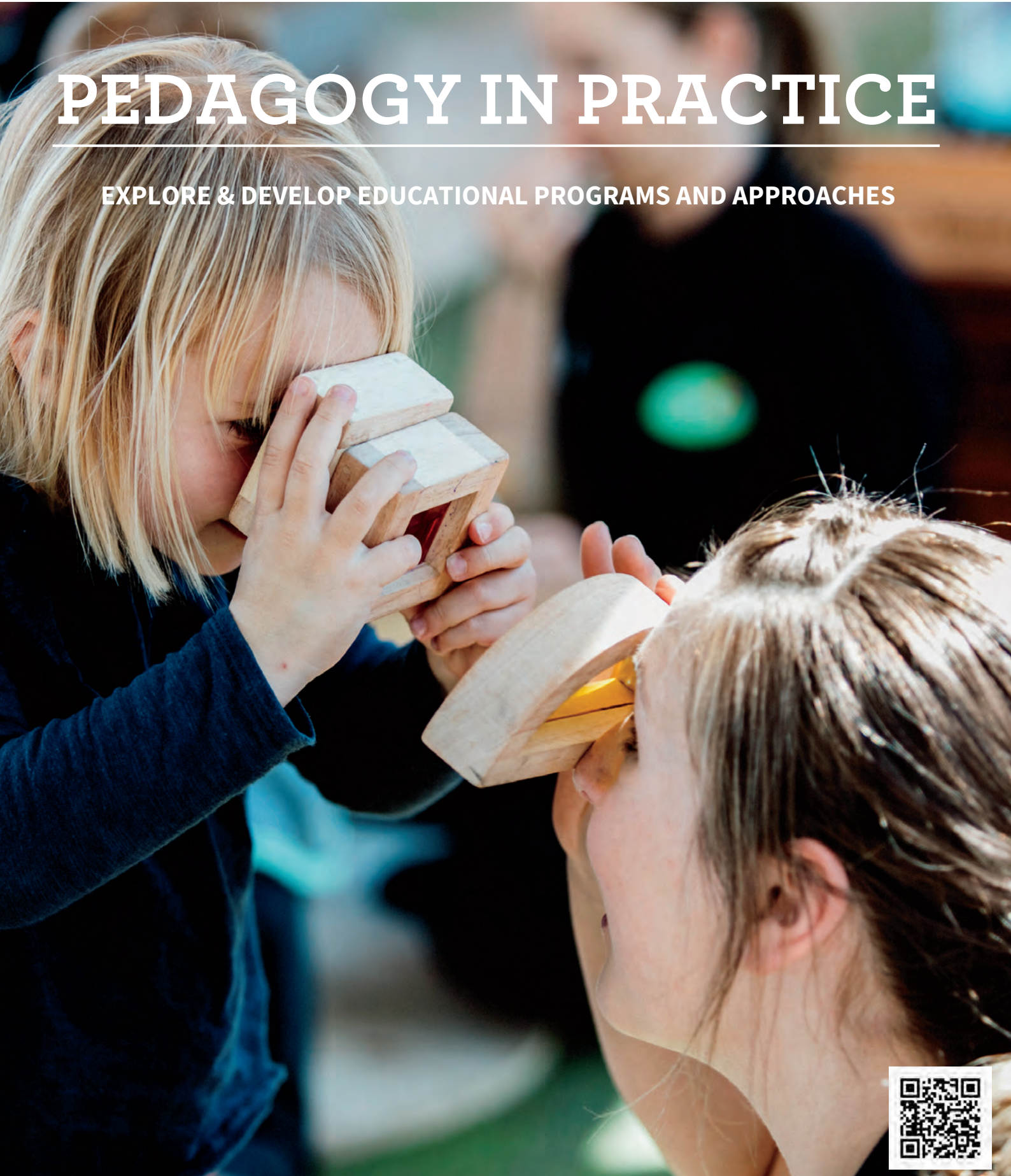


PEDAGOGY IN PRACTICE

EXPLORE & DEVELOP EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS AND APPROACHES



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Explore & Develop

Where curiosity leads to learning

REWARDING CAREER OPPORTUNITIES AT EXPLORE & DEVELOP

Each Explore & Develop service is individually owned and operated by passionate professionals who are on site daily ensuring high quality education and care. We do this through our commitment to continuous improvement and desire to give every child a great start in life.

Explore & Develop has a strong play-based learning philosophy where children are viewed as unique, competent and resourceful learners. We take a partnership approach to our work, as we believe this is an essential part of a high quality learning environment.

Collectively, Explore & Develop services employ over 700 professionals in leadership and Educator roles, with qualifications ranging from Early Childhood Teacher, Diploma and Certificate III.

We offer fully supported and funded traineeships, partnering with key registered training organisations. Each trainee is mentored and assessed in their service by a qualified Explore & Develop Operations Manager.



We strive to provide:

- Professional supportive workplace environments with opportunities for development and career advancement.
- A wellbeing program that provides external mental health support and counselling.
- Guidance and support from our Owner/Operators, Nominated Supervisors, Educational Leaders and Operations Managers who have extensive experience in the Early Childhood Education and Care sector.
- Leadership and management programs that assist participants to manage and deliver high-quality Early Childhood Education and Care services, including: managing staff, motivating the team, group-values, leadership skills and organisational capacity.
- Scan here to view our current career opportunities:





“I’ve been a member of the Explore & Develop team from the day we opened, over seven years ago. In that time I’ve experienced an immense amount of growth, both personally and professionally, which has been translated in my career. I’ve worked within, and progressed through a number of roles, including: Educator and Room Leader, Educational Leader and currently as Nominated Supervisor.

