K, Abby C, Olivia L, Shlok S, Vanessa L, Alex F, Alexander C, Lucas S, Eleanor G, Jonathan L

Sep 23, 2022

Ms Stacy

Monday:
PreKindy began their week with a bush kindy excursion. Outside the children continued to share their enthusiasm for exploring food creating ice cream stalls and mud kitchen narratives. In small groups the children researched and utilised natural loose parts to create pretend menu items. Educators extended learning by asking open ended questions, encouraging critical thinking: why cooking techniques were being utilised- measuring, mixing etc.

Tuesday:
Outside the children modelled their ongoing enthusiasm for cooking, working in small groups to create snail stews. Together the children sourced a variety of natural mediums to create their stews. To support this interest in mixing and creating educators later invited the children engage with an open ended muesli cooking station. The children shared their knowledge of cooking techniques whilst measuring, mixing and pouring the muesli using cooking utensils.
The children also was offered the opportunity to create some filipino pastilles de leche, which Miss Vivian facilitated. One by one the children took turns mixing, measuring, pouring, stirring and rolling. Together the children enjoyed their pastillas at afternoon tea.

Wednesday:
Today educators notice a shift in the children's focus, children are now choosing to focus their attention on the science of cooking. Educator will continue to support the children's developing ideas by ensuring future provocations and discussion focus on cooking science.

Supporting the children's ideas for exploring the science of cooking, educators invited the children to engage with a lentil measuring and pouring station. Children were encouraged to work in pairs, to move the lentils using spoons and measuring utensils. As the children worked together they modelled their ability to negotiate play and share ideas. Educators scaffolded learning asking open-ended questions whilst they explored the medium, "what are you making? How are you going to make that? What ingredients have you used?"

**Part of Program:**
Pre-Kindy in the kitchen

**EYLF Learning Outcomes:**
4.1 - Children develop dispositions for learning such as curiosity, cooperation, confidence, creativity, commitment, enthusiasm, persistence, imagination and reflexivity
4.2 - Children develop a range of skills and processes such as problem solving, inquiry, experimentation, hypothesising, researching and investigating
4.3 - Children transfer and adapt what they have learned from one context to another
4.4 - Children resource their own learning through connecting with people, place, technologies and natural and processed materials.

**Principles and Practices:**
Responsiveness to children
Learning through play
Intentional teaching
Learning environments
Cultural competence

**NQS:**
3.2.2 - Resources, materials and equipment allow for multiple uses, are sufficient in number, and enable every child to engage in play based learning.
5.1.1 - Responsive and meaningful interactions build trusting relationships which engage and support each child to feel secure, confident and included.

## CURRICULUM PROGRAM ON OWNA

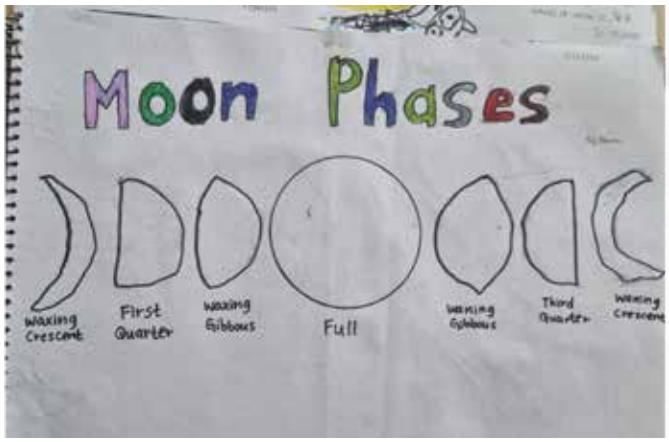
This is where all room educators engage in planning, evaluation, reflection, and ongoing discussion about their Learning Focus. The Curriculum Program document will highlight all the Learning Possibilities connected to the Learning Focus, and will be evaluated and reflected upon daily. The Curriculum Program will grow alongside the Learning Focus, with educators adding Learning Possibilities that show the learning journey that is occurring within the group.

