

ARIAH PARK PRESCHOOL

Educational Program & Practice Policy

Introduction

There is a strong theoretical and philosophical basis that underlies educational practice in the early childhood field. This has resulted from decades of research in the discipline areas of psychology (such as developmental, cognitive, educational, behavioural, cross cultural and personality psychology and more recently, neuropsychology), sociology (such as family, educational, cultural, gender, rural and urban sociology), philosophy of education (includes the pragmatism of Dewey, critical pedagogy/social justice approaches, reconceptualist perspectives, modernist/post modernist perspectives, structuralist/post structuralist perspectives, and Malaguzzi's Reggio Emilia perspectives amongst others) and also the history of educational practices and principles. The modernist/post-modernist approaches endorsed a psychology related view of the child and emphasized the child as an individual, individual needs etc, the structuralist/post-structuralist movements endorsed a sociological view of group and cultural emphases and argued against emphasizing the individual child's needs and that we should be more concerned with 'the group'. It was an either/or argument when the answer is that both perspectives are important. The reconceptualists were active in the 1990's and were about equity, so their writing was about specific issues like gender, social justice etc (eg Glenda MacNaughton's writing) and usually had political connotations.)

In light of these influences, early childhood programs today acknowledge that learning and development in 0-8 year olds occurs across all areas of development, namely cognitive (includes moral reasoning), physical, social, emotional and language development. These programs are eclectic and therefore apply the work of different theorists such as (1) constructivist approaches to learning developed from the original work of Piaget and the (later) post Piagetians and neo-Piagetians, (2) social constructivism developed from Vygotsky's work via Bickhard, Katz, and Rogoff, amongst others (3) Gardner's notion of multiple intelligences, (4) theoretical perspectives about dispositional cognition and development (Katz's work and that of Perkins, Jay & Tishman), and (5) social learning/social cognition theories that developed from the early work of Bandura, Erikson, Piaget, Kohlberg through to the more contemporary research of Damon, Gilligan, Maccoby and Selman, amongst others.

These theories have culminated in the tradition of early childhood programs being:

- child centred, promoting positive progress for children individually as well as for the group as a whole, providing opportunities for children to cooperate and interact as they learn
- developmentally appropriate e.g. using play based, active learning activities in line with the learning needs and interests of three to five year olds

- promoters of physical activity regarding both large and fine motor skills, and active play, both of which are key areas of developmental progress in preschoolers
- active supporters of families and the parenting process and active supporters of parental involvement in all aspects of the program

Aims

Ariah Park Preschool will ensure that the developmental and educational needs of children attending the preschool will be met through a program planning process that incorporates (1) both Australian and international early childhood research as noted above, (2) the current Australian National Quality Framework and the Early Years Learning Framework curriculum documents, (3) the centre's stated philosophy and (4) the Early Childhood Code of Ethics as acknowledged below (see 'Relevant Early Childhood Professional Standards'). Accordingly the centre's program will be built upon early childhood philosophical, theoretical and ethical bases. To this end it aims to:

1. Foster lifelong positive dispositions towards learning e.g. a genuine curiosity to explore ideas, intrinsic motivation to learn, enjoyment of active, hands on learning and a desire to communicate one's own ideas both verbally and expressively e.g. through the creative arts, play, active exploration and problem solving
2. Be holistic, socially/culturally contextualised, inclusive and equitable as per the field's anti-bias perspectives (see this centre's 'Anti-Bias & Equity Policy'), and will acknowledge the individual needs of children within the needs of the group as a whole
3. Be of a collaborative nature in relation to viewing (1) children as co-learners, (2) parents as partners in the development of the educational program, (3) staff members as a cohesive, self-supporting team and (4) interacting with and supporting the small, rural/farming community that the centre is a part of
4. Use the children's developmental, educational needs and interests as the starting point for program planning thus ensuring that - along with sensitive staff guidance - all children will be supported to engage in all aspects of the program and enjoy doing so. This more individualised process will occur within the daily plans for the group as a whole
5. Encourage each child to take an active and increasingly responsible role in their own and their peers' learning and plan accordingly to foster this. This acknowledges the need to encourage children's physical development and desire to be physically active in relation to both outdoor and indoor play and to incorporate learning opportunities throughout these activities

6. Use a spiral program planning model thereby ensuring that higher order thinking develops and that skill development also occurs progressively. An essential element in this model is a process of critical reflection and analysis which will usually – but not necessarily always - become a basis for future planning. (If children reach a planned outcome it may not be necessary to continue planning in this area, unless the Director wishes to extend their ability.)

