

# INSPIRING PLAY SPACES

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# PREFACE

We are both kindergarten teachers who have worked in the early childhood field for a combined 25 years. We have worked together for 7 years and during that time we have shared a passion for play-based, highly creative, artistic, child-centred learning.

In recent years we have achieved our goal of sharing the planning, set-up and implementation of all experiences with all staff at our service. We firmly believe that regardless of qualification, all staff should have an opportunity to share their interests, talents, creativity and skills to create inspirational play-based experiences for the children we have the privilege of working with each day.

*Inspiring Play Spaces* is designed to encourage early childhood educators to create open-ended play spaces for children that will support imagination and develop creativity, and to help them understand the benefits of play in relation to the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) and the National Quality Standard (NQS).

We hope that you enjoy using this book and that it continues to be an inspiration to you and your colleagues. After working in early childhood for many years we are always looking for new ways to present equipment and new ideas to create beautiful play spaces – not only that the children will enjoy but that invite adults to play too.

## How to use this book

The book is divided into chapters which reflect the range of experiences that children in early childhood settings may come across every day. We use photographs to demonstrate these experiences and the variety of ways they can be executed or set up, and describe in detail how these experiences support the 5 learning outcomes from the EYLF and reach high standards of education and care in relation to the NQS. We also provide details on what you require to set these experiences up in your centre and where you can source the equipment.

Chapters 1–3 explain some fundamentals in relation to some of the focus areas of meeting the NQS, outline various inspiring resources you may wish to gather for your service and some vital information on artistic stages of development.

Chapters 4 –15 define some common learning experiences that would be offered in early childhood education services.

The idea is to turn to the chapter that interests you or that you feel you need fresh ideas to inspire you to create a new learning experience in your service. Browse through that chapter to get ideas of different ways to present that experience. You may not want to re-produce the exact idea, but may be inspired by an aspect or something you see in a photo to create your own ideas.

This book is designed to be used by all staff in your service. It will make it easier for educators to understand the developmental and educational benefits of each experience on offer. The information relating to the EYLF and NQS can be used to write observations and learning stories in relation to these or similar experiences.

*Susie Rosback and Natalie Coulson*

Daniel, Ryan and Sam enjoyed playing with the cars.





# WHY WE DO WHAT WE DO

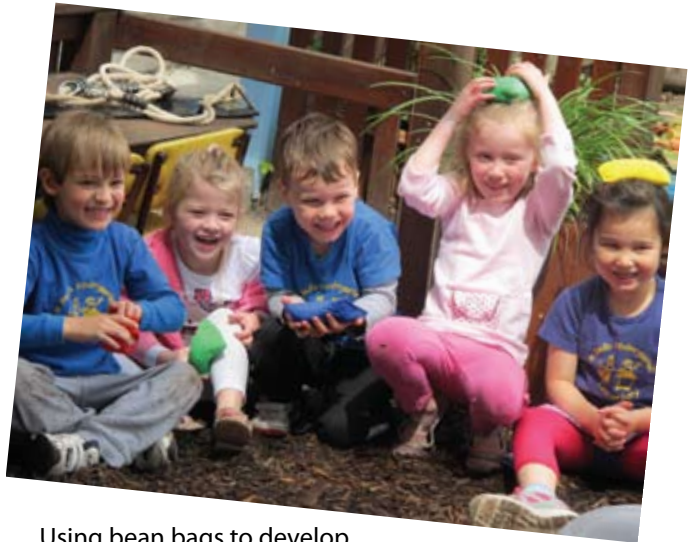
In relation to creating inspirational play spaces there are four areas we focus on. These are play-based learning, open-ended play spaces, access to equipment and natural products. These topics have been chosen as the focus because of their strong links with the EYLF and NQS and our goal of achieving high standards of education and care.

