**Deakin Preschool Philosophy Statement**

The early childhood years lay important foundations for children’s future education. At Deakin Preschool, educators strive to create an environment where children feel safe, secure and supported. Our preschool environment is inclusive for all cultures and abilities. Children are viewed as capable and competent agents in their learning.

**Children and their learning**

At Deakin Preschool, we believe children learn through play. A play-based learning environment supports children’s holistic learning in all developmental domains: physical, cognitive, spiritual, social, emotional, linguistic and personal. The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) explains many reasons why play is an effective vehicle for learning. Play allows children to discover, imagine, test new ideas, ask questions, solve problems and to think critically and creatively. Play allows children to form relationships, experience a range of emotions, construct knowledge through hands-on experience, develop communication skills and broaden thinking skills. There are many types of play. Each type of play helps children develop and learn vital knowledge, understandings, concepts and skills. Children can engage in discovery play, manipulative play, active play, creative play, imaginative play and socio-dramatic play. By initiating and participating in variety of different play types, children have opportunities to determine the properties and functions of different kinds of materials and equipment, develop their gross and fine motor skills, build strength, increase agility, refine balance and coordination, ask questions, take risks and try out new ideas, to enact and explore different roles people can play and gain social skills such as sharing, compromise, a sense of fairness, responsibility, conflict resolution, self-regulation and empathy. Because we believe children learn through play, every day in you will see children engaged in meaningful, self-directed, sustained, open-ended play where resources have been selected and the learning environment organised to provoke, encourage and support the different types of play.

This play-based approach is balanced with explicit learning experiences that foster children’s learning in curriculum areas such as language and literacy, mathematics and science to prepare them for a formal school experience. Deakin Preschool also uses and an integrated inquiry approach to curriculum. This process assists children to make connections and helps learning make sense. It is inclusive and fosters authentic links between the curriculum. It helps students understand why and how they are learning, and it develops higher order thinking skills.

**Pedagogy**

Children’s interactions with other people shapes their construction of knowledge, understandings and skills. At Deakin Preschool, we utilise a socio-cultural approach, as influenced by Lev Vygotsky’s theory of learning. Vygotsky believed that children’s learning is heavily influenced by the social and cultural context in which they live. He thought children learn best when interacting with more knowledgeable others. He developed the idea of the Zone of Proximal Development which he defined as the distance between what a child can achieve independently and what they can do with support. Children working within this zone are provided with the assistance they need to gain new ideas. We also believe in a balanced approach to curriculum. Using our philosophical ideas about how children learn, we select from a range of pedagogical approaches to curriculum. Using a variety of approaches is the best way to achieve learning outcomes. Because we believe children learn through their interactions with people, places and things, every day in my classroom you will see a child-led, constructivist approach to learning where children are initiating and directing their own learning based on their interests, strengths and needs. They enact their agency by making choices and decisions about what resources they will play with and what their play will entail. They construct new meaning and understanding for themselves as they engage with hands-on experiences with open-ended resources. You will also see children engaged in guided learning where children and educators work and play together with the educator scaffolding and extending the child’s learning within the Zone of Proximal Development in order to help them reach their potential. You will see children working cooperatively and learning from each other. You will also see some adult-led learning experiences where the educator has chosen activities based on their observations of children’s interests and needs in order to elicit learning in particular focus areas.

**Catering for Individual Difference**

We believe in equity and inclusion. All children are capable of success in their learning regardless of their gender, ethnicity, religion, family structure, learning needs or socio-economic status. Article 28 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that “Children have the right to an education”. The EYLF promotes equity in its third principle and respect for diversity as its fourth principle. Because we believe in equity and inclusion, every day at Deakin Preschool you will see educators engaging in inclusive and responsive practice that acknowledges the diversity of the learners in the room. We will be considering potential barriers to achievement and differentiating and adapting the learning environment, pedagogical approach and/or curriculum content to meet the needs and ensure the participation of all children in attendance.

