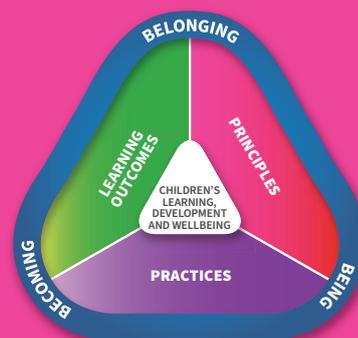


PRINCIPLES



The following 8 Principles reflect contemporary theories, perspectives and research evidence concerning children's learning and early childhood pedagogy. The Principles underpin practice that is focused on assisting all children to make progress in relation to the Learning Outcomes. Educators consider ethical, socially just and inclusive principles for children's learning in the early years when they:

- build secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships
- develop partnerships
- are respectful of diversity
- embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives
- commit to equity, inclusion and high expectations
- consider sustainability in all its forms
- engage in critical reflection and professional learning
- exercise collaborative leadership and work as a team.

Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships

Educators who are attuned to children's thoughts and feelings, support their learning, development and wellbeing. Children's first attachments within their families and trusting relationships within other familiar settings provide them with a secure base from which to explore the environment and build new relationships. Children's experience of positive caring relationships and interactions with others plays a crucial role in healthy brain development.

Research has shown the importance of relational and place-based pedagogies for children's optimal learning, development and wellbeing. Through a widening network of secure relationships, children develop confidence and feel safe, respected and valued. They become increasingly able to recognise and respect the feelings of others and to interact positively with them.

Educators who prioritise nurturing relationships through culturally safe and responsive interactions, provide children with consistent emotional support. They value the role of familiar routines and everyday rituals in children's lives, and ensure children develop the abilities and skills, such as self-regulation, and understandings they require for interacting with others. Educators also help children learn about their responsibilities to others, to support their own and others' wellbeing, to appreciate their connectedness and interdependence as learners, and to value collaboration and teamwork.

Partnerships

Partnerships are based on the foundations of respecting each other's perspectives, expectations and values, and building on the strength of each other's knowledge and skills. Learning Outcomes are most likely to be achieved when educators work in partnership with children, families, other professionals and communities, including schools.



These partnerships recognise the diversity of families and children. In genuine partnerships, educators collaborate with children, families, other professionals, community members and teachers in schools to support children's learning, development and wellbeing.

In genuine partnerships educators:

- value and respect each other's knowledge of each child
- value and respect each other's contributions to and roles in each child's life
- build trust in each other
- act with empathy and sensitivity when children are experiencing adversity
- learn about other ways of knowing, *being*, doing and thinking
- communicate and share information safely and respectfully with each other
- share insights and perspectives about each child with families
- acknowledge the diversity of families and their aspirations for their children
- engage in shared decision-making to support children's learning, development and wellbeing.

Educators recognise that families are children's first and most influential teachers. They create a welcoming and culturally safe environment where all children and families are respected regardless of background, ethnicity, languages spoken, religion, family makeup or gender. Educators, children and families collaborate in curriculum decisions to ensure that learning experiences are meaningful. Educators actively encourage such collaborations.

Ethical partnerships are formed when information is shared responsibly, and educators take safety precautions to ensure children's right to privacy and

protection. Educators know children engage with popular culture, media and digital technologies so they build partnerships with families and others to keep children safe and families aware of e-safety information.

Knowing that some children may not have experienced safe and supportive family environments, educators enact trauma informed practices. In doing so they engage with other professionals to enhance the learning, development and wellbeing of these children and as part of this educators engage in information sharing and record keeping.

Partnerships involve educators, families, other professionals, community members and teachers in schools working together for the best interests of children. These partnerships provide opportunities to explore the learning potential in everyday rituals, routines, transitions and play experiences to ensure active participation and engagement in learning is inclusive of children with diverse backgrounds, family structures and capabilities.





Chad Briggs with his artwork *Lifelines and Bloodlines*

Respect for diversity

There are many ways of living, *being* and of knowing. Children are born *belonging* to a culture, which is not only influenced by traditional practices, heritage and ancestral knowledge, but also by the experiences, values and beliefs of individual families and communities. Respecting diversity means valuing and reflecting the practices, values and beliefs of families within the curriculum. Educators acknowledge the histories, cultures, languages, traditions, religions, spiritual beliefs, child rearing practices and lifestyle choices of families. They build culturally safe and secure environments for all children and their families. Educators value children's unique and diverse capacities and capabilities and respect families' home lives.

Educators recognise that diversity contributes to the richness of our society and provides a valid evidence base about ways of knowing. For Australian children it also includes promoting greater understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing and *being* and actively working towards Reconciliation.

