

INNOVATIVE PRACTICE



This new regular feature is an opportunity to share everyday practices from quality early learning programs which promote inspiring learning experiences for young children.

Get up and Go; a story about our kindergarten's journey outside the gate

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In 2014 our staff had the opportunity to hear Reggio Emilia Approach caretaker, Ms Carla Rinaldi, speak in Melbourne. She shared an inspirational story about the children of Reggio Emilia, their walking excursion to a local park, a tree, and a present the children made to give to the tree on their next return.

We started to think about a wonderful old tree just outside our kindergarten gate affectionately called, "the climbing tree". Generations of preschool children have hurried to the tree after session time

whilst their families chat together. As they grow older, the children still retain fond memories of climbing the tree with their friends. We began to realise that the tree outside was an important part of the children's kindergarten experience. Like the children of Reggio we realised how grateful we were for the tree.

In 2015 our Educational Leader attended a study tour at Reggio Emilia in Italy. On her return, she inspired a research project at our kindergarten that we called "What's over the fence". Incursions and excursions had always been strengths of our program, but it was with the introduction of the "What's over the fence" project that our commitment to local walking excursions was expanded and strengthened. We became very curious and needed to venture outside.

What challenges did we face?

• Time

Scheduling the walking tours within the calendar, along with the time necessary to plan and implement them, was not quite as easy as we might have hoped.

• Safety

We undertook a risk assessment, altered staff rosters to create additional supervision and sought the support of our

family community to provide the extra help we needed to give us the confidence to proceed.

• Weather

In Melbourne where it can be challenging to plan around the weather!

So what did we do?

We started small. Our three year-old groups explored the street in which the kindergarten is located. We realised our little street is actually very exciting! In addition to the kindergarten and the houses in which people live, we have a library, a medical centre and a dog wash – lots of things to see, hear, and talk about. Based on this success, we planned to take our four year-olds a bit further afield to the local park.

Meanwhile, one of our parents arranged for the children to complete an art project at a local studio, close enough to walk to. We involved the children in planning the trip. The trip involved crossing two major roads – the first at a pedestrian crossing and the second at traffic lights. We began to realise how important our walks outside were in supporting the children's awareness of road safety.

“ Having the annual walking tour excursion permissions in place at the beginning of the year has been a big contributor to the program’s success. In addition to the scheduled walks, we have the opportunity to include more spontaneous opportunities.”

What did we discover?

Our local walks are contributing to a number of positive outcomes:

- the children’s sense of belonging and safety in their community
- the children’s enjoyment at experiencing an outing with family members and teachers
- strengthening of our relationships with families by increasing opportunities for family involvement
- strengthening of links with the local community
- visiting green spaces to promote the children’s connection with nature
- learning what the children see, hear and value in our local community
- promoting road safety by experiencing the footpaths and crossing roads rather than limiting ourselves to talking about them within the kindergarten walls
- promoting health & wellbeing for all our children, staff and families by taking a break from the inside to explore the outside.

We are currently pursuing our Physical Activity badge under the Healthy Together Achievement Program and as we proceed through the benchmarks, we have come to realise just how important our walking excursions are in promoting and modelling

healthy behaviours (see pages 18–19 for more about the Healthy Together program).

In reflection:

At the end of 2015 we reflected on the success of our walking excursions and took three important steps that have been implemented in 2016.

1. We set a minimum number of local walking tour excursions in the 2016 calendar in advance and distributed these dates at our family orientation sessions. Our 2015 experience taught us that as the year progressed, it became harder to find available times in the calendar so we made sure we claimed that space in advance.

2. Staff attended “The Outdoor Educator” PD with Gowrie to strengthen our outdoor programming. We had postponed some of our walking tour dates in 2015 due to poor weather, but we now aim to be prepared for walking and playing in all sorts of weather!

3. We made our annual Walking Tour Excursion form part of the enrolment process, so that the necessary permissions would be in place at the beginning of the year.

Having the annual walking tour excursion permissions in place at the beginning of the year has been a big contributor to the program’s success. In addition to the



scheduled walks, we have the opportunity to include more spontaneous opportunities. An online communications tool that we introduced in 2015 provides opportunity to SMS our families with invitations to join us at short notice. The capacity to communicate quickly and efficiently with families is a big help.

In short, the introduction of local walks has been a great success and it’s easier than you might think to just “get up and go”. With a bit of planning at the beginning and a commitment to ongoing improvement, we have introduced something that felt like a challenge at first but is now becoming embedded in our day-to-day practice.

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