

Intentional Teaching in Natural Environments

By
Anne Houghton



*Proudly promoting the value of play and
supporting all Australians to play every day*

Acknowledgement of Country



I acknowledge the the traditional lands of the Wurundjeri
people of the Kulin nations.

I recognise the strength, resilience and capacity of Aboriginal
people on this land and pay respect to elders, past, present
and future.

What is Intentional Teaching?

‘..... involves educators being **deliberate, purposeful** and **thoughtful** in their **decisions and actions**..... Intentional teaching is the opposite of teaching by rote or continuing with traditions simply because things have ‘always’ been done that way.’

(EYLF, 2009, p.15)

Ann Epstein describes it as....

‘Intentional teaching means teachers act with **specific outcomes** or **goals** in mind for children’s development and learning. Teachers must know **when to use a given strategy** to accommodate the different ways that individual children learn and the **specific content they are learning**’

(Epstein, 2007, p.1)

What are Natural Environments for Early Childhood Education?



Spaces for outdoor play that include:

- Sand / Water/ Mud patches / Digging patches
- Native vegetation / Gravel paths
- Dry creek beds / Fish ponds
- Piles of loose river rocks/ logs for children to use in open ended ways
- Gardening / Veggie patches
- Retreat / Secret Spaces within outdoor settings and/or garden areas
- Bush or Beach Kinder Settings

National Quality Standards

QA3		Physical environment
3.1	Design	The design of the facilities is appropriate for the operation of a service.
3.1.1	Fit for purpose	Outdoor and indoor spaces, buildings, fixtures and fittings are suitable for their purpose, including supporting the access of every child.
3.1.2	Upkeep	Premises, furniture and equipment are safe, clean and well maintained.
3.2	Use	The service environment is inclusive, promotes competence and supports exploration and play-based learning.
3.2.1	Inclusive environment	Outdoor and indoor spaces are organised and adapted to support every child's participation and to engage every child in quality experiences in both built and natural environments.
3.2.2	Resources support play-based learning	Resources, materials and equipment allow for multiple uses, are sufficient in number, and enable every child to engage in play-based learning.
3.2.3	Environmentally responsible	The service cares for the environment and supports children to become environmentally responsible.

(Source: NQS, 2018, Quality Area 3 Physical Environment)

Why is it important to be intentional in planning for playbased learning in natural environments?

- Current issues.....

Intentionally Plan for Learning in Natural Environments

- New services can **plan more carefully** to allow for current theories & influence changes
- Existing services can **begin to naturalise settings & use outdoor environments**



Gowrie at the Harbour – rooftop natural playspace

Importance of Philosophy



Image Source: <https://portfolio.com/entry/my-professional-philosophy>

Example of reflecting philosophy



*Photo acknowledgement to Bush Kinder,
(Westgarth Kindergarten) personal visit*

“At Westgarth kindergarten, we believe childhood is precious and that an important part of childhood is being **outside in nature....** The children experience the **changing weather** – they **feel the rain, respond to the wind, play according to what nature has provided, get wet or feel the sun** on their skin – all of this stimulates the content of their play.”

*Doug Fargher, Director of Westgarth Kindergarten,
p.18, Reflections, Gowrie Australia Publications, Winter
2012, Issue 47*

‘Materials in early childhood programs are the bones of the curriculum and the foundation of the teaching and learning process. They support what the program values, and frame the possibilities and actions for living and learning.’

(Curtis & Carter, 2008 p.54)

“Environments for intentional teaching provide:

.....many natural and open-ended resources that give children long periods of time for self-directed hands on learning, e.g. loose materials and objects that offer different possibilities
.....”

(Houghton, 2013, p.48)



Examples of Intentionality Supporting Play and Learning

Accessible materials



Adult accessory tool



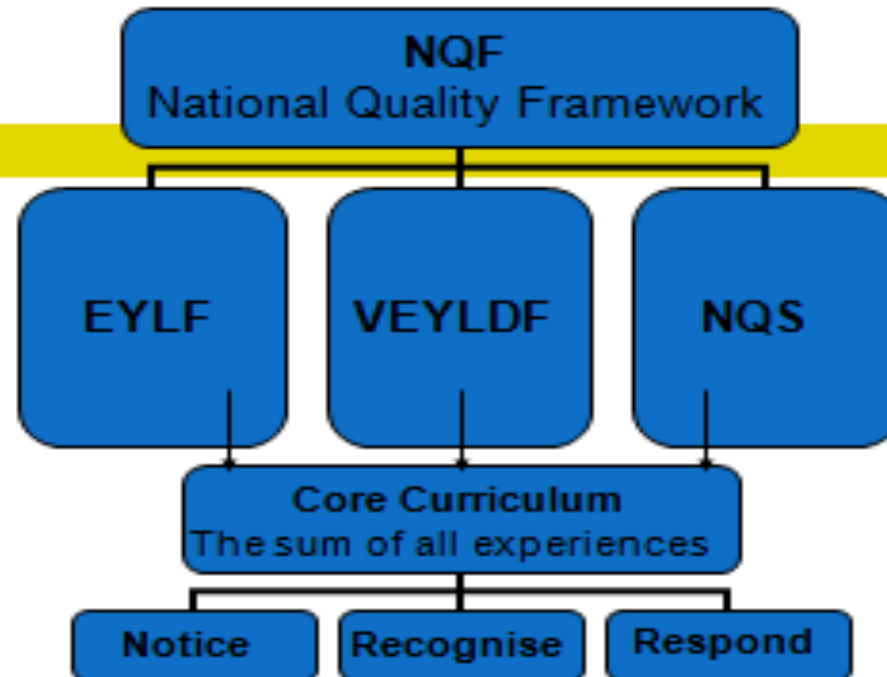
Planned experiences for solitary, dual and group play



Defining the terms 'Program' & 'Curriculum'

- Nuttall & Edwards (2007) suggest the meaning of both is different
- Program often refers to experiences that have been ***intentionally planned*** by the educator
- Curriculum encompasses all aspects of the service experienced by the child from the moment the child arrives at the service
- **“everything that happens”** (Nuttall, 2003, p.162)

Equates to High Quality Early Childhood Education in a Play Based Program



Identify opportunities for intentional teaching in natural environments



Potential Curriculum Links

- Sound
- Air
- Water
- Light
- Principles of classification
- Growth and development
- Seasons



Curriculum for Intentional Teaching in the Natural Environment



Children can:

- Observe life cycles
- Identify good bugs & bad bugs
- Have hands on experiences
- Be involved with sustainable practices



Planned Learning Experiences in the Natural Environment

1. Attitudes to Environment

2. Perceptual Skills

3. Tactile Skills

4. Taste and Smell

5. Auditory Skills

Intentionally increase children's exposure to the natural environment



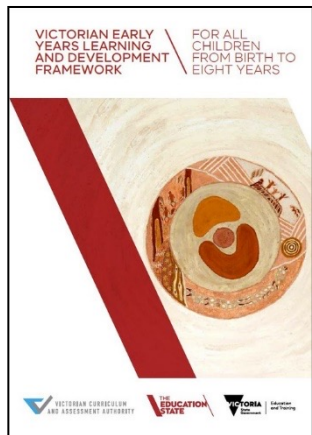
Think about what direct or indirect experiences children might have

- What opportunities are provided for exploration in the outdoors?
- Do children engage in experiences involving planting, harvesting and cooking?
- Can there be opportunities for caring for animals?