When educators respect the diversity of families and communities, and the aspirations they hold for their children, they can foster children's motivation to learn and reinforce their sense of themselves as competent learners. They make curriculum decisions that uphold all children's rights to have their cultures, identities, languages, capabilities and strengths acknowledged and valued, and respond to the complexity of children's and families' lives. Educators think critically about opportunities and dilemmas that can arise from diversity and take action to redress unfairness. They provide opportunities for children to learn about similarities and difference and about interdependence and citizenship.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives

Providing opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to see themselves, their identities and cultures reflected in their environment is important for growing a strong identity. Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in all educators' philosophy and practice is a key tool to advance Reconciliation. This also contributes to Closing the Gap commitments and fulfilling every Australian child's right to know about Australia's First Nations' histories, knowledge systems, cultures and languages. Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives is a shared responsibility of approved providers, educators, and other professionals working in early childhood educational settings, regardless of whether Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families are enrolled in that setting.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the longest surviving Indigenous culture in the world and the custodians of this land. Their knowledge systems, traditions, ceremonies, lore and culture have survived for over 60,000 years. Relationships and continual connections to Country and community are at the heart of who they are and the contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people – past and present – should be acknowledged and valued in children's learning.

Educators think deeply and seek assistance where possible, through engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, about how to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in the philosophy of the setting, their planning and implementation of curriculum. They have a responsibility to create culturally safe places, working in intercultural ways through pedagogy



and practice. An intercultural space is created when educators seek out ways in which Western and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge systems work side by side.

Educators grow their knowledge of kinship systems and cultural connections in their local communities so they can build engaging reciprocal relationships between early childhood settings and community. Acknowledging the strengths and capabilities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families while supporting wellbeing assists in reinforcing and affirming a positive sense of identity for their children.

The history and culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is respectfully and truthfully reflected through community involvement and culturally sensitive practices. Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges and perspectives encourages openness to diverse perspectives, enhances all children's experiences and assists in the authentic advancement of Reconciliation. It is a commitment to children learning about what has come before and working together for what is to come.

Equity, inclusion and high expectations

Educators who are committed to equity recognise that all children have the right to participate in inclusive early childhood settings, regardless of their circumstances, strengths, gender, capabilities or diverse ways of doing and being. They create inclusive learning environments and adopt flexible and informed practices, including making reasonable adjustments to optimise access, participation and engagement in learning. This supports wellbeing and positive outcomes for children in all their diversities. Reasonable

adjustments² are the measures or actions taken by approved providers and educators to assist the meaningful participation of children with disabilities or who are experiencing barriers to learning. Educators nurture children's optimism, happiness and sense of fun and support children's friendships and interactions with each other.

Educators engage in critical reflection, challenge practices that contribute to inequities or discrimination and make curriculum decisions that promote genuine participation and inclusion. To support all children's inclusion, they recognise and respond to barriers that some children face, including attitudinal and practical barriers. Such barriers can be related to disability, family diversity, cultural and linguistic diversity, neurodiversity, and children and families living through trauma and adversity.

Educators view all children as competent and capable and hold high expectations for their learning. They strive to provide all children with equitable and participatory environments and experiences to promote their learning, development and wellbeing. In doing this, educators recognise that equitable means fair, not equal or the same, and some children may need greater access to resources and support to participate in early childhood settings. By developing their professional knowledge and skills, and working in partnership with children, families, communities and other professionals, educators continually strive to find equitable and effective ways to ensure that all children have opportunities to achieve Learning Outcomes and flourish.

Sustainability

Humanity and the planet we share with all living things face some big challenges. Educators and children have important and active roles to play in creating and promoting sustainable communities.

Broadly defined, sustainability spans environmental, social, and economic dimensions which are intertwined. Environmental sustainability focuses on caring for our natural world and protecting, preserving and improving the environment. Social sustainability is about inclusion and living peacefully, fairly and respectfully together in resilient local and global communities. Economic sustainability refers to practices that support economic development without negatively impacting the other dimensions. This includes a focus on fair and equitable access to resources, conserving resources, and reducing consumption and waste.

2 Disability Standards for Education 2005 (Cth) s. 3 (Austl.).

Adopting this broader definition helps to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. In sustainable communities, the requirements of humans, animals, plants, lands, and waters can be met now and for generations to come.

Educators recognise children's avid interest in their world, their ability to engage with concepts of sustainability and their capacity to advocate and act for positive change. Children's agency and their right to be active participants in all matters affecting their lives is supported. Further, children's understanding of their citizenship, and rights and responsibilities as members of local and global communities, is built through meaningful and relevant educational experiences.