While working towards becoming the Nominated Supervisor of our service has been something I have strived for, I feel that this is testament to the guidance, support, leadership, and mentoring I’ve received from my colleagues over the years, which I am extremely appreciative of and grateful for. They have been able to teach me all there is to know about Early Childhood Education and leadership, and have constantly proven their support by backing me wholeheartedly throughout the process by steering me in the right direction.”

Kahra, Nominated Supervisor, Explore & Develop Leichhardt

NATURE PLAY IN URBAN LANDSCAPES

Our little school is a 56 place, birth-5 year long day early learning service on a rooftop, in Sydney's Inner West. It is high density, inner city living at its best!

Many of our families live in apartments or little houses with tiny yards. It's so important for these children to experience unstructured play in natural spaces and develop a positive relationship with the natural world. Urban nature play is a central part of our identity.

Critically reflecting on the context of our place at Explore & Develop Annandale includes considering more than just the physical environment. It urges us to consider the local community, the history, the cultural context and how they come together. It asks Educators to think about the relationship the school community has with the world beyond the gate (or in our case, the lift), and how the school can build positive connections with it.

Extending upon this line of thinking, we connect with the nature we find around us and consider the role we can play in looking after small, disconnected patches of green - little parks and green corridors - that have become special worlds where play and civic participation can come together.

We have many small spaces within walking distance that we visit with children, allowing us to walk different paths and see multiple parts of our community on the way. Over the years, these places have been named by the children, reflecting their play and shared imaginary landscapes.

We have encountered theory that supports teachers and Educators to rethink the nature-culture binary, so that we have changed our definition of 'nature'. Our spaces are not 'wild', but the 'natural' elements like sticks, leaves, climbing trees and bugs that we nature players love, are all there.

Visiting these spaces regularly opens the children's eyes to the abundance of critters that live around us and invites learning about the creatures we share our urban world with.

We are interested in the plants in our park spaces as well as in the gardens in front yards and nature strips. We research which plants are native and which plants were in Sydney before there were houses and roads. Using a post-colonial lens to re-imagine our place offers a new way to consider our practices in relation to our context.

We find that Aboriginal perspectives in curriculum and 'Sustainability for Education', combined with our rethinking of nature pedagogy, have helped to create a nexus of ideas that have deeply impacted our practice.



TRANSITION TO SCHOOL

Explore & Develop Breakfast Point is tucked away in a newly built estate of Sydney.

At the beginning of 2017, a new local school, St. Patrick's of Mortlake, opened its doors just minutes from the service's front gate.

Many preschool children and Educators were eager to find out about the new school and so contact was made with the school's Principal.

During email and phone conversations, it was discovered that the vision and philosophy held by both the school and Explore & Develop Breakfast Point were aligned on 'transition to school', and the relationship began to flourish, resulting in effective collaboration. A 'School Information Evening' was held, providing families with the opportunity to ask questions and discuss their child's readiness for school.

The preschool children began visiting the school in small groups of 10, joining the kindergarten reading sessions and exploring the classrooms, outdoor environments and school resources.

The preschoolers seemed cautious at first when entering an unfamiliar space. However, when their visits continued and their confidence grew, they soon realised that 'big school' is a fun and enjoyable place for them.

These regular visits provide the children with a sense of belonging to their community, and an opportunity to become familiar with a school's routine.

The Educators enjoy the opportunity to deepen their understanding of school-based learning environments and practices. They also relish the chance to discuss with teachers pedagogical practices, such as play-based programs and the incorporation of children's interests into the curriculum.



Understanding each other's curriculum and planning helps both the Educators and teachers work together and develop effective transitions from preschool to school and support the continuity of children's learning.



USING EVERY NOOK AND CRANNY

The idea that our large, gated carpark could serve as a blank canvas for wonder, investigation and freedom of movement was sparked from an Educator's reflection during the height of COVID in 2021.

Many of our families live in apartments or have small backyards and their ability to visit parks and other outdoor spaces is extremely limited. We realised that our service is often the main outlet for children to engage in outdoor play.

Casting a critical gaze across the spaces offered within our service, we concluded that our carpark was the perfect area to offer large, encumbered spaces for the children to explore and engage in active play.

Our first carpark event, 'Wheels Week' was meticulously planned with ongoing consultation with families, an hourly schedule and months of preparation.

The success of the week gave the team the confidence to begin using this space for spontaneous learning experiences.

Gross motor games, water fights and yarning circles and nature play are often held in the carpark.

We also use the space to offer opportunities for play and investigation linked to significant dates, such as the lion dance for Lunar New Year, cooking damper on a campfire in celebration of NAIDOC Week, and yoga and meditation to highlight Self-care September.

One year on, we see classes simply popping out to the carpark to enjoy afternoon tea in the garden, to tell stories or to engage in mixed-age learning with another class.

