



1.2 Environmental Awareness and Sustainability Policy

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Aims

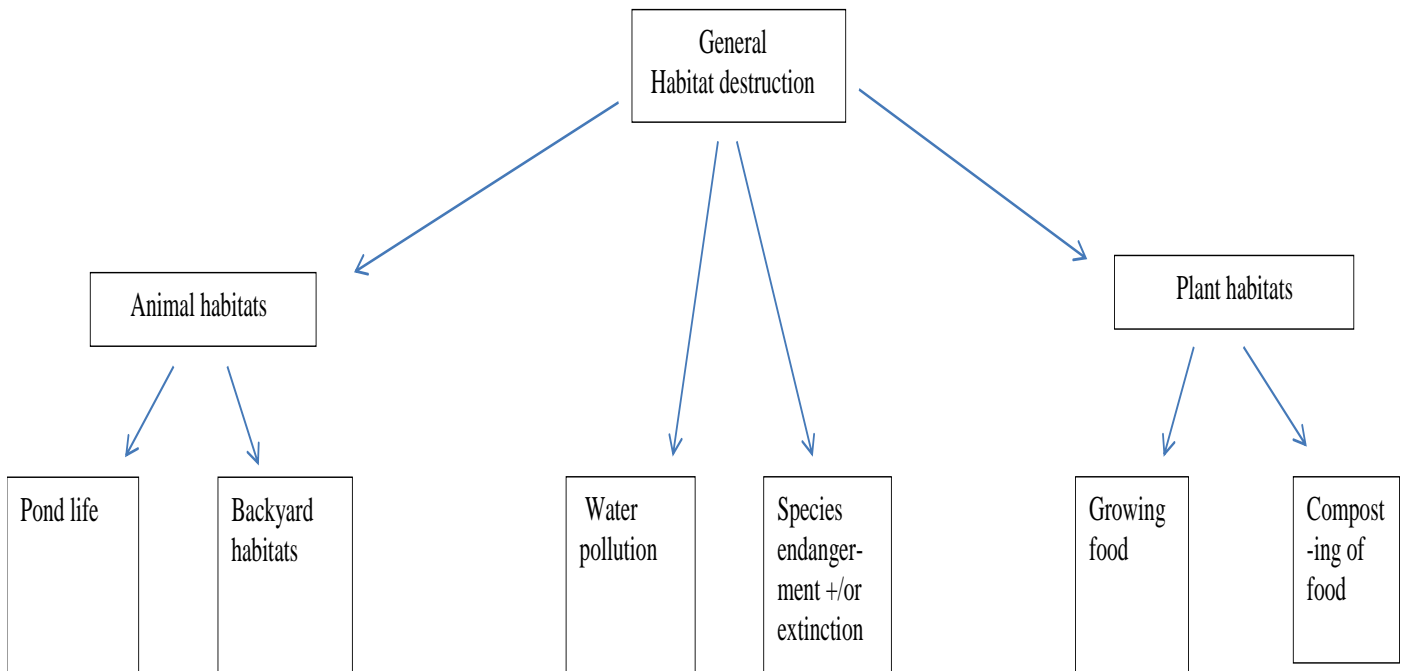
The **Cootamundra Preschool** argues that education for environmental awareness and sustainability in early childhood is a holistic approach in line with this centre's program planning practices (see the 'Education Program & Practice Policy – Introduction' and the centre's philosophical statement). That is, it is interwoven throughout all aspects of life and learning that this centre offers to children, and acknowledges the rural region in which this centre is situated. Therefore the aims of this centre are:

1. To empower children to appreciate the natural environment in a variety of ways and verbalise their experiences. (Aesthetic appreciation and sensory perception, language, emotional and social development.) This includes developing a greater awareness of the rural region they are living in
2. To empower children to think about environmental issues as per the educational program, and discuss them **without** political or negative perspectives being introduced. (Cognition and moral reasoning)
3. To empower children to express their appreciation of the natural environment in a range of ways (drawing, painting, collage etc, dramatic play, books and literacy play, music, creative movement etc)
4. To acknowledge through this policy, the significance of early childhood education as being one of a number of foundation influences for later, lifelong appreciation of the natural environment and the nature of sustainability. The primary influence is of course the child's family

