

Nature Play

Petrie Terrace State School is a small inner-city primary school located in Paddington, near the Brisbane CBD. We adopt an inclusive, student centred philosophy of learning which we believe is best practice in educational choice for primary age students. In this environment, our students seek to be mindful and respectful of themselves as unique and valued individuals, while being constantly aware of and sensitive to the mutual needs of others and the world around them. The importance of celebration as a crucial and natural consequence of effort in all its forms, is embraced and actualised throughout the school culture. We have an exceptionally strong sense of community and engagement and this is reflected in our programs.

Actions At Petrie Terrace State School, we believe that the environment is the third teacher. This stems from our learnings of Reggio Emilia and their approach to Early Years Education. We have also conducted research in to the work of Richard Louv's notion of Nature Deficit Disorder. His research demonstrates that direct exposure to nature is essential for healthy childhood development and for positive physical and emotional health. Armed with this research and a strong philosophy for early education our Prep teachers, in partnership with families, devised a physical environment that embraced nature play. Together we looked at kindergartens who had embraced nature play and the surfaces and aspects they had included. We were conscious of what is actually on the ground and how teachers and children are going to work in it, be it mud, grass, sticks or water. Further reading on nature pedagogy emphasised the importance of having an anchor point such as a large tree stump or log as well as objects that can be moved. Open ended materials provide children with the opportunity to engage in play that connects them to their environment. As adults we had to learn that play is in the child not the toy and we are not to interrupt the play but observe, watch and listen. Through the generous support of our P&C our nature play came into being mid-2015. Parents and community members came together over a weekend and worked with the lay of the land to establish pathways, working within the objective of the nature play space.

Parents were able to research the plants that would provide a range of sensory interactions and child friendly experiences such as being edible. A Liquid Amber tree was chosen as an integral component showing the seasonal changes throughout the year. Learning informing next steps We are continuing to educate the community about what nature play is and just because it is made of natural materials does not mean that it is nature play. We need to continue to find ways to embrace nature pedagogy in age appropriate ways modifying and adapting the area to fully respond to the needs of our children. We look at how to increase risk taking and resilience and the inclusion of props such as watering cans to stimulate the right kind of play. Being aware however that some stimulates can change the play in negative ways. We know that the play has become more imaginative, and focused. The ideas are now developed over a number of days or weeks, morphing and changing over time. We have also seen a decrease in the amount of injuries in this playground as children are able to manage their own risk more effectively. As Richard Louv says "If you connect with nature you'll love it, if you love it you'll care about it".