The provision of additional outdoor play opportunities in this space has had innumerable outcomes for children including: physical and gross motor development, teaching of road safety, strengthening social skills, understanding and celebrating diversity and positive emotional wellbeing through connection to nature.





ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

Every curriculum decision at Explore & Develop Lilyfield advocates for what we consider is important. It puts a spotlight on what we value and what experiences we consider are appropriate for children's learning.

We believe when children are taken out into their world, they are given a voice. They are also given choices and are entrusted with responsibilities. Their experiences are crucial in developing their sense of identity as active members of the society they live in.

Our work as Early Childhood Educators is to facilitate a pedagogical companionship that values sustainability, diversity, and complexity, supporting children to live an honourable relationship with our planet.

WALK THE LAND

If we believe that children should truly love and respect the land they walk on, then an ongoing and deep relationship with the land should be fostered and embedded within our curriculum. We use the area around our service to create a sense of "my home" and support children to develop an intimacy with their neighbourhood. By regularly visiting local places, children begin to look at the rich detail within their natural landscapes.

LEARN THE NAMES

By becoming a "practiced observer", we move beyond generalities to talk intimately and specifically about what we are seeing and sharing with children. By learning the names of the flora and fauna unique to our neighbourhood, we support children to develop deep knowledge.



EMBRACE NATURE

When we begin to think of ourselves and nature as interconnected, we allow ourselves to embrace nature and consider ways to support children to think with nature.

“Love for a specific place, makes possible love for other spaces.”

Ann Pelo
Author, *The Goodness of Rain*

SYDNEY CITY IS OUR PLAYGROUND

Explore & Develop Castlereagh Street is located in the heart of the Sydney CBD, which means that learning environments are mostly internal. As a result, excursions are embedded into our programs. Babies through to preschoolers experience the true outdoors regularly.

Children visit different places of interest in the Sydney CBD according to planned or spontaneous experiences that tie in with specific curriculum topics, such as wellbeing, STEM, literacy and community engagement.

As stated in our philosophy, “We are indoors, but love nature and seize every opportunity we have to be outdoors.”

We have easy access to the Botanic Gardens and Hyde Park. Children get 'beyond the gate' to visit these beautiful parks to 'launch rockets', collect natural resources, feel the mud on their feet after a rainy day, have picnics and spend time exploring and climbing.

Open-ended interactions, spontaneity, risk-taking and connection with nature are fostered in these real outdoor environments. Sunshine, fresh air, chirping birds and greetings from members of the general public always bring smiles to the children's and Educators' faces.

The children and Educators regularly participate in NAIDOC Week celebrations at Hyde Park, ANZAC Day services and a favourite activity is visiting the large Christmas tree in Martin Place.

Buying babycinos or purchasing ingredients from supermarkets for our healthy cooking experiences is another regular occurrence the children enjoy.



When learning about dinosaurs and other animals, the Australian Museum has offered us tours and hands-on experiences in analysing fossils and animal species.

These real-life experiences foster autonomy and interdependence of children and encourage them to build connections to their community.



GUIDING EARLY INTERVENTION

Supporting, nurturing and guiding children's development and wellbeing in the early years of life is at the heart of our philosophy, pedagogy and practice at Explore & Develop Brookvale, as it lays the foundation for children's future learning and success.

For some children, early childhood intervention (ECI) is needed to ensure that this support is tailored to their individual and unique needs. As no two children are the same, or progress at the same pace, working with specialised allied health professionals can help achieve the best plan of support for children.

ECI is provided at Explore & Develop Brookvale for children who have a disability, developmental delay or learning need, to ensure their continued development and meaningful participation in all facets of their life.

Some areas that ECI proves to be beneficial include: language, physical, sensory, social, emotional and cognitive development. In fact, ECI may mean the difference between a short-term delay and a long-term one.

Research shows the positive effects of ECI well beyond their schooling and into adult life (ECIA Vic, 2022).

Accessing ECI before starting school often means that a child's transition to school is smoother. Our Educators and the child's support services can communicate with a school and make sure any required physical changes are in place, as well as areas of support, so that the child can participate fully and enthusiastically in their schooling experience (NSW Gov, 2022).

When it is highlighted that a child is experiencing developmental delays, it is an understandably overwhelming time for parents and families. We are able to walk alongside families during this journey and guide them, be a shoulder to lean on and an understanding ear to talk to.

Our Educators' years of professional experience, as well as personal experiences of navigating down this path themselves with their own families, sets us apart in the level of understanding and care that we provide to families.

In addition, we aim to identify and break down the barriers to children participating in the classroom, by incorporating specialised strategies as well as applying for inclusion support services in the classroom.

Our approach at Explore & Develop Brookvale results in the recognition and celebration of each child's strengths and interests and the creation of learning environments, programs, curriculum and practice that is tailored to each child, so that they can reach their full potential.



SECURE, RECIPROCAL RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships at our service are fostered and sustained through secure moments spent together, assisting the children to develop safe foundations to explore the world around them.

Professional development opportunities are provided to our Educators to further their expertise. This includes initiatives such as 'Circle of Security', where the Educators encourage the children to foster their foundations of attachment. 'Circle of Security' is an internationally recognised evidence based program which draws from 50 years of research into attachment.

Our Educators enjoy collaborating, being challenged and implementing new ideas to bond with the children. A recent activity has been Educators and children using sign language or visuals to communicate with non-verbal children and to make routines more inclusive.