Thinking about sustainability means thinking about the future and acting to create healthy, just and vibrant futures for all. Educators encourage children to develop appreciation of the natural world, understand our impact on the natural world, and the interdependence between people, animals, plants, lands and waters. Sustainable practices are created with children and children are supported to take an active role in caring for the environment and to think about ways they can contribute to a sustainable future. Recognising that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have looked after Country for the past 60,000 years, educators and children learn about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, culture and rich sustainable practices.

Educators provide opportunities for children to learn about all the interconnected dimensions of sustainability, understanding that sustainability goes beyond learning in nature and being involved in nature conservation. Children are supported to appreciate that sustainability embraces social and economic sustainability – as well as environmental sustainability – and to engage with concepts of social justice, fairness, sharing, democracy and citizenship.

Critical reflection and ongoing professional learning

Educators continually seek ways to build their professional knowledge and skills and develop learning communities. They are co-learners with children, families and community, and value the continuity and richness of local knowledge shared by community members, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders.

Reflection and critical reflection are 2 terms that are often used interchangeably but are different

practices. Reflection involves educators thinking intentionally about their own and others' practices, with certain aims or goals in mind. Critical reflection is a meaning-making process that involves a deeper level of thinking and evaluation. It requires engagement with diverse perspectives such as philosophy, theory, ethics and practice and then evaluating these in context, leading to pedagogical decisions and actions that are transformative. As professionals, educators collaboratively explore, identify and evaluate diverse perspectives with respect to their own settings and contexts. In this way, critical reflection informs future practice in ways that demonstrate an understanding of each child's learning, development and wellbeing, and have implications for equity and social justice.

In practice, educators can frame their critical reflection within a set of overarching questions, developing more specific questions for areas of inquiry.

Overarching questions to guide critical reflection might include:

- What is our understanding of each child, their culture and context?
- What questions do we have about our work? What are we challenged by? What are we curious about? What are we confronted by in relation to our own biases?
- What theories, philosophies and understandings shape and assist our work?
- In what ways – if any – are the theories, knowledges and world views that we usually draw on to make sense of what we do limiting our practice?
- What other theories or knowledge and world views could help us make sense of what we have observed or experienced? What are they? How might those theories and that knowledge affect our practice?
- Who is advantaged/included when we work in this way? Who is disadvantaged, excluded or silenced?

A robust culture of critical reflection is established when educators as a team, as well as children and families, are all involved in an ongoing cycle of review. Current practices are examined, outcomes of those practices evaluated, new ideas generated, tried and tested. This approach supports educators to question established practices and to think about why they are working in particular ways. In such a climate, there is opportunity to engage in deep thinking about pedagogy, equity and children's wellbeing. Educators who are critically reflective are also committed to their own ongoing professional learning and development, actively seeking out opportunities that develop capabilities, as well as



collaborating with their colleagues on aspects of practice in the early childhood setting.

As professionals, educators are committed to lifelong learning and seek out opportunities to strengthen their professional knowledge and skills to support continuous quality improvement in practice. Working in collaboration with colleagues, they identify and negotiate learning priorities, reflect on how they learn best, and look for evidence-informed learning experiences that support deep learning, critical reflection and practice change. Educators recognise that ongoing learning can take many forms. This may include professional learning experiences within settings, for example, professional conversations within teams, coaching and mentoring, professional reading, practitioner inquiry and participating in collaborative research projects. It may also include learning opportunities offered by others, for example, pursuing further study, attending professional conferences and completing professional learning programs. Within early childhood settings, team members share new knowledge and skills gained through professional learning experiences and encourage and support the ongoing learning of others.



Collaborative leadership and teamwork

All educators exercise aspects of leadership in their daily work with children, families and colleagues. Educators lead their own ethical practice as they take professional and personal responsibility for their actions and the decisions they make. Collaborative leadership and teamwork are built on a sense of shared responsibility and professional accountability for children's learning, development and wellbeing. It is a view of leadership that empowers all members of the team to use their professional knowledge and skills in ways that assist everyone to do the best they can for children, families and colleagues in their setting.

Collaborative leadership and teamwork are aspects of a positive work culture where a motivation to enact a professional philosophy of cooperation and collaboration enables positive relationships to grow. Children and families are attuned to the work culture of an early childhood setting, which influences their relationships, interactions and experiences within that setting.

Collaborative leadership and teamwork are built on professional and respectful conversations about practice. Educators engage with different ways of thinking and working to critically reflect on their practice both individually and as a team, and contribute to curriculum decisions and quality improvement plans. Children's learning, development and wellbeing is optimised when educators communicate and share ideas and views about improving practice. Collaborative leadership and teamwork support a culture of peer mentoring and shared learning where all team members contribute to each other's professional learning and growth for high quality programs for children in early childhood settings.