7. Support the Director and any other teachers taking responsibility for planning and evaluating the centre's program by providing appropriate time release for this, as has been usual practice in the early childhood field

Legislative Requirements

Education and Care Australian National Regulations 2011

Who is affected by this policy?

Children

Families

Staff

Practicum students

Relevant Early Childhood Professional Standards

Early Childhood Code of Ethics:	I, II, III-5, III-6, IV-1, IV-2, IV-6, VII-1 VII-2
Early Years Learning Framework:	Outcomes 1–5, Principles – 1-5
Education & Care Services Australian National Regulations:	73-76, 103-105, 156(1), 115, 107, 108
National Quality Framework:	Quality areas – 1.1, 1.2, 3.1, 3.2, 4.1, 4.2, 5.1-5.3, 6.1.2, 6.2, 6.3, 6.4, 7.2.2, 7.3.3, 7.6

Sources/References:

Education and Care Australian National Regulations 2011

Ebbeck, M. Waniganayake, M. (2010). (Eds.), *Play in early childhood education: Learning in diverse contexts*. Sth Melbourne Vic: Oxford University Press

Hirsh, R. (2003). *Early childhood curriculum: multiple intelligences, developmentally appropriate practice and play*. Boston MA: Allyn & Bacon

Machlan, C., Fler, M. & Edwards S. (2010). *Early childhood curriculum: Planning, assessment & implementation*. Port Melbourne Vic: Cambridge University Press

Murray-Thomas, R. (2005). (6th Ed.), *Comparing theories of child development*. Belmont CA: Thomas Wadsworth

Siegler, R. & Alibali, M. (2004). *Children's thinking* (4th Ed.), Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall

Rogers, S. (Ed.), (2011). *Rethinking play & pedagogy in early child education: concepts, contexts & cultures*. New York NY: Routledge

Procedures:

In line with the stated aims above, centre staff under the guidance of the Director will use the following procedures:

1. Make available to parents, details of the educational program through a range of means, e.g. the centre's notice board, their child's communication book, a newsletter, electronic means, conversations etc. Parents are always invited to give the staff feedback, particularly in how they perceive their child is responding to the program. Parental participation of this nature is introduced at the initial enrolment interview and encouraged thereafter. (See 'Enrolment & Fees Policy' Point 1.4 and the centre's 'Initial Enrolment Interview Checklist')
2. When undertaking program planning, the Director will usually inform parents of future topics and areas of learning, inviting their involvement or help with resources etc. This action is also a follow on from the Director's discussion with parents at the initial enrolment interview. The Director will also seek information from parents on an ongoing basis about their child's interests and experiences at home as a basis for individualised program planning
3. Under the Director's guidance, staff may at times be involved in subtly collecting observations of children's skills, behaviour and learning. The observational strategies the Director uses will vary and may be one or more of the following methods: running records, anecdotal observations, post event observations, time or event sampling, and journal notes. (Time sampling & event sampling is when you set a time to observe eg 15 mins and note everything that happens to a child in that time, event sampling is when you observe a particular kind of behavior (event) that you are focusing on, for 15 mins or other length of time. In event sampling you're scoring the behavior as a tally, nothing else. You're just interested in frequency of occurrence. It's a method often used with aggressive children to ascertain how bad the problem is.) These observations will be used as a basis for individual program planning which will be incorporated within the daily plans for the group as a whole. This observational information will be used along with additional information provided by parents, regarding the child's current play interests, recent family experiences such as holidays etc

4. The Director will develop plans for individual children. This will ensure that every individual child is planned for on an individual basis. These individual plans will be incorporated into the Director's daily plans for small group and/or paired learning experiences, which will in turn be subtly incorporated within the daily plans for the group as a whole. Thus the needs of individual children and the group as a whole are continually and simultaneously addressed. It needs to be noted that staff will not 'ignore' the particular needs of children once their individualised planning period has passed. In fact the ability of staff members to appreciate individual differences and continue to observe and cater for these informally (i.e. when it is not documented) continues, even after a period of individualised planning for a child has been completed. If anything the ability to do this becomes sharper due to the underlying and ongoing process of individualised planning.