In line with Reggio Emilia's philosophical approach, small unencumbered group times, play times and play spaces offer increased opportunities for more reciprocal relationships between Educators and children and children and their peers while at our service.

"A secure and consistent relationship through a secure base develops a child's sense of connection and belonging."

Pam Linke, Author of 'Connecting Behaviour with Belonging'

Creating lasting and trusting relationships from the moment that children are brought to the service is what is most important to us. Whether it be greeting children and families in the morning, providing orientations or stay and plays for families, we ensure all Educators have a comprehensive understanding of making positive connections.



These opportunities give the service a welcoming atmosphere, allowing children, their families and Educators to feel safe to grow, laugh, learn and explore during their time here.

RELATIONSHIPS

As a long-established service, we feel that the strengths in our practice can always be linked back to our relationships.

Our teaching teams support one another through professional growth and bond over a shared love of what they do.

We find humour in the everyday and share a lot of laughs. The staffroom table is often laden with a delicious spread as we celebrate one another's special life events.

Children and Educators from different rooms regularly come together to share everyday moments, joyful group times and mealtimes or bigger centre events, like 'Dance for Sick Kids' raising funds for Ronald McDonald House or 'Australia's Biggest Morning Tea' for the Cancer Council. We love to plan celebratory events for the children, including our 'Open Classroom Day' and super fun 'Water Play Day'.

Families speak of the sense of calm they feel when they walk through our doors and they soon become part of our 'family'.

It is wonderful to see the way in which families influence who we are as a service - be it through a suggestion for a program, joining in our play or simply being a part of the buzz of friendly chatter at the end of each day.

Our community continues to grow through family referrals and the community vibe extends beyond a family's time with us.

We take great pleasure in visits from past families and we've even welcomed back grown-up alumni as work experience students!



Within our local community, we have established relationships with a diverse group of services and professionals including Occupational Therapists, Paediatricians and primary schools.

Of course, we must acknowledge the value of the wider Explore & Develop community. The ability to pick up the phone or pop into another service and connect with like-minded Educators is a unique opportunity that we highly value!



COASTAL CURRICULUM

At Explore & Develop Freshwater, regular walking excursions to the beach and other landmarks are key parts of the educational curriculum. Our excursions give children the time and opportunity to develop a sense of connection to their land and appreciation for the environment, fostering a sense of 'belonging' to their local community and broadening their understanding of the world around them.

These excursions are known as 'beyond the gate'. They give participating children the chance to be active members of the community and support their general health and wellbeing.

Before we head out 'beyond the gate', the children and Educators meet and plan the excursion, predicting any potential risks that may be encountered along the way.

We do this via our Risk Benefit Assessments that are created through open discussions with children and Educators.

WHAT DO WE NEED TO CONSIDER?

- The suggested route we will be taking. We share a map as a visual resource with the children, discussing landmarks and the nearest cross roads.
- Road and water safety precautions.
- What supplies we will need to carry with us (hats, water, footwear, food, sunscreen, first aid supplies, technology, journals, magnifying glasses, etc.)
- We discuss potential boundaries prior to arriving and when we reach our destination.
- As a team, we discuss ratios and support staff who will be joining us, and ensure they have read the Risk Benefit Assessment.
- Head counts are implemented throughout the session - prior to leaving, during and on return.



While on excursion, the children develop self-awareness to become confident, resilient and capable learners, so that they can take responsibility for themselves, their actions and the world around them.



RICH LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

When entering a space, your senses are engaged to generate a feeling. How a space makes you feel can shape your emotions, attitudes, and actions.

We often hear during our service tours that our space 'feels like home'. Endeavouring to create a setting where children feel safe and secure, our rooms are filled with adult sized furniture such as dining tables and lounges, as well as real plants and natural resources. As you walk through the service you will always hear gentle acoustic music playing, usually by an Indigenous artist.

During daily set ups, our Educators carefully consider their choice of resources and consult with the children to establish environments where children and their families feel connected. This may be through incorporating elements or interests from home, or linking to current themes of a room's project.

Educators meaningfully observe and plan, creating provocations at different heights and areas within each room. These areas draw the child in, igniting curiosity and excitement through using both familiar and unfamiliar resources.

This commitment to the way spaces are presented transcends to our outdoor environment. Our adventurous outdoor environment is filled with native plants, vegetable gardens, sandpits, big gum trees, branches to climb on, and a natural adventure playground. These provide curiosity and learning opportunities, promoting possibilities of risk taking and teamwork.

From jumping in mud and digging for witchetty grubs, to observing the life cycle of a ladybug, our outdoor space provides endless opportunity for learning and generating a passion for the natural world.

The children are supported to enhance their learning through experiences linked to their interests. Educators thoughtfully consider the way the environment is set up and resources are utilised in the outdoor space to offer further opportunity for learning - painting and dress ups for creative expression or balls, tyres and ropes to foster development of gross motor skills.

Our environments at Explore & Develop Narraweena are driven by the children's interests, family links and community connections.





INTENTIONAL ART MAKING

At Explore & Develop Artarmon, we recognise the important role that the creative arts play in children's lives and learning. When entering our space, you see evidence of children's thinking, learning and self-expression.