Note: The importance of environmental education has been acknowledged by the federal government with the publication of a national action plan entitled 'Environmental Education for a Sustainable Future' (Commonwealth of Australia, 2000). However it is only recently that theoretical/educational bases for teaching about the environment to preschoolers have started to emerge in the early childhood field. Thus early childhood research in this area is a growing yet still small area of endeavour. This centre strongly believes that in relation to 3-5 year olds, gaining knowledge of sustainable living is not about a few ad hoc, outdoor experiences with plants and animals, but should be a conceptually cohesive approach, integrated across all or many areas of the learning program, in many different ways. Accordingly this centre has adopted research by Edwards and Catter-Mackenzie (2011), (for full details see 'Sources/References' below) in which the researchers developed a learning framework for environmental issues for use with younger learners. This study has been modified slightly (Lambert, 2011). By adopting this curriculum framework, the educational procedures contained in this policy are justified developmentally, in terms of Aims 1 - 4 above. This curriculum framework is built upon the likely environmental experiences 3-5 year olds would naturally have been exposed to in their play and that country children would have experienced many times, particularly those who live on farms. In this way it follows a sound, conceptual progression for pre-school thinkers, of concrete to abstract, simple to complex and familiar to less familiar.

The Edwards & Cutter-Mackenzie framework follows this page and precedes the other sections of this policy.

Early childhood Environmental Educational Conceptual Framework (Edwards & Cutter-Mackenzie, 2011, modified by Lambert, 2011).



Legislative Requirements

Australian Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act of 1999
Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011
Children (Education and Care National Law Application) Act 2010

Who Is Effected By This Policy?

The environment
Children
Families
Staff

Relevant Early Childhood Professional Standards

Early Childhood Code of Ethics: I-4, II-8, IV-4 to IV-6,
Early Years Learning Framework: Outcomes 2–5, 4.1, 4.4, 5.3
Education & Care Services Australian National Regulations: 107, 110, 113
National Quality Framework: Quality areas – 1.1.1, 1.2.1, 1.2.2, 1.2.3, 3.2.2, 3.2.3

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Next review date: March 2015

Sources/References

Edwards, S. & Catter- Mackenzie, A. (2011). Environmentalising early childhood education curriculum through pedagogies of play. *Australasian Journal of Education*, 16 (1) 51-59

Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Environment & Heritage (2000). *Environmental education for a sustainable future: National Action Plan*. Canberra ACT: Government Printer

Davis, J. & Elliot, S. (2003). *Early childhood environmental education: Making it mainstream*. Canberra ACT: Early Childhood Australia

NSW Early Childhood Environmental Education Network (ECEEN): <http://www.eceen.org.au>
(Retrieved January 2012)

Tarr, K. (2000). Enhancing environmental awareness through the arts. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*. 33 (3) 19-26

Procedures

1. Indoor and outdoor play spaces for children will be improved where possible to encourage sustainable living practices and enjoyment of the environment. The outdoor environment will be well maintained, attractive and inviting. In this way the centre will demonstrate for parents and children, simple and achievable practices that produce aesthetically pleasing and relaxing moments outdoors for all age groups
2. Staff members will use a variety of informal, spontaneous strategies to encourage appreciation of the natural world. Examples: encouraging children to bring flowers from their home garden to place in the centre and involving children in the process of deciding where to put them, carefully placing posters of natural scenery where they will be noticed by children and sometimes casually discussed either amongst peers or with staff, by including picture books about the natural world on the library shelves, by providing learning centres featuring natural materials, magnifying glasses etc
3. The centre will try to include trees or large bushes in the outdoor area that provide natural shade and wind protection. The benefits of these will be discussed with children during the different seasons of the year
4. The centre will allocate an area/s where children can grow plants with adult supervision. Sometimes these plants will be edible, such as vegetables and safe herbs which can be eaten at preschool and/or taken home for the benefit of the families
5. The centre will use a basic compost/recycling procedure for food scraps which will also be used with the children as an element of their learning about sustainability. This procedure naturally lends itself to having a worm farm. This centre recycling system will be incorporated into the children's own growing and use of vegetables, disposal of food scraps after snack and meal times etc

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6. The centre will make conscious and ongoing attempts to use water and energy efficiently and staff will talk to children about how they do this.

