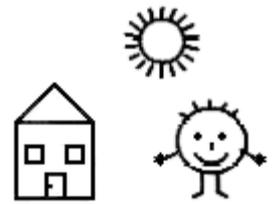


Estrella Pre School Philosophy



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.

Underlying Beliefs

We believe that childhood is a unique and valuable stage of human life and one in which experiences have important and lasting effects on later life. It is a time when children will learn more than in any other period of their lives. As educators our paramount responsibility is to provide safe, healthy, nurturing and responsive settings for children. We are committed to supporting children's development by cherishing individual differences, by helping them to learn to live and work co-operatively, by promoting their self esteem and independence. We believe that children are best understood in the light of up to date developmental knowledge and in the context of family, culture and society. This aligns with Bronfenbrenner's 1979 ecological model of child development. Our goal is to help children achieve their full potential in all areas of development – Identity, Community, Wellbeing, Learning and Communication. (VEYLDF, 2016)

We believe that relationships are everything. Every effort and time needs to be given to developing positive, trusting, respectful relationships with children. Children need to feel secure and supported and to feel a sense of belonging, in order to be able to learn and to achieve their potential. We believe that children need to be allowed to be children – to just be who they are at any one given moment in time, without the push to be constantly getting

them ready for the next step. Children need to be allowed to live in the moment and to enjoy being a child.

Our philosophy is guided by developmental theories and current day research. We use elements from different theorists of child development and play to guide our teaching. Vygotsky's belief that children learn by doing and the developmental theorists idea that children actively construct knowledge, is the basis for our teaching and learning. Vygotsky's hypothesis of the 'zone of proximal development' guides the ways in which we set up learning areas and the level of support we give. At times children are left to explore alone and at other times adult interaction, predominately verbal support, is given. Children can be challenged and achieve more with supported learning and sustained shared thinking.

The 'total' development of the child must be the focus. Children grow and develop as they proceed through stages, gaining increasing mastery of skills and complexity of thinking as they proceed from one stage to the next. (Piaget) How children achieve this learning varies, as Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences supports. Different children learn and think in different ways. They also develop proficiency with skills at different rates. Children are all continuously learning and will vary in the time they take to master a skill and the manner in which they approach learning. Knowing each child's multiple intelligence strengths enables us to cater for their individual learning and to ensure all children can succeed.

These beliefs on how children develop and learn have important implications for designing the environment and curriculum of the program.

Creating our Philosophy

Our philosophy encompasses theoretical knowledge of children and education, personal and social values and early childhood values and understanding. It underpins everything we as educators do, guiding our educational procedures, routines, interactions and environment.

Staff have developed this philosophy in consultation with the committee, children and families of Estrella. As a community, we have questioned and discussed what it is that we believe to be important for children, what we value and what is unique about Estrella. 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. A display asks families for input into our philosophy and pages are sent home for comments. Children have been involved in questioning and discussions about what they enjoy and want from kinder. Families at Estrella value a strong community and consistent staff who take time to listen to and talk to parents. We acknowledge this and recognise the importance of working hard to ensure trusting relationships, a sense of belonging and the involvement and inclusion of all is established and fostered. Staff place great importance on being available for families before and after every session and on making an effort to speak to every parent/carer regularly. Staff will always be available to meet with families to discuss their child's progress and needs. Regular opportunities for families to come together and socialise are valued and prioritised in order to create a strong supportive community. Families also value a program that offers opportunities for play and learning, which is what we strive to provide for every child through our play based program and planning informed by observation and assessment.

Community

Estrella Preschool has grown up with a strong culture of community; which is highly valued and regarded and is continually fostered. It is a place where everyone supports each other, where lifelong friends are made and where everyone is made to feel welcome and an important part of the community.

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:

Our view of the child

Each child is a valued member of our community. Every child is a capable, curious and unique being, who has something special to contribute to our kinder. Every child has an individual personality, learning style and family background. Therefore, although all children progress through specific stages of development, we acknowledge that they do so at different rates.

At Estrella we embrace the concept of the 'whole child'. We support each child holistically in terms of their overall development, using developmental theory as a foundation. Children have a natural ability to learn and develop by exploration and investigation. The whole child concept includes the child as capable and an active participant in their learning.

We believe that children are highly competent and need to be given opportunities to be the best they can be. We have high expectations of every child.

This can be seen through:

- the programs developed
- experiences on offer
- staff interactions with children.

Family centred Practice/working in partnerships with families

We believe it is vital to recognise and support the unique and important relationships of families. We value families as the child's first teacher and strongly believe in the importance and benefits of working in partnerships with families. Parents are an important part of our preschool. We share a common interest in each child's wellbeing and education. We believe that parents can and should be involved at the preschool, and encourage working together with staff.

How children learn

Developmentally appropriate practice is something that has been associated with early childhood education since the 1950's and informs our practice at Estrella. It is a perspective whereby our role is to nurture each child's whole development through practices and decisions based on – theories of child development, individual strengths and needs, and the child's background. It is based on the idea that children learn best from doing: when they are actively involved in their environment through hands on experiences and interactions with the environment, their peers and adults. As developmental theorists believe, children actively construct knowledge as they manipulate and explore the world. This requires an environment

which offers materials and experiences that are coordinated with each child's level of development and their individual needs and which are culturally and socially appropriate. Child development theories and neuroscience confirm that play is essential for educating children. We view play as not only a learning tool but as the best way to engage children and support and extend their skill development and learning. Children must be given opportunities to experiment, explore, create, and discover. Play provides the most natural and meaningful platform for children to construct knowledge and understandings and practise skills.