Art making is a process, which is why we provide long stretches of uninterrupted time for children to be creative and then revisit projects over weeks and even months.

With the support of intentional Educators who guide creative thinking, self-reflection and visual art techniques, the children harness new skills and develop their artistic sensibilities and self-belief.

Art is also not limited to one space or one medium. Experiences are thoughtfully planned and designed to be inviting, build curiosity and connect with the children's interests. From clay to felt-tip pens, children are taught to see the beauty and wonder in every mark they make.

What families have found most impactful about the way we present and share children's art is how we capture the children's voices.



Senior Preschool Class 2021, What Does Country Mean to Me?

Taking the time to sit with a child and hear their explanation about what their marks represent, what they want it to express or the challenges they faced along the way, have been very powerful for all.

With the support of our Creative Arts Leader and dedicated team, we continue to ask the question 'how does our practice reflect our pedagogy?' ensuring that we are offering meaningful visual art experiences that build children's confidence and nurtures their creativity. After all, there is an artist within all of us!





TINKERING

Learning is not only limited to what we can provide for children, but what learning they can provide for themselves. That is, for children to use their hands to create something - to imagine, problem solve and re-invent stories, ideas and concepts.

When we provide children with these opportunities to express themselves, we witness their journey to discovering what they can do.

The environments and learning spaces we provide children reflect the way we view them; as capable, confident and involved learners. We believe that learning is co-constructed through interactions between children, Educators and children, through play, inquiry and tactile 'hands on' experiences.

Tinkering offers children the opportunity to deepen their learning experiences through exploration, experimentation and an iterative style of engagement with resources. For instance, children can “take things apart, put things together, figure out how things work, attempt to build and make creations using tools,” ('Making and Tinkering with STEM', by Cate Heroman, 2017, p. 8).

When children are invited to resource their own learning, we can see their imagination and creativity drive their learning.

We encourage children to take risks through the use of real life tools, to develop their confidence and explore things in a way that is unique to them.

When we walk into the learning spaces not knowing what will happen - that's when we know it's authentic learning.



Our team at Explore & Develop North Ryde Public School is committed to providing quality, play-based educational programs for children. Through collaboration, planning and reflection, we provide a safe space for children to discover their capabilities.

The implementation of our tinkering space has offered us a lens into the children's creative process.

EXPLORING OUR COMMUNITY

Explore & Develop Roseville provides unique experiences for children and Educators through our 'Exploring our Community' program.

- Bush Tucker Garden - the children care for the land, watering the plants, removing the dry leaves, going on bug hunts, having a yarn and partaking in planting. The children experience the fragrances of the plants while engaging in conversation with the Educators about what they see and smell. They collect plants to eat and natural materials while learning on Cammeraygal Land.
- Swim School - we value the importance of water safety and physical activity. We offer swimming lessons for our preschool children at Carlile Swim School in Castle Cove. This excursion brings the opportunity to walk through our community.
- Monday Mark Making - in our Community Space each week, we have the opportunity to utilise a quiet space for mindful art classes. In small groups, the children are provided with a variety of different art experiences.
- Construction Site - as we foster community connections, we offer excursions to the local Woolworths construction site. The children are provided with a clipboard and pencils and they are invited to draw what they observe. The children share their findings with their peers and add these to the Excursion Inquiry book.



- Scott Crescent Reserve - the children respect space and boundaries on the equipment, collect natural resources, demonstrate teamwork and investigate the natural elements.
- Wheelie Day - this is an opportunity for the children to bring their wheels to preschool and ride them in our undercover carpark. This supports children's learning around road safety and safe scooter/bike riding. Road signs are placed around the carpark, for children to engage in role play, which supports children to understand each other and the world around them.

INQUIRY BASED LEARNING

At Explore & Develop Waitara, we value a child led, inquiry-based learning model. Educators support children to theorise, hypothesise and wonder by asking children key questions - what, why and how?

The topic of dinosaurs is one the children love to dive into and learn more about, so that is exactly what our Educators did with our 4-year-olds! It began through open-ended play using the dinosaur figurines in home corner with loose parts.

Through conversations during play, a wider interest in dinosaurs became apparent, extending to what a dinosaur environment might look like and the types of dinosaurs that existed. Pictures of dinosaurs with accompanying text were included in the play space, for the children to name the dinosaurs and continue their discovery.

The children suggested to add leaves and sticks for the dinosaurs to eat, so the Educators took the children outside to find what they needed from the garden and added it to their imaginative play scene.

One child suggested a volcano, so with some brainstorming, the children decided to create a papier-mâché volcano to be used in their dinosaur environment. They glued, painted and decorated it with charcoal (exploding lava rocks).

A sensory experience was created at the table with three natural coloured play doughs representing variations of the earth's surface.



The dinosaur discovery continued with the incorporation of music and movement, through a dinosaur hunt held outside where there were objects to climb through, around, over and under.

Dinosaur felt board stories and action songs were also very popular with the children.

Together the children and Educators created a shared learning experience, where they engaged in child-led and play based inquiry. It was amazing to see the curiosity and wonder from the active and engaged learners!



ENRICHED BY NATURE

"It's more than just a nice garden, it's feeding our soul," says Merran Bardsley of Explore & Develop Baulkham Hills' outdoor play spaces.