**Relationships**

At Deakin Preschool we believe strong, positive relationships provide the foundation for successful teaching and learning. The quality and reliability of a child’s relationships with important people in their life leads to healthy development. It is important for children to develop secure attachments with their caregivers, including their educators. In a secure attachment, the child sees the educator as a safe base from which they can explore. The feelings of security help to support growth in all developmental domains. Learning is supported when children share a close relationship with a sensitive, responsive educator. When children feel valued and respected, they are more likely to seek out new challenges knowing they will receive feedback and encouragement. We also believe that learning outcomes are best achieved when educators work in partnership with families. Families are children’s first and most influential teachers and their role in their child’s ongoing development and their contribution to the learning program is vital. Because we believe in developing strong, secure, positive relationships with children, families, staff and community, every day you will see educators being responsive in their interactions with others. We care about and care for the children at our service. We strive to create a learning environment where families are welcomed and respected. Every day you will see parental involvement in their children’s learning. This may take the form of parents being present in the room, helping and learning alongside their child or through parent feedback and responses in student portfolios or whole class visual diaries.

**Classroom Management**

We endeavour to create a positive learning environment where the expectations about appropriate behaviour are clear to children. However, there will be times when conflict occurs between children. At these times, a restorative justice approach will be taken. The restorative justice process does not focus on assigning blame or meting out punishment, rather it focuses on repairing relationships between people when things have gone wrong. This is achieved by permitting all involved in a conflict to gain an understanding of the impact of the behaviour, the reasons the behaviour occurred and to come to a solution that is agreed upon by all. Questioning scripts are used to elicit what has happened, how someone has been affected, what children were thinking at the time and what they have thought about since, what can be done to put things right and what has been learned so different choices are made in the future. Because we believe in building positive relationships and giving every child a voice, every day you will see educators facilitating restorative conversations between children in conflict. We use questioning scripts to guide discussions to allow all children involved in a disagreement to express their feelings and needs. As the facilitator, educators will be impartial and non-judgemental and will actively listen and demonstrate empathy. Educators respect the perspectives of all involved and empower children to develop their own solutions to problems and to repair relationships.

**Assessment**

Assessment is an integral part of the ongoing teaching and learning cycle of observation, planning, documentation and evaluation. I resonate with Mary Jane Drummond’s definition of assessment in that assessment. The EYLF champions assessment for learning as one of its pedagogical principles. It states that assessment for learning is a process of collecting and analysing data to make visible what children know, can do and understand. The EYLF goes on to explain the importance of assessment for educators. Assessment allows educators to plan effectively for the current and future learning of children, to measure a child’s progress toward learning outcomes, to identify children who may require additional support and to evaluate the effectiveness of the learning program. Because we believe that assessment is a vital part of the teaching and learning cycle, every day you will see evidence of assessment for learning and assessment of learning and assessment as learning. You will see examples of children’s learning from a range of contexts documented using written and visual methods. This includes photographs, individual and group learning stories, class discussions recorded in visual diaries and children’s work samples. You will see educator’s reflections and analyses of this information where we have made connections to the children’s interests, dispositions, ways of thinking, the leaning outcomes of the EYLF and the distance travelled by children. You will also see how this documentation informs the planning considerations through written reflections of intent for future learning opportunities where children can be supported and extended.

**Professionalism**

We believe that education is a lifelong process. As educators, we are committed to the fifth principle of the EYLF: Ongoing Learning and Reflective Practice. We endeavour to continually build professional knowledge and practice in early years education settings. Because we believe in constant improvement, every day you will see educators engaging in reflective practice. We critically examine the learning experiences and opportunities provided, the learning environments, resources and assessment documentation collected to evaluate the effectiveness of the teaching program we have developed. We also participate in professional inquiry with colleagues to review practice and to generate new ideas.

Education is a continuous learning journey where teachers, parents and children have a valuable opportunity to learn from one another, sharing equal status. Deakin Preschool is committed to equity and believes that all children have the capacity to succeed, to work together with others and to share ideas. In turn, children become responsible for their own learning.