A variety of play experiences must be provided, with open ended play forming the basis for most experiences. Play must allow for solitary and small group experiences. It must be purposeful and focus on the process, not an end product. We believe also that engaging all of the senses promotes greater benefits and so we use a multi-sensory approach where possible. Every minute spent at preschool is a time of learning with all routines and interactions being important. Social interactions, in particular, form the basis for all learning, and as such need to be nurtured and supported.

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

The teacher's role, in addition to planning, observing and documenting learning, is to act as a facilitator. To provide a broad range of learning experiences which children can engage in independently, but which allow for opportunities for staff to step in and support, guide and extend learning as needed.

Assessment

Assessment is an integral part of the planning process. It provides staff with information that is used for making decisions about how we will plan for and respond to each child, in order to build on their unique strengths, interests and knowledge and to support them in their learning. The assessment process is an ongoing cycle of observing and gathering information, interpreting observations and responding to what we have observed and recorded by planning strategies and experiences. Ongoing assessment ensures that we provide a program that is relevant for and constantly challenging to children. It ensures that all children are extended and moved forward with their learning.

We believe it is important to record assessment as it builds a meaningful picture of a child's achievements and learning, and is evidence of a child's progress. However at the same time, much of the assessment that we do is not recorded, as assessment happens every moment of the day and staff are noticing and responding continuously to children's needs.

The Outdoors

We believe that our large outdoor space and the beliefs and practices that guide our outside program make Estrella unique. For us, the outdoor environment holds a very important place within our program.

Our large natural outdoor space provides lots of opportunities for children to engage with nature. We have made a conscious decision to not put out lots of activities or man-made toys each session, as we want children to explore the natural environment and to create their own

learning through engaging with what is around them in a non-prescribed way. We believe that self-selection is important in encouraging independence and responsibility, as well as creating greater enthusiasm and enjoyment in learning. Our goal is to provide a variety of loose parts, both natural and man-made. We also believe that engaging with nature provides unique learning experiences for children and allows them to engage all of their senses, maximising learning potential.

Two elements of our outdoor program that we believe to be very important are:

1. ***Barefoot Policy*** – We believe that there are enormous benefits to children not wearing shoes all the time and as such allow our children to go barefoot if they choose to do so.
2. ***Mud/Wet sand Play*** – The rich and diverse nature of mud/wet sand offers a world of sensory and learning experiences for children: creative expression and invention, problem solving, stress reduction, building stronger immune systems, appreciation for our earth/land and cooperative play and language skills. As such this type of play is valued, supported and encouraged at Estrella.

Supporting and encouraging risky play is another important part of our program. We believe that children are curious and capable investigators with an appetite for risk. As such they are able to learn about managing risk and develop skills for staying as safe as possible, whilst still engaging in risk taking behaviours. Diverse risky experiences promote robustness and resourcefulness. Exposing children gradually at an early age to risk teaches them how to cope with risk and builds resilience. It provides opportunities for children to develop autonomy, build self-confidence and identity and to be creative independent thinkers. Children who develop risk competence are better equipped to judge risks in their everyday lives and develop responsible attitudes towards risk. Climbing the tree and playing with sticks is encouraged with an awareness of safety being discussed and promoted with the children. Staff are continuously exploring more ways to incorporate managed risk taking experiences into the program.

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.

Environment

We believe that the environment provided has an extremely important role and can be described as a third teacher. Planning for and providing an environment where children can develop at their own pace and experience enjoyment and security as they learn is essential. It is important to create a warm, welcoming environment that makes children feel comfortable and secure. We believe that the environment needs to be inviting, stimulating, challenging and calm. As learning is an active process, children must be provided with an environment which furthers their natural tendency to engage with objects, to explore, to manipulate and to experiment. An environment organised at the child's level, challenging yet not too difficult and allowing for successes, enhances a child's natural desire to learn. Providing a selection of activities which encompass all areas of learning is important.

Many studies highlight that creative, open and active learning environments produce happier children, less behavioural disruption and significantly engaged children who learn productively, sustain their learning over the long term and can transfer the skills they acquire

to a range of different learning situations (Coppie & Bradekamp 2009; Marcon 2003) Our goal is to achieve such an environment at Estrella.

Cultural Competence

We feel exceptionally lucky to live in such a culturally diverse country and believe it is important to recognise and celebrate this. We believe that teaching children about culture creates an environment of respect and acceptance, which is so important in the world we live in. We also believe that it is important to recognise and acknowledge the different cultures within our own preschool, as all children have the right to feel valued for who they are. Celebrating similarities and differences and instilling tolerance are highly valued.

Diversity

At Estrella, we celebrate diversity. Differences are what makes us unique and our world so interesting. We believe that as early childhood educators it is our job to ensure that the messages children receive are correct ones – racism, sexism or any prejudice against any group of people is unacceptable. It is vital that we recognise and celebrate differences through our attitudes and teaching. This means recognising and talking about differences on a daily basis, be it skin colour, food, ability/disabilities.

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)

Reflective Practice

At Estrella, we believe in the importance of Reflective Practice and regular continuous improvement. Staff are committed to continuous improvement on a professional level, with all staff encouraged to undertake PD. They are then given opportunities to share their learning with each other. We believe it is important to be aware of current research and practice so that we can provide the best for our children and families. We also believe in the importance of continuous reflection on our program and on individual children.

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*
- *Theories into Practice, Andrea Nolan & Bridie Raban*
- *Early Childhood Play Matters, Shona Bass & Kathy Walker*
- *'Early Childhood Education with a Difference teaches Toddlers how to Play with Fire'-Julie Power*
- *Evidence Paper Practice and Principle 4 Equity & Diversity, Department of Education & Early Childhood development. Saffigna et al. Melbourne University.*
- *Assessment in the Early Years, Gowrie Australia*