When we spend time in nature, every one of our senses benefits. We see the beauty, smell the rawness, hear the birds, feel the textures and taste our produce. Educators and children thrive. Our bodies relax and our minds become more present.

We are a new service and have had the opportunity to create an outdoor environment that's been purposefully designed to create areas of exploration and play that represent places and spaces in nature that we come across when at the beach, on a bush walk or in a parkland.

The very core of our curriculum is evident in the outdoor play spaces.

These areas form a key part of the daily program, where children learn to nurture and care for the trees, plants, flowers and herbs.

Learning opportunities are provided as children and Educators connect through horticulture, nature play, a love of earth and the simplicity of life.

Spending time in nature also allows the Educators and children the opportunity to engage in discussions about First Nations people and their connection with Country.





RELATIONSHIPS AND CONNECTIONS

When asked “what does Explore & Develop Emu Plains do well in terms of pedagogical practice?” the overwhelming response from all our staff was relationships!

Our pedagogical practice starts right from the moment orientation occurs. The child is not seen separate to this process, our approach is holistic.

Everything that is relevant and important in the child's life is incorporated and accommodated for, to ensure that the relationship with all parties is valued and the child's individual needs are met.

Educators view every child as strong, capable, competent and connected to people, places and environments.

Our Educators value and promote the connection between themselves, the child and their family.

Fundamental to the establishment of these strong relationships is the existence of trust, confidence, and dependability.

The relationships we develop with children and their families encourage the children's developmental growth, including their identity and connection to their wider community.

Such relationships also let us into the child's world, to become an extension of it and not separate to it.

We know that children do not exist in any one environment, that they come from a wider community and play an important role in it.

To solidify this approach, we have created strong connections and relationships in the wider local community to support and nurture the education and care of children at Explore & Develop Emu Plains.



PALLET PLAY CHALLENGE

At Explore & Develop Glenmore Park, sustainability is embedded into our daily practices. We value the role we all play in ensuring the continuity of a liveable world for future generations.

As the need for sustainability becomes more apparent globally, so does the importance of embedding sustainability into children's programs. We would love to take this opportunity to share one project that demonstrates our commitment to sustainable practices.

Our Educators and children created the beautiful resources (seen in the images on this page) during a team and relationship building challenge, and they are still being used today!

The interests of the children guided the construction of the resources, with the children using a variety of tools and recycled materials.

Throughout the creative and building process, the children and Educators had meaningful discussions on repurposing and recycling and how these simple actions can help the environment.

This challenge encouraged opportunities to build stronger relationships with the children in our care as well as each other.

Encouraging the children to engage in experiences that extend their interests while learning more about the world around them was one of the key benefits of the challenge.

The planters have sparked an interest in caring for our garden as well as learning more about growing our own food, the lifecycle of plants, the impact of human activity on the environment and the interdependence of all living things.





EXPLORING CULTURE

Being part of a community, especially one as culturally diverse as ours, is a privilege and one we truly appreciate at Explore & Develop Norwest. Rich with heritage and tradition that spans the globe, this diversity invites us to dive head-first into exploring culture through a child-focused lens: how it is central to a child's individuality, identity and sense of belonging and how gaining knowledge about and appreciation for different cultural practices can influence their lifelong learning.

Weaving this exploration of culture into our curriculum is an embedded practice at Explore & Develop Norwest. It allows us to work in close partnership with families and build meaningful connections as we recognise and celebrate our differences. The children love learning about their own culture, the cultures of their friends and Educators and other cultures from around the world through play, music, dance, sharing stories and small world play.


Following the children's interest is paramount and often leads us into the garden and kitchen!

Gardening and cooking are found at the heart of communities all around the world and these experiences always encourage conversation about the land in which we live and the different cultural practices and traditions that enrich our lives.

Group gardening and cooking experiences also reinforce each child's sense of belonging in their environment as they engage in turn-taking and cooperative play. The children showcase care and curiosity throughout these experiences, making connections with one another and drawing connections from the real world, building on prior knowledge and absorbing new information as they encounter mathematics, science and language in the most authentic settings.

Our Educators are passionate about recognising children as valuable and capable members of their community and actively explore all the things that make them unique individuals, empowering them in their interactions, negotiations and relationships. This sense of agency supports their growing understanding of the diverse and boundless world around them.





EDUCATOR WELLNESS

At Explore & Develop Parramatta, we've made a commitment to being a mentally healthy community for the benefit of our Educators, children and their families.

We believe that Educators' mental health is the number one priority and we recognise the importance of ensuring that each Educator is fully supported and equipped to be able to feel their best and recognise when they, or someone they know, might need some support with their mental wellness.

Our statement of commitment with the 'Be You' federal government mental health program highlights that we are committed to supporting children, young people, Educators and families within our learning community to achieve their best possible mental health.

Our 'Be You' Action Team has undertaken training to ensure they can support all Educators and children at our service.

The training consists of a series of learning modules that are available to all Educators. The modules further support Educators to know how to: be a part of a mentally healthy community, create supportive partnerships with families and support learning resilience.

In addition to the 'Be You' program, we have a partnership with AccessEAP (Employer Assistance Program). This program provides our Educators and staff with free confidential access to counselling, resources and check-ins to support all employees' wellbeing and mental health.



