

nature play and loose parts position paper march 2015

black forest primary school

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Black Forest Primary School is a learning community committed to continual improvement and working in partnership with families to promote well-being, high achievement and quality learning to empower students to be active and informed citizens.

*We believe that all children are competent, capable and rich in potential. Our principle, **Learning occurs in a variety of environments. The environment is the third teacher** underpins this position paper.*

Goals of Education

The [Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians](#) states that *All young Australians become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens.*

Therefore, education has more than one goal. At Black Forest Primary School we are concerned about the WHOLE child and educators therefore plan for:

- **Intellectual goals** - the kinds of thinking that help children to learn and live successfully
- **Dispositional goals** - the kinds of 'habits of mind' that help drive deep learning
- **Social-emotional goals** - the well-being and sense of self and others that promote full active lives and positive relationships
- **Physical goals** - the kinds of skills and development that help children learn and to live active, healthy lives
- **Academic goals** - the kinds of knowledge and skills that help children success in school and life

To thrive in the 21st century, it is not enough to leave school with a clutch of examination certificates. You have to learn how to be tenacious and resourceful, imaginative, self-disciplined and self-aware, collaborative and inquisitive. (Claxton 2002)

principles of play

Play is at the root of everything it means to be human and provides an opportunity for children to become successful, confident, creative and active individuals. Play is a basic need of children and motivates like nothing else can. Children play because they have an inborn need to know more about everything. It is an essential part of growth and is an important and developmentally valid way for children to develop a sense of control and competence. Play is self-directed, enabling children to practise skills, test understanding, take risks, and learn about themselves and their world, whilst developing language, social-cultural competence, solving problems and developing curiosity, imagination and creativity. According to Einstein, "Play is the highest form of research", during which children's brains are at their most open-minded, flexible and adaptable. Play provides an opportunity for social interaction so that children can develop new relationships to transfer into their learning contexts (TfEL). Children who engage in quality play experiences are more likely to have well developed memory skills, language development and are able to regulate their behaviour, leading to enhanced school adjustment and academic learning (Bodrova E & Leong DJ, 2005)

nature play

Australian children spend an average of 52 hours a week in “screen time” and 40 minutes per week outside (Kellert 2012). One out of three Australian children play outside every day compared to three in four children only a generation ago (Kellert, S 2013).

Natural playgrounds have the benefit of providing children with more opportunities than typical pre-formed playgrounds and allows children to connect with nature. This contact with nature has been associated with a number of health benefits for children, such as improved cognitive function, increased creativity, improved interaction with adults, reduced attention deficit hyperactivity disorder symptoms and reduced rates of aggression (natureplay.wa). Spending time in nature helps children thrive:

- **cognitively** - by improving creativity, motivation, concentration and academic performance (Murray & O’Brien, 2002). Communication, observational skills, problem solving and working memory and interest for further inquiry are also enhanced. Children who play in natural settings play in more diverse, imaginative and creative ways and show improved language and collaboration skills.
- **emotionally** by lowering levels of stress and depression and by increasing confidence and self-esteem (Peacock 2007) and by providing opportunities for developing social skills, collaboration and the executive functions of inhibition and self-regulation. Children who play in natural settings are more resistant to stress; have lower incidence of behavioural disorders, anxiety and depression; and have a higher measure of self-worth. Bullying behaviour is greatly reduced where children have access to diverse nature-based play environments (natureplay.wa).
- **physically** by reducing risks of obesity and myopia (short-sightedness) and by improving healing and recovery. Children who play in dirt have less allergies. In addition, natural, irregular and challenging spaces help kids learn to recognise, assess and negotiate risk and build confidence and competence.
- **ethically** by not just developing a respect for nature but by developing environmental stewardship and a stronger sense of concern and care for the environment in later life. *“Natural playgrounds should be the standard for all our playgrounds. They truly connect children with nature through play and are a sort of classroom for the next generation of environmental stewards”* (Suzuki, D cited in Bienenstock, A)

Risk management

Play brings the world to life for children. It provides for an exploration and understanding of their abilities; helps them to learn and develop; and exposes them to the realities of the world in which they will live, which is a world not free from risk but rather one where risk is ever present. *Outdoor play and the natural environment are very important to school age children... The outdoors is full of noises, sights, textures and adventures just waiting to be explore* (Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations). At Black Forest Primary School, effective outdoor learning environments offer a range of experiences that provide challenge and risk while still being safe. We plan learning environments with appropriate levels of challenge where *“children are encouraged to explore, experiment and take appropriate risks in their learning”*(Australian Children’s Education & Care Quality Authority).

