



1.1 Educational Program and Practice Policy

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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.

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 centered, 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

Cootamundra 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:

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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. 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 Services National Regulations 2011
Children (Education and Care National Law Application) Act 2010

Who Is Affected By This Policy?

Children
Families
Staff
Practicum students

Relevant Early Childhood Professional Standards

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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, 1.1.2, 1.1.3, 1.2.1, 1.2.2, 1.2.3, 1.3.1, 1.3.2, 1.3.3, 2.1.2, 2.1.3, 3.1.1, 3.2.2, 4.1.1, 4.2.1, 5.1.1, 5.1.2, 5.2.1, 6.1.2, 6.1.3, 6.2.1, 6.2.2, 6.2.3, 7.1.1, 7.1.2, 7.1.3, 7.2.1, 7.2.2, 7.2.3

Sources/References

Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011

Children (Education and Care National Law Application) Act 2010

Early Years Learning Framework, Belonging, Being and Becoming, Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations for the Council of Australian Governments, 2009.

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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, 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 enrollment interview and encouraged thereafter. (See ‘Enrollment & Fees Policy’ Point 1.4 and the centre’s ‘Initial Enrollment Interview Checklist’)

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2. When undertaking program planning, the Educator 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 Educator's discussion with parents at the initial enrollment interview. The Educator 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 Teacher's guidance, staff may at times be involved in subtly collecting observations of children's skills, behaviour and learning. The observational strategies the Educator 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. 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 Educator will develop plans for individual children in sub groups, on a rotational basis throughout the term. This will ensure that every individual child is planned for on an individual basis at least twice a term – however it must be noted that this will depend on the amount of times children attend preschool each week. These individual plans will be incorporated into the Educator'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 Educational Leader 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 Educational Leader will also provide feedback to staff on their contributions, with a view to furthering their own skills and knowledge
6. The Staff 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
7. 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.

8. The Staff 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 Staff will be more likely to successfully manage difficult behaviour due to the quality of her/his relationships with children

9. The Staff 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').

10. 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

11. 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.

12. Individualised program planning for children will be sensitive to family and cultural preferences and as deemed appropriate by the Educator, incorporated into the planning process. In most instances the Educator 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

13. 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

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14. 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

15. 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

16. 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

Physical Activity

1. Cootamundra Preschool is committed to implementing the physically active message that supports the National Physical Activity Recommendations for children 3-5 years, which are:
 - Preschooler (3-5 Years) should be physically active everyday for at least 3 hours, spread throughout the day. For preschoolers at least 60 minutes should be energetic play.
2. Preschoolers should not be restrained or kept inactive for more than one hour at a time, with the exception of sleeping.
3. 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’
4. Cootamundra Preschool seeks to promote children’s activity by supporting the development of their gross motor skills and fostering the emergence of their fundamental movement skills through a range of intentionally planned and spontaneous active play learning experience. Further we recognized the importance of supporting families to promote children’s physical activity through positive, respectful and reciprocal relationships.
5. Educators actively role model appropriate physical activity behaviours. Staff will also ensure all physical activity is a fun experience for everyone to participate and not for competition.

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Small Screen Time Recreation

1. The Staff 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, ipad etc.
2. Cootamundra Preschool is committed to implementing the key messages about electronic media that support the National Physical Activity recommendations for children 3-5 years, such as:
 - Screen time should be no longer than 1 hour in total throughout a 24hr period
3. Educators model appropriate small screen behaviours to the children
4. Small screen recreation should not be used for rewards or to manage challenging behaviours for any reason

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