PROGRESSIVE MEAL TIMES

At Explore & Develop Penrith, we have an embedded practice of progressive mealtimes. You might ask 'what are progressive mealtimes and how does that work in early childhood settings with so many children?'

During a progressive mealtime, the children can choose when they wish to eat, over a longer scheduled period of time. This allows for children who are playing to continue playing without interrupting their learning and engagement.

Why should a child who doesn't feel hungry, have to stop what they are doing to sit at a table for a meal they are not ready for?

Progressive mealtimes offer plenty of opportunities for positive experiences and learning, including: nurturing relationships, promotion of health and wellness, and a chance for children to practice language and self-help skills.

Progressive mealtimes encourage children to make decisions based on their needs. We know that children thrive on routine, but when it comes to mealtimes, a fixed approach to food isn't always appetising.

Children's worlds are too often filled with 'busy'. Our approach to mealtimes allows both children and Educators to be in the moment and present with each other.

In addition to mealtimes, our children are involved in setting up meals. They will collect the food trolley from the kitchen and then help set the table. The children sit in small groups and self-serve independently.

Even the youngest members of our learning community are supported to feel capable and independent. These types of opportunities offered during mealtimes support each child's sense of agency and belonging.

Progressive mealtimes in our service are a calm, relaxed, and unhurried practice. Of course, this didn't happen overnight. But, now we can confidently say that it is a ritual rather than a routine.

Progressive mealtimes as a practice has enabled us to shift our thinking - we are not governed by time or routine, we now move with the children. The ebb and flow of learning happens naturally, and children intrinsically go and eat when they are hungry, whatever time that may be.





PHILOSOPHY IN ACTION

When creating a 'Service Philosophy', it is important to remember and reflect on how it is evident in Educators' practices. Words can be easily said, but it is in our actions that we see the potential.

When creating our 'Service Philosophy', we had at the forefront of our minds how it would look in practice and how we could make it relatable to what we do. By creating a physical representation of our 'Service Philosophy', it assisted Educators in understanding why they are doing what they do.

Through exploration with Educators, children and families, reflective practice becomes evident as we link our practices with our 'Service Philosophy'. This is where our 'Philosophy in Action' comes in.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

- Through provocations that prompt thoughts and ideas, we incorporate our 'Service Philosophy' into our curriculum and show how our practices are driven by it.
- We display ideas and thoughts in our foyer, where families comment and provide feedback.
- We showcase our achievements and how our 'Service Philosophy' drives our passion.
- When our wall display becomes a full piece, it is removed and turned into a display book. The wall can then be showcased repeatedly.

“Free the child’s potential, and you will transform them into the world.”

– Maria Montessori



Educators' voices and values are valid and always considered when creating a 'Philosophy in Action'.

These processes allow for the questioning of provocations and ethics, as well as enriching decision-making about children's learning.

The 'Philosophy in Action' encompasses children, environments, ethics, and collaboration.



NUTRITION MISSION

Children are at their best when they are happy, healthy and energetic. Knowing the effect that diet and nutrition have on mood, behaviour, immune response and overall wellbeing, has led us to partake on our 'Nutrition Mission' at Explore & Develop Terrigal.

We have an onsite chef who curates our menus to ensure that they are balanced, appealing and meet the nutritional requirements of young children. On a daily basis, our chef prepares fresh meals and snacks that offer variety, are made from whole foods and taste great.

The meals we offer are low in hidden sugars and additives with the aim of eliminating artificial colours, flavours and preservatives. We use fresh ingredients and real foods that have had minimal human intervention.

We are able to cater for children with food intolerances and allergies along with religious, cultural or lifestyle food preferences.

Along with providing nutritious snacks and meals, we also aspire to educate children and families about healthy food choices. When children are offered a wide variety of selections at our service, it broadens the options that families might provide in the home environment.

Another important way that we foster nutrition education is by encouraging children to serve themselves during our progressive mealtimes. This builds independence and also empowers children to make decisions on when, what and how much to eat.

When children are able to make their own selections, they're more likely to eat what they've chosen. Serving oneself may also lead to less overeating and being open to new foods.



OUT THE GATE EXPERIENCES

At Explore & Develop Umina, our location in the heart of town enables us to frequently venture 'out the gate' and into our local community.

Not only does this allow for the children to see and experience the world around them, but they also become more visible within their community.

We may visit the library, post office, park, bakery, supermarket or any of the other services located close to our centre. These outings provide a range of learning opportunities:

- Literacy and numeracy development as we identify and 'read' signs and symbols in the environment, pay for purchases and use shopping lists and maps.
- Road and pedestrian safety.
- Communicating clearly and respectfully with others for a range of purposes.
- Contributing to the running of the service by carrying out errands.
- Developing a strong sense of self through increased confidence and independence.
- Children can make links between their service, their home and their community.



“Experiences of relationships and participation in communities contribute to children’s belonging, being and becoming.” 'Early Years Learning Framework' p.28

It's not just walking excursions that we participate in. As an extension of our educational program, we also regularly make outings into the broader community. Bushwalking in national parks, frolicking at the beach, watching performances at the theatre and exploring at the Australian Reptile Park are all experiences on our schedule. We access these destinations through private and public transport and for the children, the journey always provides excitement and delight.