5. The Director will share information about and guide staff in the execution of the educational program as she/he deems appropriate, and similarly with the evaluation of it, e.g. the degree to which outcomes for individual children were achieved and what future planning for those children might entail, the ongoing needs of the children as a group etc. As part of this process the Director will also provide feedback to staff on their contributions, with a view to furthering their own skills and knowledge

6. The Director will use a spiral model for program planning incorporating the following phases:

- Subtle and systematic observation of a sub group of children. These observations will be used to identify a key priority/ies or outcome/s for each child in the sub group which may be in the area of learning or skills or attitudes as per the NQF and EYLF curriculum frameworks
- Planning will be undertaken for the next week, aimed at successfully achieving these identified developmental and/or educational outcomes for the sub group of children. This planning will be subtly incorporated into the daily plans for the whole group. At the end of the week, staff will commence collecting observations for the next sub group of children to be planned specifically for
- Each child's progress towards reaching these individual outcomes will be monitored and evaluated by the Director and may be discussed with staff, at the end of the fortnight
- (If necessary) these evaluations will be used later when planning individually for these children on the next rotation, when observations will again be gathered before further individualised planning is decided upon

7. The Director will use a range of teaching approaches: intentional teaching, informal teaching, teaching by modelling, overt demonstration, questioning, problem posing, discovery learning, socially constructed learning (Vygotskian perspectives) and constructivist approaches (Piagetian influenced perspectives). These strategies will be used via one to one learning, learning experiences for pairs, small groups and the group as a whole

8. The Director will use technology and foster technological learning in children selectively and as is developmentally appropriate. Because screen viewing is an extremely passive activity, it would not be appropriate to use this as a predominant or ongoing activity due to the fact that preschoolers frequently need to be physically active. 'Technology' here refers to computer use, use of white boards, DVDs, television, ipads etc

9. All staff will respect the children's developing self esteem and self efficacy as learners and accordingly will demonstrate this knowledge by ensuring that children enjoy their learning experiences. As part of this process, staff will consciously foster feelings of **intrinsic** satisfaction as opposed to extrinsic satisfaction which results from external influences such as prizes, rewards and the overuse of empty praise statements by adults. An example of the latter would be when in response to a child's drawing, a staff member would always say 'that's beautiful!' The overuse of such external reinforcement merely increases children's dependence upon external sources to motivate them, thereby reducing intrinsic motivation to learn. Intrinsic motivation is an important life skill. Hence staff interactions will not over use meaningless praise statements e.g. 'that's great' but will instead focus more on reinforcing the effort and goals of the child e.g. 'wow, you really tried hard, you must feel pleased with yourself/I like the way you worked out how to balance the blocks/you look as if you're really enjoying that/you've been concentrating on that drawing for a long time, I like what you did' etc

10. The Director will develop warm, nurturing relationships with children on an individual basis and as such will provide a model for other staff and practicum students. This is also a preventative behaviour management strategy because the Director will be more likely to successfully manage difficult behaviour due to the quality of her/his relationships with children

11. The Director will manage difficult behaviour in a way that is ethical, firm and developmentally appropriate (see the centre's 'Interactions with Children & Managing Difficult Behaviour Policy'). She/he will support and guide staff in doing the same

12. Providing an educational program that acknowledges individual learning needs demonstrates that the centre program recognises (i) there are different pathways children will take in their learning, (ii) they will need different amounts of time to get there and (iii) the end result will often be different

13. The indoor and outdoor (including the natural) environment and equipment are seen as being critically important elements in successful program planning and practice. The outdoor play area also exists as testimony to the recognition that physical activity and gross motor play are very important for preschoolers. Therefore great care is taken in the purchase and arrangement of these play environments and maintenance of equipment as per the centre's 'Equipment & Educational Materials Policy' and 'Environmental Awareness & Sustainability Policy'

14. All learning experiences will be in line with children's developmental status, interests and past experiences. Thus their learning will be experiential and meaningfully contextualised to allow for conceptual consolidation in the foundational stages of new learning. It will also be transformational whereby once new learning becomes consolidated; opportunities will then be provided for children to meaningfully apply new knowledge or skills in different situations. This phase also logically, provides opportunities to extend what has been learnt. Program planning in this way demonstrates the spiral nature of the centre's programming model which scaffolds children's learning towards higher levels of thinking, unlike cyclical approaches which are merely repetitive.

15. Individualised program planning for children will be sensitive to family and cultural preferences and as deemed appropriate by the Director, incorporated into the planning process. In most instances the Director will share program planning with parents when it is undertaken specifically in relation to their child. This sharing will also include follow up information about the child's progress towards reaching the outcome/s that were set

16. In line with social constructivist perspectives (Vygotsky's theory – see 'Introduction' above) the educational program will provide and evaluate learning-through-play experiences that:

- Promote small group interaction and paired play experiences that foster cooperation, joint problem solving and goal setting and will involve the skills of listening to and supporting peers as well as articulating one's own understandings

17. In line with constructivist perspectives (Piagetian perspectives – see 'Introduction' above), the educational program will provide and evaluate learning-through-play experiences that:

- Allow individual children to sometimes work alone should they choose, and in doing so have opportunities to challenge themselves and experience intrinsic satisfaction as they actively explore their own ideas

18. The program and daily routines will be carried out such that transitions are smooth, predictable and children are forewarned of any changes, although the daily timetable will in time, communicate this to children. This practice assumes staff supervision is organised clearly and in advance so that all staff are aware of their responsibilities and are available to support children as needed

19. As is usual practice in preschools, the Director and any other teacher responsible for program planning will have 4 hour minimum release time from teaching on a weekly basis to:

- Develop individual program planning for a small group of children
- Evaluate previous individual plans for children, noting if a previous outcome was achieved, partly achieved or needs to be extended further next time
- Collate, update and interpret children's observational information in relation to this planning
- Plan for the whole group, group times, daily routine etc for the oncoming week

- If necessary, make teaching aids
- If necessary change visual aids in the playroom
- If possible and whenever warranted, re-arrange outdoor and/or indoor equipment
- Administration tasks as needed e.g. petty cash shopping, paper work related to student teachers (if at centre), newsletters or any other information to be provided for parents, preparation of monthly report for Committee of Management, excursion preparation, book club, attend to emails, collect and respond to correspondence, collate day book, revise policies, liaise with local school, attendance sheets.

20. The ongoing professional development of the Director and staff is critical in rural areas where resources are limited and distance disadvantages teachers in relation to attending professional conferences and workshops. To this end the centre's ability to subscribe to a number of professional journals, magazines etc and thus develop a centre based professional library is of paramount importance and benefits all staff and parents. The centre's Committee of Management therefore will as finances permit, cover the financial costs of two to three annual, professional subscriptions

The Director will ensure that this policy is maintained and implemented at all times.

Review

The rationale and procedures for reviewing this policy are twofold. They are as follows:

(1) This policy will be formally reviewed after three years. All formal reviews will be conducted by the Committee of Management, the Director, parents, and interested community members if the Director feels it is necessary. For example the Director might decide that a health and hygiene policy should be considered by a local doctor or nurse as part of the formal review process. All formal reviews will be recorded as per the 'Centre Review Sheet – Formal Three Yearly Review Form' attached to each policy. Given the large number of policies that early childhood centres are now required to develop, it is considered that a formal review does not need to be taken more frequently because (1) each policy needs time for staff to adapt to and time to run so as to enable a well informed evaluation/review during the third year and (2) the formal, three year review process will be a demanding one for the preschool Committee of Management which is composed of voluntary members. Therefore it is considered that a formal review should occur regularly but not excessively so.

(2) Within this three year period however the policy will still be monitored, evaluated and minor adjustments can be made in line with daily occurrences or needs at the centre. This will occur as part of an ongoing process of review undertaken by the centre Director and staff during each calendar

year. These reviews will be recorded and dated as per the 'Director's Annual Review Form' and these will also be attached to each policy, along with the formal, three yearly reviews.

The Director's annual review will occur on an ongoing basis and will thus ensure this policy is continually updated. For example if updates are received from a government department that warrant immediate change of some policy procedures, or if implementing a policy has resulted in agreement by staff that minor modifications are necessary before the policy is enacted upon again, these improvements can be made immediately through the Director's annual review process and then be presented to the Committee of Management for ratification at the next formal, three yearly review.

Reviewed: 15th May 2014.

Signed: Leanne Watterson