7. The centre will use recycled and natural materials where possible, both indoors and outdoors (see the centre's 'Equipment & Educational Materials Policy', Procedures 6 & 7). Staff members will intermittently take opportunities to draw children's attention to these. The following examples illustrate the possibilities of this for both the indoor and outdoor play areas:

- The occasional use of things like (separate) collections of seed pods, leaves, pebbles, shells, small bathroom tiles or buttons for matching, sorting or counting activities
- The use of second hand props such as pots, bowls and cutlery as well as dress up clothes in home play areas. In pre-literacy dramatic play areas, the use of office props such as an old keyboard, 'notepads' (stapled stacks of recycled paper) to promote list writing etc
- The use of recycled and natural materials to make percussion instruments (preferably to be made with the children)
- The use of recycled and natural materials as open-ended props to further both imaginative and symbolic play and thought. Examples: in imaginative and dramatic play areas, timber off-cuts (obtainable for free from a local joinery) that are interestingly shaped and not representational in any way, squares of material off-cuts, doorknobs, pine cones etc
- The use of recycled materials such as packing cases, tyres, cable reels of different sizes, old bedspreads, sections of carpets etc. These are moveable and so can be used in many different combinations. Example: a packing box turned upside down can be used as part of an obstacle course one day, and turned on its side and used as a cubby for dramatic play the next day, a third use could be as a table top set up with percussion instruments
- The use of recycled materials for the creative arts, e.g. gift wrapping paper and ribbons, cardboard rolls etc

8. All recycled materials will be carefully inspected by staff in relation to safety and educational issues, before being made available for children to use (and thereafter will be inspected regularly). (See the centre's 'General OH&S Policy' – Procedures 1.4-1.6, and its 'Equipment & Educational Materials Policy,' Aims 1 & 2, Procedures 1.3, 1.4). Examples of safety issues are:

- Size and weight (if it is too heavy, staff will not be able to move it around comfortably or frequently, thus it may cause an injury and/or need to remain in one spot for a long period of time, limiting possibilities when it comes to re-arranging equipment)
- Timber will be checked re potential dangers from splinters, protruding nails and rough edges
- Metal objects will be checked for sharp edges and corners

9. Staff will actively encourage children to perceive that the natural environment is integrated to the other environments we inhabit. This will be done spontaneously, on an informal basis with individual children or small groups as opportunities

arise, or more formally as a part of the Director's process of planned, intentional teaching. Therefore the centre staff will help children to develop connections with the natural world by:

- Encouraging them to observe it closely and feel excited by what they notice
- Helping them to explore and think about plants, animals and other natural elements including the weather
- Emphasizing the ecological interrelatedness of these things (e.g. life cycles, the changing seasons, the growing of plants from seeds, the composting cycle etc)
- Helping them to reflect and think more analytically about what they learn, to apply their knowledge and in doing so, move towards higher levels of understanding. (This again reflects the centre's spiral model of learning – see the 'Education Program & Practice Policy' – Procedures 6 & 13). These considerations will be in relation to positive attitudes about the environment and will not be about 'doom and gloom' or politically slanted perspectives

10. The educator will use a range of teaching materials apart from the natural environment itself and the other natural materials previously mentioned in this policy. Examples: books, posters, and other reference materials that can be obtained from the local library, magnification aids for looking at micro-organisms which may be borrowed from a local high school or the science teachers themselves may be invited to be at the centre to show the children how to use them. The centre's environmental awareness and sustainability learning program may at different times include the use of excursions and/or inviting experts to demonstrate or otherwise share their skills with children. Parents will also be invited to share these wider community experiences

11. The centre will occasionally seek involvement from the local council regarding the development of water efficient ground covering plants and indigenous grasses, plus aspects of garden design. It will also use other local resources such as Landcare and local bush revitalization groups. This will be part of the centre's ongoing goal of improving or modifying the playground area as a whole or sections of it, so as to increase its bio diversity, the number of mini habitats it contains and in doing so, encourage native bird and insect life. Information about these local resources will also be shared with parents

12. The centre's Director will seek and share information regarding environmental awareness and resources, with other rural directors. This will ensure a wider network of support and information

13. The centre will try to use natural substances if possible, regarding cleaning and pest control and may at times discuss their choice of products with children to increase their awareness of this issue

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