Our 'out the gate' encounters reflect the principles and practices of the Early Years Learning Framework. Children develop respect for diversity and experience different ways of being. Our learning environments extend out into the community and become more inclusive and make learning more meaningful and relevant.



CONNECTING WITH OUR COMMUNITY

Connecting with the community will be a passion for the team at Explore and Develop King Street, Newcastle. Our service is due to open mid 2023.

We will place great value on the relationships with our local families, community, and peer learning centres.

Our philosophy aligns closely with that of Reggio Emilia - believing that it takes a village to raise a child - and we aim to embrace the warmth and friendliness of the local Novocastrian community.

Providing children with the best start in life is about creating adventures and sense of wonder as they discover the world around them.

We plan to often explore our local community and learn the history and uniqueness of Newcastle through visits to the beach, neighbouring bushland and local areas of interest.

We will involve families in our activities and curriculum and ensure that they become part of each child's journey into lifelong learning.

On site, it is intended that our beautiful adventure playground will assist children to develop skills of independence. They are sure to be challenged on the rope bridge and fortress and explore the restored dinghy boat and water play areas.



BELONGING AND BEING

Explore & Develop Newcastle East is a new service. We're situated in a visually significant building that features a monochromatic, dark red facade and fine brickwork.

Our building was originally designed as a shipping warehouse in Federation Warehouse style and was converted to an Early Childhood Education and Care service in the 1970's.

Our site binds us to Newcastle's history and provides a platform for our service, children and families to learn about the city we live in and connect with our community.

Images of local Newcastle landmarks - including Lake Macquarie - are positioned in our play areas, assisting children and families to foster their sense of belonging to the local community.

Building on this sense of belonging, our curriculum planning is child-led and centred - it follows rather than leads children, responding to and expanding on their expressed interests.

We view children as inventive, enriched, and vibrant human beings, actively constructing their own experiences.

We aim to respond reflectively and respectfully to the skills and interests of our children and their families, creating a curriculum that is not only developmentally appropriate but also culturally and individually suitable.





CONNECTING WITH NATURE

Explore & Develop Conder has recently re-opened its doors to welcome families and Educators, after previously being owned by another organisation.

We took the opportunity in late 2022 to make changes to the physical environments, so that it embodies the Explore & Develop ethos of creating natural environments that are reflective of home.

The northerly aspect of the children's outdoor play area meant that we have an abundance of sunlight, which has created a great platform to create a sensory garden that the children can enjoy.

It was a priority to add a herb garden, fruit trees as well as native plants that will attract insects and bird life to the garden.

The children are encouraged to be caretakers of their space and be actively involved in the care of the garden, including watering, composting and planting.

The end result is that the children will be involved in picking herbs and vegetables to be incorporated into freshly prepared meals for a full 'garden to plate' experience.

Explore & Develop Conder supports the mounting evidence that connecting children to the natural world through early education programs and environments enhances learning, and is essential for healthy development.





Explore & Develop

Where curiosity leads to learning

FRANCHISE OWNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES AT EXPLORE & DEVELOP

All Explore & Develop services are privately owned and operated by Franchise Owners who appreciate and value the contribution that high quality Early Childhood Education and Care services make to children, families and the local community.

Our franchise business model helps people who are passionate about Early Childhood Education and Care to own their own service, and supports them to successfully plan, set-up, open and manage an Explore & Develop service.

We strongly believe that each Explore & Develop service should have its own identity that is shaped by the Franchise Owner, their team, families and the local community.

Our support structure provides a strong compliance framework that's delivered via our bespoke software platform that can be tailored to suit a Franchise Owner's philosophies.

New franchise opportunities in the ACT are now available.



We strive to provide:

- Each Franchise Owner has a dedicated Operations Manager who has extensive experience in the sector and is available to guide and support the Franchise Owner and their team.
- A commercial team who is on hand, specialising in property searching, lease negotiations, financial budgeting and marketing.
- Ongoing professional development, training and collaboration opportunities co-ordinated by the Support Office team, including: webinars, face to face learning conducted by sector professionals, leadership programs, Nominated Supervisor and Educational Leader Forums, and Franchise Owner meetings and Conferences.
- Scan the QR Code to discover more about becoming a Franchise Owner with Explore & Develop.



Explore & Develop

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ABOUT US

- Explore & Develop services offer caring and nurturing environments to accommodate the needs of infants through to preschool-aged children.
- We believe that children develop at their own rate and in their own time. This is why we offer daily programs that reflect a calm, relaxed and unrushed environment for growing and learning.
- We help children reach their full potential by providing enriching, meaningful and real opportunities for learning and development through emergent educational programs.
- We believe that children learn as they explore, discover, make, create and imagine. We value constructive play as a tool for learning through our natural environments.
- We celebrate our differences through acknowledgement and acceptance of diversity within our community. We value the insights and traditions that can be shared, respected and appreciated within our services.
- We welcome and value each family and their contribution. Embedded in our culture is the notion that families are a part of our service and are invited to make contributions to all aspects of its operation.
- All Explore & Develop services are individually owned and operated by committed Franchise Owners who have been carefully selected because of their dedication, skills and passion for ensuring that every child gets a great start in life.

FOR LOCATIONS AND CONTACT INFORMATION, PLEASE VISIT OUR WEB SITE:

