

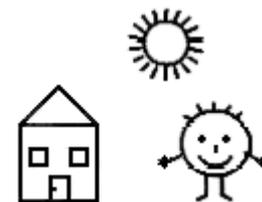
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Estrella Pre-School Philosophy

History

Estrella Preschool has been in operation since the 1940's. In the mid 50s the Preschool moved to a Church Hall. Around 1958 Mrs Searle, who was a qualified teacher but not a qualified kindergarten teacher, was told by the Department of Health that as she was not qualified to teach kinder; she could no longer teach the children.

A group of local parents approached the then councillor, Mr Eric Raven, of the City of Camberwell (now Boroondara Council) to see if they could help with land for a new preschool. The Council kindly donated the corner block of Watson's Park for the building of a preschool. Mr Reg Padey, who lived in Albion Road, was a member of the Church of Christ and an architect. He drew up the plans and permits were issued for the building of Estrella. The Department of Health offered the local parents working on the project a grant. For every £2000 the group raised with local fundraising the Department of Health would give an additional £1000. Around £16 000 was raised in total to build Estrella. Bob Shields, who was a prominent builder in the area kindly offered to build the Preschool at a very reasonable rate (to fit the grant money raised) and so the building began. The name 'Estrella' was chosen by Mrs Ryall, also a member of the Church of Christ, and it means 'Star of the East'. Estrella was officially opened in October 1958 by the Honourable Mr Dick Hamer who was the Health Minister at that time.

After the opening of Estrella, all the parents were asked to bring some plant cuttings from their own gardens to beautify the gardens of the Preschool. There may be some trees or plants still living from way back in 1959! Estrella has seen over 4000 students pass through its doors in almost half a century and is still going strong.

Community

Estrella Pre school has grown up with a strong culture of community; which is highly valued and regarded and is continually fostered through:

- Parent committee & sub committees
- Social events
- Working bees
- Links with other local services & Primary Schools
- Visits from members of the community (as part of the program)
- Consultation with families regarding future improvements.

At Estrella, we believe that children learn best in an environment where they and their families feel comfortable, safe and secure and where they are happy and have fun; providing them with a sense of belonging.

Some of the ways we achieve this at Estrella are through:

- Photo books
- Our welcoming entrance area.
- Our open door communication policy
- Positive interactions between staff, parents and children.
- Staff act as role models.
- Developing a culture of respect between families, staff and children.
- Consistency of learning areas promoting security.
- Transitions/routines provide security, but we also believe in flexibility and learning strategies to cope with change. These are also seen as learning opportunities.

Our view of the child

We believe that children are highly competent and a valued member of our community.

That they are capable, curious and that each child is unique and has something special to contribute to our kinder. Therefore, we have high expectations of children.

This can be seen through:

- the programs developed
- activities/experiences on offer
- the way children are treated by staff.

Family centred Practice/working in partnerships with families

We develop a culture of respect at Estrella - respect between staff and families, staff and children and children and families.

We value families as the child's first educator and strongly believe in the importance and benefits of working in partnerships with families. Information gained from surveys and questionnaires, which are given to parents throughout the year, contribute to the development and review of our philosophy each year. Likewise, our observations of children and their comments are used as a resource when devising our programs and philosophy. In this we feel we are able to gain valuable community input to our philosophy.

We do this by:

- Having parents complete a family background questionnaire.

- Holding parent/teacher interviews twice a year.
- Our open door communication policy.
- Duty roster
- Inviting families to contribute to and participate in the program.
- Twice yearly parent surveys

How children learn

We believe that children learn through play; by doing and being given the opportunity to try things out for themselves, experiment, explore, create and discover.

Children learn through social interactions and following their interests.

Responsibility for ones actions is important and both this and children's independence are fostered through:

- Open ended activities and natural materials are often used.
- Children are given the opportunity to help choose what to put out.
- Encouragement to try things first and then ask for help if needed.
- Discussions about what they would like to do or know.
- A holistic approach
- We combine Intentional teaching with following children's interests.
- We provide choices for the children
- We provide a balance of guided play, adult led learning and child directed play & learning.

The teacher's role is to act as a facilitator providing opportunities for children to learn balanced with acting as a guide and support at times when children need extra support.

This is achieved through:

- Scaffolding
- Careful observation
- Trial & error – knowing when to step in
- Suggesting ideas to extend play & learning
- Empowering children, asking questions
- Providing resources
- Joint learning
- Learning from one another.
- Fostering a love of learning, encouraging inquisitiveness.

- Respecting and accepting children as independent individuals
- Seeking children's input into decisions on matters that will affect them and their world. E.g. asking them about what they would like to do/learn at kinder?

Assessment for learning

We believe this is an important part of what we do. This is how we make decisions about what we do and where to go.

We feel that some important points with assessment are to ensure that we:

- Use a variety of methods to collect information about children's learning & interests.
- To showcase this information in a variety of ways to make the learning visible for parents, children and staff.
- We see learning as a journey and do not place a lot of emphasis on the final product. (although there are times when it may be important to ensure a child completes a task)
- Children are regularly observed and the information is recorded & documented & used to inform planning.
- We use an ongoing planning cycle. (see planning sheet in prog folder informing program) Children are encouraged to progress within the 5 outcomes of the National Early Years Learning Framework. (NEYLF).
- All Children are catered for and included.
- We use a number of teaching styles/strategies to cater for different learning styles.
- The 4 year old program is called 'Possible Projections' and has a section for modifications. We believe it is important to have a framework but to be flexible within that and follow the children's interests and learning as things occur.
- We are working towards including parents & children more in the assessment process. – through displaying documentation around the room, and making portfolios accessible for both parents and children. Children are invited to contribute their own items that they think are important. Our family background questionnaire completed at the beginning of the year provides information about parents expectations.
- Experiences provided will cater to a number of different levels.

At Estrella **outdoor play time** is as important as indoor activities. We believe that activities that can be done inside can also be done outside. Children are provided with a variety of experiences. Our large natural outdoor space enables lots of opportunities for children to engage with nature. They are given autonomy to participate and tell us what they would like to do, learn, know. Children are also provided with an environment to explore and be creative. Risk taking is promoted within limits. We

believe in the importance of being flexible and responsive to group and individual needs, and at times run the indoor and outdoor program at the same time.

This can be seen through:

- Discussions with children about what they would like to do/know/learn.
- Teachers asking the children what they would like to use when selecting equipment for outside.
- Children can take shoes off in sand, but must put back on when leave sand pit.
- Children can climb our big tree, but must have an adult watching them.

Environment

We believe that the environment provided has an extremely important role and can be described as a third teacher.

This means we:

- Endeavour to create a warm, caring and inviting environment that makes children feel secure and comfortable.
- Support children's use, through signs how many children in each area.
- Consider where furniture is placed
- Have experiences for 1 child as well as for groups
- Other areas for group play, promote sharing & encourage interactions
- Have cosy little nook spaces as well as some more open spaces
- Change the environment periodically to stimulate children's curiosity and interest and to support them to learn to cope with change.

Cultural Competence

We value family's first languages and talk to all children about other languages.

We:

- Encourage parents/family members to come in and share aspects of their culture with children.
- Sing songs in other languages
- Present images of other cultures through books, puzzles & posters.
- Celebrate different cultural festivals

We also value Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander cultures through:

- Representing these cultures in puzzles, books & posters.
- Displaying the Aboriginal Flag

- Discussing these cultures respectfully and non-stereotypically in our program.
- We celebrate difference.

Diversity

At Estrella, we celebrate diversity- differences and what makes us unique.

We practice equity ensuring every child has access to fair, just and non discriminatory education & care. (p.8 VEYLDF, Evidence Paper. Practice Principle 4 Equity & Diversity)

This is achieved through:

- talking to the children in context as things occur. E.g. colour of eyes.
- Children are treated fairly
- Fairness and justice concepts are discussed as they occur, e.g. when we are playing a game, or needing to take turns. We talk about how we can 'be fair.'
- All children are encouraged to participate and activities are modified or adjusted to include all abilities/capabilities.
- Using stories, posters, puzzles etc. to encourage acceptance of and initiate discussion of differences.

Reflective Practice

At Estrella, we believe in the importance of Reflective Practice and regular continuous improvement.

This is achieved through:

- Reflective Journals
- Discussions during team meetings [about our current practice & how we could improve upon it]
- Discussions during our monthly NQS meetings
- Informal discussions with team members during the day or after a session.
- Our self assessment & Quality Improvement Plan
- Involvement of families through surveys and speaking with the committee.
- Regular reflection and evaluation of program planning.
- Discussions with the children about what they like and what could we do better?

Our observations and input from discussions with children are regularly reflected upon, and the understandings gained from this reflection is used to guide our values, program, philosophy and management of children's behaviours.

Sources:

- *Early Childhood Australia Code of Ethics*
- *National Early Years Learning Framework*
- *Estrella website*
- *The Victorian Early Years Learning Developmental Framework*

Evidence Paper Practice and Principle 4 Equity & Diversity, Department of Education & Early Childhood development. Saffigna et al. Melbourne University.

Our Philosophy is influenced by the theories of Vygotsky, Gardner.