### Play-based learning

The EYLF defines play-based learning as 'a context for learning through which children organise and make sense of their social worlds, as they engage actively with people, objects and representations' (DEEWR 2009, p.6). As educators we all know the value of play and how vital it is for young children's development. It provides the opportunity to investigate, explore, discover, practise, try, fail, succeed, observe, imagine, dream, pretend, share, listen and participate in everyday activities, thus allowing children to develop a sense of who they are and an understanding of the world in which they live.

The EYLF describes children as being able to 'recognise their agency, capacity to initiate and lead learning and their rights to participate in decisions that affect them, including their learning' (DEEWR 2009, p.9). With this in mind, planning then develops children's sense of self, their image of who they are and their ability to 'participate fully and actively in society' (DEEWR 2009, p. 7). Being shown this respect develops confidence, efficacy and self-discipline. It helps children to regulate their own behaviour and develop focus and concentration for what they are doing. Their work has more meaning and they therefore put in more effort as the drive to complete the task has come from within.

The EYLF places a strong emphasis on play-based learning. It is vital, however, that we as educators understand what that means in relation to our role. Communicating with children, listening to their interests and developing strong and supportive bonds with each child is imperative when planning a play-based program that supports each child's interests, abilities and family culture.



Using bean bags to develop throwing, balancing and catching skills.

Patrick, Archer and Tom made instruments and formed a band.





Tom learnt how to hold a chicken on a farm visit.



Grace, Ruby and Jessica cooked cakes in the sand kitchen.

Taking information gathered from children and their families to create play-based learning experiences will provide children with a rich and valuable learning environment, develop a strong sense of self and the important part they play in directing their learning and their ability to influence the learning of others.

All this requires creativity, spontaneity and flexibility. Educators need access to a range of equipment, and often ideas gathered from colleagues to respond to children's interests, to create stimulating learning experiences at a moment's notice. This book is designed to support your staff in creating beautiful, inviting, stimulating and creative play experiences for children, thus supporting the vital intentional teaching role that we as educators play in children's lives. 'Intentional teaching involves educators being deliberate, purposeful and thoughtful in their decisions and actions' (DEEWR 2009, p.15).

### Open-ended play spaces

Children will learn at their own level and at their own pace if they are given the opportunity to participate in play experiences that have no desired outcome. Experiences they can construct or co-construct using their imagination without feeling they

needed to produce something in the end will better support learning and creativity. These experiences allow each child to work at their own level and explore what is interesting to them. We need to 'create learning environments that encourage children to explore, solve problems, create and construct' (DEEWR 2009, p.15).

It is no longer considered acceptable to offer play experiences resulting in 25 identical pieces of art hanging up in your room. This is not seen as supporting creativity; in fact it could stifle it. Discussions with children should lead to creative experiences being devised and implemented in partnership. If this experience is of interest to certain children, they might then participate in the activity. If they produce similar concepts or works of art, that is alright but each will demonstrate their own ideas within the initial concept.

Colouring-in pages and pre-cut out shapes limit a child's potential to develop their own ideas and say to children that we don't think they have the ability to create their own works of art. To stimulate a child's creativity you could place children's picture story books or beautiful colour photographs of items of interest such as, fish, flowers, animals, boats, planes etc.



Children will look at these and may be inspired to draw them and or cut them out themselves. Works of art created from the child are more meaningful, respectful and beautiful than photocopied or pre-drawn pictures produced by teachers.

To help children develop the skills to draw for themselves, you can sit with them and discuss the shapes you see in the pictures. Children will begin to draw shapes once they reach the symbolic and recognisable stages of artistic development, so if your discussions are simplified then even young children will have a go at drawing, painting and creating for themselves.

Prior to the symbolic stage of development, in the manipulative stage children should be allowed to explore art mediums by scribbling, mashing, thumping, pounding and being creative without being expected to produce recognisable art. (Details of artistic stages of development are discussed in more detail in chapter 4.) Trying to push children ahead of their current stage of development can stifle creativity.