Be *'tuned in'* for *'in the moment'* teaching opportunities

- Notice
- Recognise
- Respond

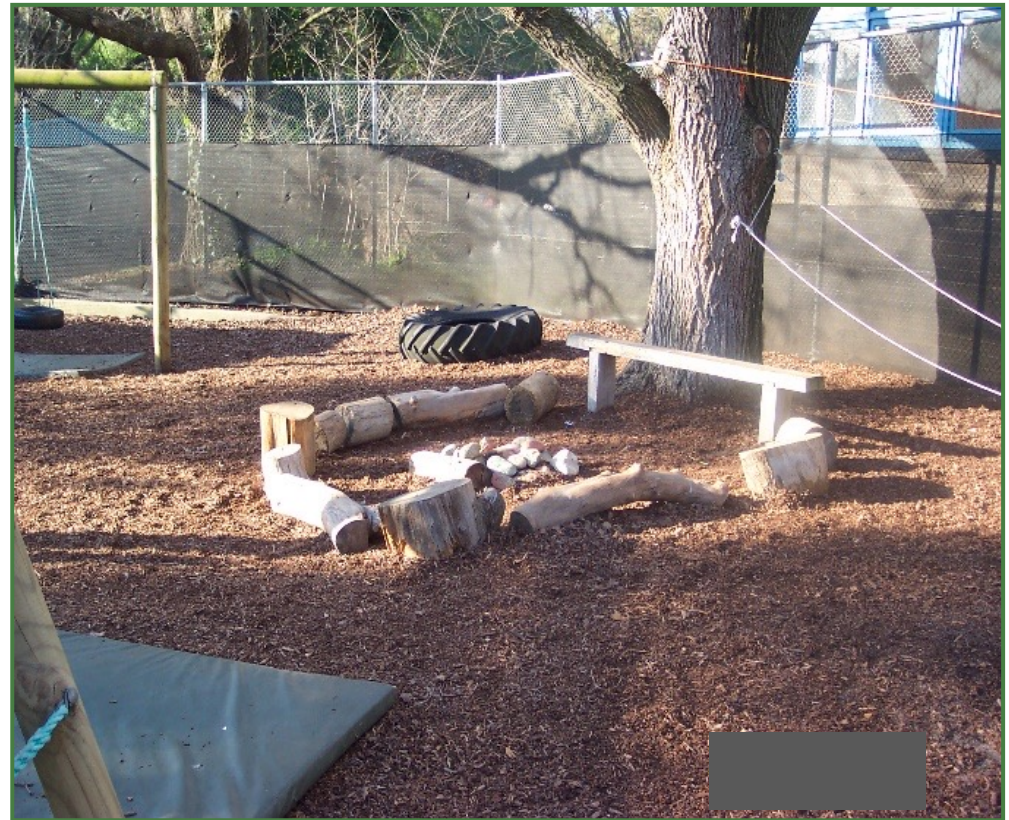
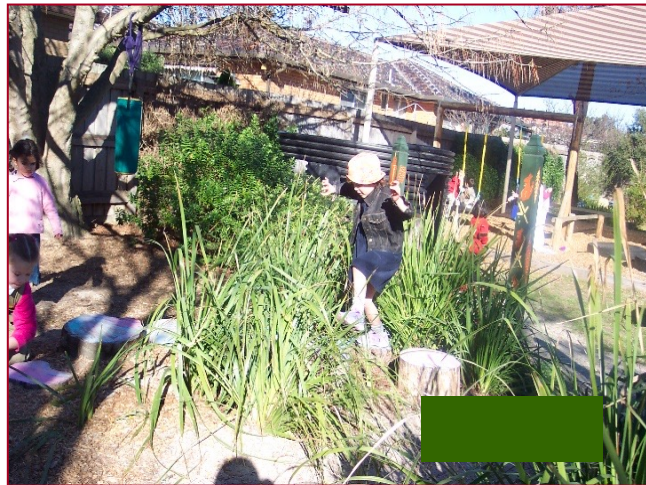


What natural materials are found in your community?

Will you need to add equipment or gather resources to increase experiences for children?



Do you notice what materials children like to use in their play?



Importance of Time

- How much time do children have to explore?
- Consider **planning chunks of uninterrupted time**



Risky Play, Duty of Care and Intentional Teaching

- How do we empower children to make informed choices in their play?
- How might we value children as capable and competent learners?
- What happens if we take all risks out of the natural environment?



Intentional Teaching Techniques to adopt



(See definitions in *Houghton, A. 2013, p16*)

Conclusion

‘From birth, sensory experiences with nature are an essential part of connecting with the natural world. **Take time to share natural sensory experiences with babies, toddlers and children** to ensure that each generation does not become more removed from the natural world. Kahn & Kellert (2002) describe the increasing disconnection from the natural world with each successive generation as **‘generational amnesia’**.

(p.24, Crook, Sue, Just Improvise! Tertiary Press, 2004)

References, Resources & Acknowledgements

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Useful Resources and websites:

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Play Australia

<http://www.playaustralia.org.au/>

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