## EXPECTATIONS

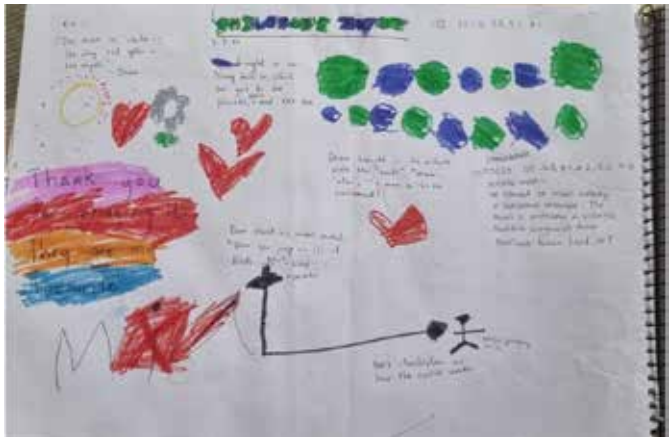
**Daily:**

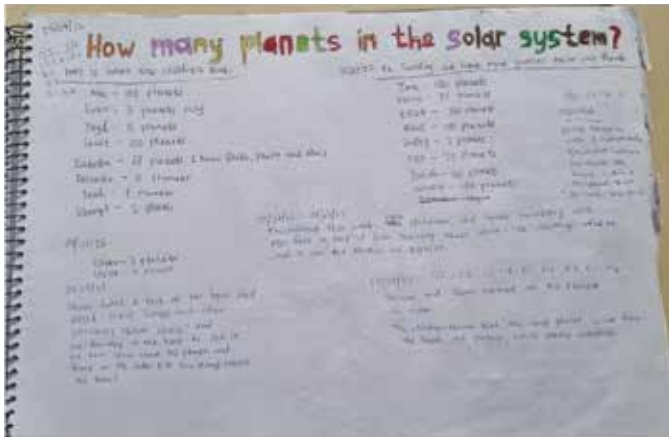
- Add a high-quality story, photo, anecdote, quote, or drawing to the floor book.
- Edit the program on OWNA by adding evaluations and additional learning possibilities.
- Add information to the 'Weekly Learning Update', including photos and text, and save in drafts.
- All educators must contribute to daily tasks- to ensure that weekly tasks can be completed successfully

