



We are very lucky to have a beautiful outdoor learning environment. This learning environment was designed by the children at the Preschool in 2014 in close consultation with JPE Design studio. The educators and JPE consulted the Early Years Learning Framework and the National Quality Standards for Early Childhood closely throughout the process.

The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) and the National Quality Standard (NQS) acknowledge the importance of outdoor learning environments: Outdoor learning spaces are a feature of Australian learning environments. They offer a vast array of possibilities not available indoors. Play spaces in natural environments include plants, trees, edible gardens, sand, rocks, mud, water and other elements from nature. These spaces invite open-ended interactions, spontaneity, risk-taking, exploration, discovery and connection with nature. They foster an appreciation of the natural environment, develop environmental awareness and provide a platform for ongoing environmental education (DEEWR, 2009, p. 16).

Over the last few years the Educators at the Preschool have been attending professional development about the learning benefits associated with outdoor natural play. This has become a focus in our environment and we have noticed many positive outcomes for children. The educators have attended sessions by international experts about children and nature. One expert talks about children having access to 'wild space.' This is space where they can explore, create, imagine and be masters of their own learning. We hope that some of this will occur with our learning area outside and when we attend excursions to parks

etc. The design of our space was carefully thought about to ensure that it be open-ended enough for the children to explore however they want .

Holly Fitzgerald from Kidsafe SA has been to the Preschool and completed an audit. We have regular risk assessments of our yard and ensure we meet standards.



Safe Risks in Play

The Educators have attended sessions run by international experts Tim Gill and Adam Bienenstock. Tim talked about balancing the risks and benefits in children's play experiences in order to prevent a generation of 'couch prisoners.' Tim challenged us to think about where our favourite places to play were as children. Think about that now.....was it outside..... was there an amount of risk involved?

There is a lot of research that says children need to be allowed a certain level of risk in their play so that they can learn their personal boundaries

and learn not to take outlandish risks. Adam also spoke about the importance of children having 'learning injuries' like a skinned knee. Research has shown that children who have these injuries are less likely to have a catastrophic injury (like a broken bone).

No play space is risk-free. No matter how much we try to remove the risk of children being hurt, children (and adults) can still get hurt. We need to ensure that we provide children with the skills and abilities to identify and mitigate risk when they come across them .

A **risk** is something that is possible to negotiate and may be appropriate for particular situations and children.

A **hazard** is something that is inherently dangerous and needs to be remedied, such as a climbing structure with sharp edges or loose boards that could seriously injure children if they play on it. (Curtis, 2010)

The educators have had meetings about how to manage the risk of our playspace. We have done risk/benefit assessments and have planned how we will encourage the children to engage with the space. We will use the audit from Kidsafe to ensure that areas with a higher risk will have strategies in place to reduce the likelihood of something occurring

We speak to the children about risky behaviour and teach them to assess when something is not safe. We talk to the children about the difference between a risk and a hazard.

We speak to the children about noticing the things that are different outside and encouraging them to explore at a level that suits them.

For more information visit :

<http://rethinkingchildhood.com>

<http://www.claire-warden.com>

<http://www.naturalresources.sa.gov.au/adelaidemtloftyranges/education/for-educators/nature-play>

<http://www.letthechildrenplay.net/>

<https://www.facebook.com/CampbelltownPreschool>

<https://natureplaysa.org.au>