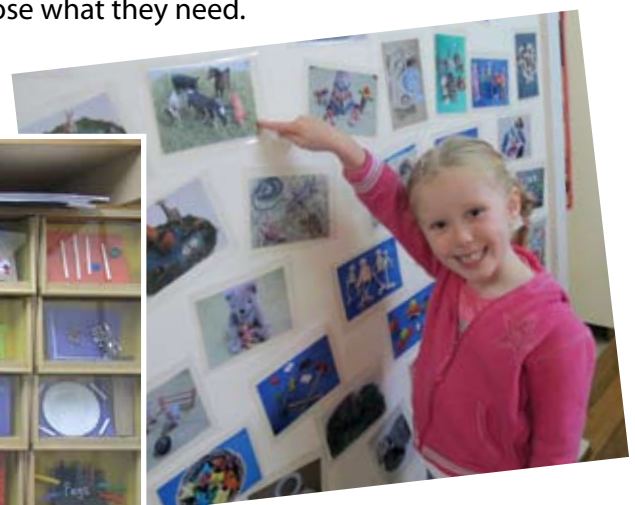
## Access to equipment

Educators need to be flexible, think fast on their feet and respond to requests made for equipment to extend the learning experience.



George, Kaz and Jessica were inspired by the book *Where The Wild Things Are* when creating these drawings.

The storeroom should be well organised and children need to know what is available to them. Having photos of everything available in the storeroom allows children to point to an item and request the equipment they require. Much of the equipment should be available within the room, but if this is not possible, then this is a great way to give children access to more resources. Art and craft supplies should be displayed or available so children can choose what they need.



Grace is selecting the farm animals to use in block corner.

Children can see clearly the art and craft supplies available to them and are encouraged to request items they need at any time.



This was well loved by the children at St Paul's, created using sand, bark, logs and leaves.

## Natural products

The early childhood environment needs to include many natural products. Rocks, wood, sand, plants, flowers, acorns, leaves, shells and anything else you can find should be incorporated into the play environment where possible. Gumnuts and wood shavings can be used in home corner, little logs and rocks as props in block corner, and have a number of natural products on the playdough, pasting and drawing tables too.

Ideally, the outdoor space has water available at all times, mud and dirt, logs for sitting on and a trickle stream or water feature. The assessment guide for element 3.1.1 of the National Quality Framework states that assessors may observe 'outdoor spaces that include plants, trees, edible gardens, rocks, mud, water and other elements of nature' (ACECQA 2011, p.89).

You are limited only by your own imagination. A pile of rocks, a couple of little logs, a bowl of water, leaves from the garden and a bunch of rosemary will turn a handful of plastic animals into a real-life safari.

To gather your resources, organise a staff walk during planning time. Not only will everyone enjoy the fresh air but your supply cupboard will quickly fill with wonderful items gathered from the environment that will enhance the experiences you will be creating to support the children's learning and creativity. Alternatively, you could take the children on a nature walk or ask families to gather items near their homes to add to your nature box. Get a handy parent to saw up

a fallen tree branch to create a boxful of useful little logs for fairy tables, farms, African safaris and other visually stimulating play spaces.

**REFLECTION:** Learning in an environment that emerges from the children's interests develops a love of learning and a sense of respect, belonging and efficacy. Being able to respond to a child's interests after discussions with children is a skill all educators must develop in today's early childhood education culture.



# INSPIRING RESOURCES

In order to run an early childhood program in line with current regulatory requirements, services should have the following resources in their cupboards. We don't include here the obvious paper, paints, textures, glue, musical instruments, blocks, rolling pins, scissors, Lego ... the list could go on and on. The resources listed in this chapter are the sorts of things you will need to scrounge and forage for. They are the special treasures found in the little op shop around the corner, offcuts from your nearest fabric shop, bits and bobs from your local park or your backyard, or maybe some treasures you have seen during a weekend away at the beach or in the country.



Plants



Rocks



Logs



Mini pinecones and seed pods



Rosemary