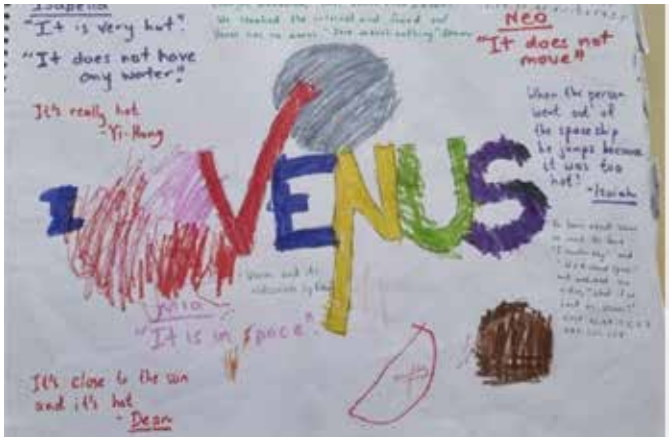
# FLOOR BOOK EXAMPLE







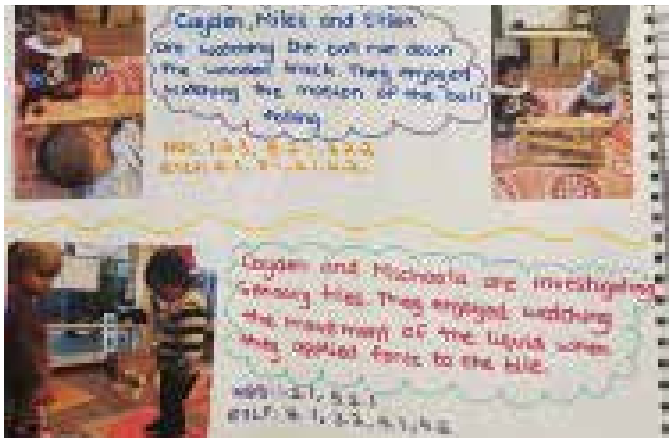


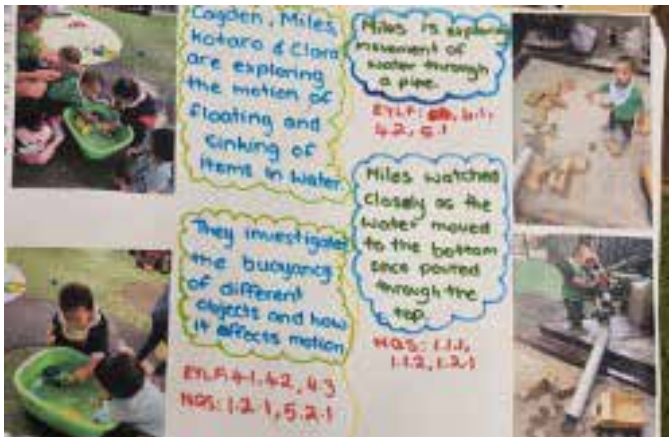
## THE LEARNING FOCUS WAS:

## WHY IS THE MOON OUT DURING THE DAY?

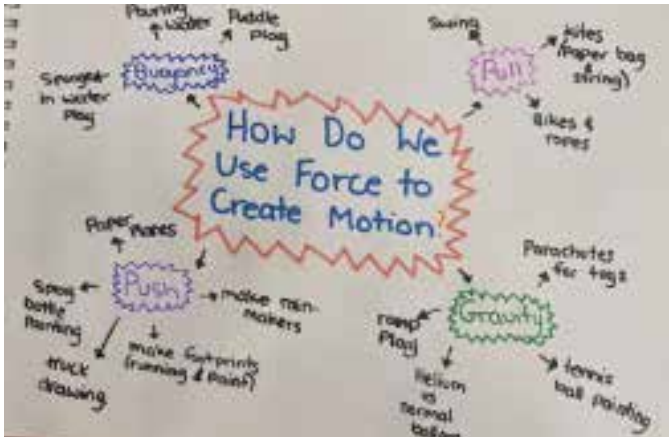
Floor book by Montessori Garden Early Learning Centre (Kindy) 2022.

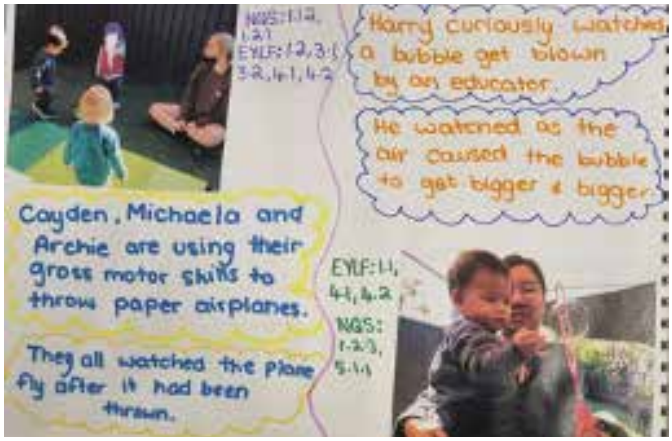
# FLOOR BOOK EXAMPLE







## THE LEARNING FOCUS WAS:

## HOW DO WE USE FORCE?

Floor book by Perfect Beginnings Early Learning Centre (Nursery) 2022

# LEARNING FOCUS (MICROSYSTEM)

## LEARNING SNAPS

Learning Snaps (LS) are how we share other learning from throughout the day. Learning Snaps are rich, meaningful, high-quality posts that are shared with families via OWNA. The reality is that we cannot document everything, and we don't want to. Learning Snaps allow us to highlight those extra moments quickly, centering the learning that has occurred throughout the experience. A Learning Snap is a 2-4 sentence post on OWNA describing what the children have learnt (not what they did), accompanied by clear, high-quality photos or video showing the children's actions. By using photos or video, this usually eliminates the need to describe what the children did, as we all know 'a picture tells a thousand words'. This allows us to focus more on what the children have learnt proficiently, using less time documenting and more time connecting with children.

## INDIVIDUAL CHILD'S PORTFOLIO (CHILD)

Each child has an individual portfolio on OWNA. Families can look at their child's portfolio via the app at any time. The individual portfolio is constructed with goals set for the child by the family, the educator, and the child. Samples of work can be captured and stored in here as well as observations, photos, videos, jottings, support plans, transition plans and learning stories.

Summative assessments are completed in May and October for every child. This is a detailed report for the educators and family to see the child's progression and development against the developmental milestones and the framework.

## EXPECTATIONS

**Daily:**

- ☐ Take photos of the learning that you see occurring. Photos should be clear, high-quality, and show children's engagement in play. Post at least 3 learning snaps per day capturing all children across the day.
- ☐ Make sure that you have ample photos and/or data of each child in attendance each day. No child should be excluded.
- ☐ Upload photos to OWNA. Ask yourself 'What did the children learn during this play?'. Write 3-4 quality sentences detailing the learning you observed.
- ☐ Make sure you are tagging every post with each of the following: EYLF and/or QKLG, Principles and Practices, Theorists, NQS, Developmental Milestones, and Aboriginal 8 Ways of Learning and the centre philosophy.
- ☐ The educator who engaged in the experience with the children should be the person who uploads the learning snap to OWNA.

# LEARNING SNAP EXAMPLE

## How Do We Feel?

Selena K, Alira S, Amethyst H, Archer S, Audrey D, Callum T, Dyln F, Everlyn-May B, Harrison B, Kai P, Kaice P, Kaniyah S, Maggie B, Maisie J, Piper A, Remy B, Valentina Z, William A

Sep-20, 2022

Miss Chloe

The children and Miss Chloe discussed how we felt today, the children used their fine motor skills to grasp the paint brushes and express their feelings through colours ( zones of regulation). The children were able to identify and match colours into the 4 zones of regulations.

**Part of Program:**
how do i feel?

**EYLF Learning Outcomes:**
1.1 - Children feel safe, secure and supported
2.1 - Children develop a sense of belonging to groups and communities and an understanding of the reciprocal rights and responsibilities necessary for active community participation
4.1 - Children develop dispositions for learning such as curiosity, cooperation, confidence, creativity, commitment, enthusiasm, persistence, imagination and reflexivity

**Principles and Practices:**
Intentional teaching

**NQS:**
5.2.2 - Each child is supported to regulate their own behaviour, respond appropriately to the behaviour of others and communicate effectively to resolve conflicts.

**Theorists:**
Socio-Cultural - Adults have a role in guiding children's learning.

**Aboriginal Ways:**
Symbols and Images: Using images and metaphors to understand concepts and contents.

**Centre Tags:**
#Centre Philosophy, Our trained educators provide an emergent curriculum that focuses in on all areas of development. Children are empowered to try out new things daily as they progress through developmental milestones during this time of incredible growth in their lives. Our educators are eager to support the process, and to share the achievements of each child with their family as they reach those milestones.

# LEARNING SNAP EXAMPLE

**Croc and the Platypus**

We all enjoyed listening to the story of Croc and the Platypus!
Reading stories stimulates imagination and helps develop concentration skills.

Posted by: **Ms Vivian** (Friday, September 23rd 2022, 2:13:16 pm)

Comments 0 Likes 5

**Children Tagged :** Aaron Chen, Alex Faithfull, Chantelle Shen, Edward Gao, Elijah Wilson, Ellie Lee, Erin Kim, Evan Che, Harriet Kefford, Jake Saldanha, Japneet Hans, Katie Dsouza, Luna Lai, Olivia Li, Shivom Kapil, Shlok Sharma, Vanessa Lee, Zeki Cole

**Achievements :** EYLF Learning Outcomes: **4** | NQS: **1** Priniciples & Practice: **2** | Developmental Milestones: **2** | Aboriginal Ways: **1** |

**Viewed by : 27 -** Vivian Operio, Preetha Pinto, Stacy Mangifesta, Emma-Louise Teichmann, Poo ns, Vanja Kondic, Kerry Saunders, Hiroe Yamane, April Wu, Dan Yao, Sarah Chen, Kristy Kelly, Mary Ilan Sharma, Nicole Storey, Dominic Georgiou, Sunjoo Lim, David Lee, Shaune Gao, Tanu Sharm e Mo, Kristie Faithfull, Christina Chiang,

erfect Beginning
HILD CARE CENTR

## A kind friend

**Emilia P, Jaskirat S, Yuna H**

Sep-23, 2022

Miss Emma

Emilia & Jaskirat demonstrate kindness and compassion as they make Yuna a bed and help her to get comfortable. Yuna, Emilia and Jaskirat engage in dramatic play together, reflecting their ability to be imaginative and creative. Positive interactions like this support the development of relationships and friendships.

**Part of Program:**
Physical Health & Wellbeing - Kindy

**EYLF Learning Outcomes:**
1.4 - Children learn to interact in relation to others with care, empathy and respect
2.1 - Children develop a sense of belonging to groups and communities and an understanding of the reciprocal rights and responsibilities necessary for active community participation

**Principles and Practices:**
Responsiveness to children

**NQS:**
1.1.1 - Curriculum decision making contributes to each child's learning and development outcomes in relation to their identity, connection with community, wellbeing, confidence as learners and effectiveness as communicators

**Theorists:**
Critical and Post Structuralist - Social and cultural relationships change how children see themselves, how they act and what they learn

**Developmental Milestones:**
3 - 5 years - Social - Enjoys playing with other children
3 - 5 years - Social - May have a particular friend
3 - 5 years - Social - Shares, smiles and cooperates with peers

**Aboriginal Ways:**
Community Links: Centring local viewpoints, applying learning for community benefit.

**Phoenix Cup:**
Connection

# THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Careful planning and consideration goes into every space within the service to meet the needs of all children and to promote their holistic development.

The Early Years Learning Framework pays particular attention to environments for children. The physical environment is a fundamental part of the curriculum. It should have well planned areas that are defined and aesthetically pleasing. Children should have the opportunity for creative expression, rest and relaxation, gross motor and risky play, time for quality interactions with peers and educators, and spaces to explore and enquire.

Environments that support learning are vibrant and flexible spaces that are responsive to the interests and abilities of each child. They cater for different learning capacities and learning styles and invite children and families to contribute ideas, interests and questions. (EYLF, pg.15).

Children should have equal opportunity to engage in the indoor and outdoor environments.

Inclusion of every child is fundamental and adjustments to the environment to allow for the inclusion of all children should be implemented.

The environment should provide the children and educators with a sense of belonging. Their ideas, culture, beliefs and interests should be represented.

Planned learning possibilities should be present in the environment as provocations.

Connecting with nature and natural materials is part of our philosophy and should be available for children in the indoor and outdoor environments. Bush Kindy provides an extension to our physical environment at the Centre and allows children to connect with deep and meaningful enquiry within the natural environment.

## EXPECTATIONS

- All educators should reflect on their physical environment regularly. They should be able to explain why each material is out in the room and the intentional teaching behind it.

# THE MONTESSORI ENVIRONMENT

It is important to note that the Montessori environment reflects the needs of the four planes of development and is referred to as a prepared environment and is one of the core components of the Montessori Philosophy. The prepared environment is designed to facilitate optimum learning opportunities, engagement and independent work of a child, and allows the child the freedom within limitations, to explore and work at developmentally appropriate materials or work – recognising that not all children will be adept or interested in all options of work at all times. This is why individual lessons are provided for children and they are given the freedom to choose the work to suit their needs.

**The key components of the Montessori Environment:**

**1. Freedom**

Freedom of choice is one of the primary goals of the Montessori Method. Educators will guide children through the environment and correct as necessary (setting limitations / guidelines), but empower the children to freely choose their work and interact with peers.

**2. Structure and Order**

Structure and order / routine allow a child to make sense of their world.

**3. Beauty**

The Montessori environment should be simple, uncluttered and well maintained to evoke feelings of peace and harmony – an inviting environment for learning.

**4. Nature and Reality**

Maria Montessori firmly believed that nature should be used to inspire children, and why the program is delivered both indoors and outdoors in nature, and includes natural items in the classroom, including wood, bamboo, cotton and glass, rather than synthetic / plastic materials. All furniture should be child sized in order for the child to be able to move about independently in the environment without interference of an adult.

**5. Social Environment**

The Montessori environment fosters a child social awareness, allowing them to interact with their peers respectfully, and promoting empathy and compassion.

**6. Intellectual Environment**

This is the final component of the Montessori Environment. Until all previous components are met, then and only then will a Montessori educator be able to reach the child through the intellectual environment.

Maria Montessori developed learning materials for each curriculum area in the learning environment, to stimulate logical thought and independent discovery. A child is given lessons on each material in the environment as they display 'readiness indicators' or as their interests arise, and then they are able to engage with their materials as they desire. The materials are simple to use, self-correcting, intentional in their teaching and are masterfully designed in context of all other Montessori materials, allowing transference of skill, knowledge and understanding from one material / curriculum area to another.

All materials are taught in sequence promoting the gradual understanding of an abstract concept in a concrete manner.

# THE MONTESSORI CURRICULUM

**The Montessori Method is broken into 5 curriculum areas:**

1. Practical Life
2. Sensorial
3. Language
4. Math
5. Culture

All curriculum areas form part of an integrated curriculum, in that work from all subject areas are presented parallel to one another. This allows children to distinguish the interrelationships between all curriculum areas, providing the child with a more holistic view of their world.

As part of our documentation of our Montessori Curriculum we observe and record children's progress on a Montessori Tick Sheet. This documentation follows the child through their learning journey across all rooms in our Service, to ensure continuity of learning and progress through each of the curriculum areas.

## 3 STAGES OF NORMALISATION

In Montessori education, the term 'normalisation' doesn't refer to your child being 'typical' or 'average.' Instead, the term is used to describe a unique process in child development, where children become contributing members of their community.

Normalisation consists of a child's ability to concentrate and work freely in the Montessori environment, using the Montessori materials to fully engage their interests, and exercising self-discipline and peace.

**Stages of Normalization**

1. The child does something because they want to
2. The child does something because he/she is asked to do it
3. The child does something because they know it is right

## EXPECTATIONS

- Daily Montessori Work Cycle
- Observe and present materials to children
- Maintain and Update Montessori Tick Sheets weekly
- Link appropriate material work to children's goals and learning journey

# CRITICAL REFLECTION

Using critical reflection as a tool for learning, development, and continuous and ongoing improvement is an essential aspect of Early Childhood professionalism. Each person working in Early Childhood, regardless of their role, must critically reflect as a regular part of their practice in order to identify their current skills and knowledge, and where additional training or ongoing learning can be focused.

There is a very clear difference between a 'reflection' and 'critical reflection', and this distinction is important when considering how you reflect to meet your role expectations. This distinction is also important when considering the QIP 'Exceeding' expectations, of which 'practice is informed by critical reflection' is one of the three themes.

The definition of 'critical reflection', according to ACECQA, is 'closely examining all aspects of events and experiences from different perspectives' (EYLF p.13). Therefore, when engaging in critical reflection, Early Childhood professionals must consider their own personal experiences, understandings and biases surrounding an event or topic, and then layer others' personal experiences, understandings, and biases, and use this information to work towards positive outcomes. Critical reflection is an opportunity to examine feelings, ask key open-ended questions, and examine an event or topic in detail and creatively.