Providing children with risk is important because it is by being exposed to risks that children learn how to assess and manage risks. This not only teaches them skills they will use as adults, but builds resilience, adaptability and self-confidence (natureplay.wa). In nature play *“we remove hazards the children do not see. But we do not remove challenges or risks that children do see and then choose to undertake. Children can choose to climb up a tree and determine for themselves how far they feel comfortable*

climbing. If we remove all the challenges, children lose the ability to risk assess....be risk-averse and employ a sense of perspective when assessing risks” (Warden C).

A risk is something you can judge and that is possible to negotiate. It is a challenge that a child can see and chooses to undertake or not. ...*children learn “physical literacy” this way by starting small and then becoming more adventurous* (London Play Briefing, 2007). A hazard is something you cannot judge and a child doesn't see. It is inherently dangerous and needs to be avoided or remedied (eg: climbing a structure with sharp edges) (Curtis)

At Black Forest Primary School, we are committed to working with children to manage risks, not eliminating them, as this leads to a child's inability to assess danger. We will work with children to identify what are the risks, what are the possible outcomes of the risks and how to minimise risks. We will adopt a common language of “ sitting watching waiting” and develop in children their own ability to Talk, Look, Test and Know.

what are loose parts?

loose parts are objects and materials that children can move, manipulate, control, and change within their play (Nicholson 1971). Providing materials that can be carried, moved, collected, revamped, taken apart, and put back together in a variety of ways is a key element to creating consistent active learning opportunities in any setting (Mitchell, T). Loose parts encourage creativity and innovation in all types of play, and at each child's developmental level. As children gain experience with materials, their use of materials becomes more complex, their ideas expand, and, oftentimes, they will seek the help of others to carry out their plans.

In any environment, anything loose can potentially be a play object (betterkidcare.psu.edu 2011). The loose parts theory suggests that when children are given a wide range of materials that have no identified purpose, they will be more inventive in their play and have infinite play opportunities manipulating them in ever-changing ways that their imaginations devise. When items are novel and interesting, children will tend to take more risks in problem solving and will more likely go beyond their comfort zone. The more flexible the environment, the greater level of creativity and inventiveness expressed (Nicholson 1971).

At Black Forest Primary School we have a commitment to the introduction of natural and manufactured loose parts to inspire and engage children in outdoor play.

Natural	Manufactured	Location/season dependent
Stones (heavy enough for children to use in construction projects, but too heavy to throw) Stumps Logs Large branches Small twigs Sand Gravel Water	Recycled car and bicycle tires (avoid steel-belted radials) Pallets Wooden or plastic crates (milk crates are favorites) Buckets, tubs, laundry baskets Plastic garden pots Boxes Gutters Drain tile PVC pipe Wood: planks of different lengths	Sea shells Kelp Seaweed Beach rocks Driftwood Hay bales Bunches of wild grasses Tractor tires and seats Troughs Old street signs Traffic cones Construction debris

Leaves Pebbles Sunflowers Seeds and seed pods	Rope Chain Cardboard rolls and tubes of all sizes Large- and medium-sized wooden reels Plastic bottles Landscape netting Ice cream tubs Fabric (light-weight) Tarps or drop cloths Hoops (Hula and others) Weather-proof cushions Bricks Outdoor tools Mesh (canvas or metal, with different sized openings) Chalk	(thoroughly sorted for safety) Hubcaps Car parts River and creek rocks Logs Pine cones of all sizes Large ferns Palm fronds
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Implementation process at BFPS

what	who	process	details
whole site approach	staff	staff meeting term 2 week 1 with heather - self reflections; agreements with concept of nature play introduction of loose parts	self reflections definition of break times and role of adult shared understanding and agreement of proposal/policy
community awareness	parents	project wild thing showing and parent information session re nature play at bfps, Launch of Koala Park, Tuesday 5 May garden committee gc presentation newsletter articles	stimulate conversation role of garden in nature play management and maintenance of loose parts leanne/joel leanne/joel
phase 1			
nature play	staff	acceptance of natural and loose parts play - discussion of position paper	
risk management	staff	completion of decd risk assessments student action team 3-7 to identify risks and benefits and document minimising risk strategies - develop poster (BANB-7) - sourcing ideas from children identify common language and approach	linda to complete SAT + leanne term 1 week 1 leanne to facilitate conversations with r-2 classes whole staff at t2w1 staff

		concerns/benefits	meeting
manufactured loose parts introduction - jp sandpit shed; koala park		sourcing of materials roster for class use during class time prior to being available at breaks	heather et al process for getting out, packing up role of adults
phase 2			
nature play		tree climbing	identification of suitable trees staff discussion
tools not toys		intri introduction of 'real tools'	staff discussion educating children

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