The second important step in critical reflection is using this information to make changes to practice. Critical reflection is a tool for professional and personal growth and should be used to enhance, improve, extend, and cultivate quality practice within the service. This occurs through team discussions, feedback, inquiry cycles, ongoing reflections, changes to the environment, adjustments to practice and pedagogy, and posts or discussions on OWNA.

Finally, it is important that critical reflection is always supported by current research, best-practice, and evidence. This is an essential step to ensure that regardless of personal biases, experience, and knowledge, all critical reflections are supported by key information related to that event or topic. This is how Early Childhood professionals can ensure that changes made to practice based upon their critical reflections are meaningful changes that will impact practice and these changes are relevant to the service and the Early Childhood profession.

There are many different ways educators can contribute to critical reflection. All posts must be uploaded to OWNA through the 'Reflections' tab. These uploads can be in a few different formats, a written post, voice recordings, video recordings, mind maps or visual explanations.

## EXPECTATIONS

- Each educator is to complete **one team reflection and one personal reflection per month**. Team reflections can be completed as a team. You can use your professional conversations as reflections, however it needs to be clear how each team member has contributed meaningfully to the discussion.

  Personal reflections can be about any topic you feel is relevant. They are only viewed by management, and feedback is provided to extend deeper thinking, add additional information/ knowledge and improve practice.

  ALL educators are to complete reflections- including casual and support educators.

# PARTNERING WITH FAMILIES

Partnering with families is an essential part of our curriculum. Families provide valuable insight into children's inner worlds, their experiences and understandings, their cultural context, and priorities for learning and development. There is a wealth of rich experience that we utilise when we build collaborative and meaningful partnerships with families. Access these family partnerships throughout curriculum planning to ensure that the programs and experiences offered to children meet the individual needs and contexts of each of our service communities.

Partnerships with families can be evident throughout every aspect of our curriculum. When considering our Curriculum Model, our Mesosystem (the Inquiry Cycle) can only be fully effective if we consider family experiences, ideas, knowledge, and values within our cycle. Ensuring that these voices are heard within the overarching structure of our curriculum ensures that they are collaborators within our service reflections and decisions.

Our Microsystem (the Learning Focus) also requires partnerships with families for successful outcomes for children. While the Learning Focus may be established at the service, family input will always be considered when determining how children's ideas and learning can be extended. In addition, partnering with families throughout the Learning Focus journey will ensure that family voices, values, and perspectives are captured and contribute to children's ongoing learning. This ensures that we maintain a holistic approach to children's learning and development.

The final aspect of our curriculum, the child at the center (Individual Child Portfolios) exists within the context of family, and therefore partnering with families to meet children's learning needs is essential. Families are the experts on their children, and their contributions to Individual Child Portfolios are invaluable. Families contribute to children's learning and development through engaging with posts on OWNA, contributing to curriculum decision making within services and the wider organisation, supporting educators to develop goals for their children, providing feedback and information about their child's individual learning, sharing experiences, and joining children at the service in planned and spontaneous experiences.

Families are invited to contribute to our curriculum through posts, comments and likes on OWNA, responding to polls on OWNA, providing feedback (verbal or written) to educators and management, contributing to philosophy reviews, joining children in play at the service, volunteering to join as helpers on excursions, contributing to the development of Learning Focuses, sharing children's personal experiences, family-educator interviews.

# CONCLUSION

## A SHARED CONSTRUCTION WITH CHILDREN: INQUIRY BASED LEARNING.

At the time of progressing this movement throughout our organisation we were faced with the global pandemic. This time offered us a lens to reassess our meaning and value as early childhood professionals, what really mattered to children and how we could champion our values and ethics.

Thank you to all our amazing early childhood professionals within our services that contributed to the process and content.

Thank you to our families for being open and trusting our ideas and believing in our vision for children.

Thank you to all the children that blessed us with their questions, ideas and actions. Without you we wouldn't have a learning community.

# REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING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