

SUBMISSION OF ABSTRACT FOR ACLE 2013:

Title:

Dragonflies and Daisies – using children’s interests to share the wisdom of God’s world.

Method of delivery:

This will be a paper presentation using a powerpoint presentation, photos and other visual aids to support the paper.

A description of the presentation:

Have you ever pondered and worried about how to make authentic and meaningful links between the Early Years Learning Framework and the Beginning Strand of the Christian Studies Curriculum? This presentation documents our learning journey as a new service as we trialed approaches, reflected on our outcomes and implemented improvements so that we could provide quality Christian education and outcomes for the young children in our care. The presentation will include a ‘show and tell’ of some of the resources that we have found useful in sharing God’s wisdom with young children.

How this presentation links to theme/s of the conference:

This presentation links with:

1. What shapes quality education in a Lutheran School?
2. How does the teaching ‘Christ, the wisdom of God’ inform our work in Lutheran Schools?

Biography of presenter:

Susan is a passionate and enthusiastic early childhood educator with over thirty years of experience in many facets of the early childhood field. She holds a Master of Education (Early Childhood) and has a passion for science and mathematics learning, especially in the outdoor environment. She was the Chief Executive Officer for Queensland Lutheran Early Childhood Services for seven years, until the end of 2012, leading this organization through many changes and rapid growth. In 2013, Susan returned to her practitioner roots to set up and direct a new facility at Trinity Lutheran College on the Gold Coast, Queensland.

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Creating a world of wonder ...

Susan Shaw

Method of delivery:

A PowerPoint presentation using photos and other visual aids to support the paper.

A description of the presentation:

This presentation will share our Action Research project – ‘Transformation of our Outdoor Environment’. This is a collaborative journey being undertaken by staff, children and families at our new service, to transform a beautiful outdoor space into a world of wonder and awe for young children. This project is challenging our minds to think, research and explore; firing our bodies to action; and engaging our hearts, passion and wisdom to achieve a sense of belonging together in an environment of excellence. The presentation is an exploration of the journey (in photos and words), the decisions, the resources and the achievements to date of a project that may evolve over many years.

‘In every walk with nature,
one receives far more than he seeks’
John Muir

Nature has been for me, for as long as I remember,
a source of solace, inspiration, adventure and delight;
a home, a teacher, a companion.

Lorraine Anderson

The Beginning ...

Aim

- What did we want to achieve?
'To achieve a sense of belonging together in an environment of excellence'
- How did this link with our philosophy?
Collaboration, respect, children empowered and curious, children as active learners
- What theories and pedagogies underpinned our beliefs?
Reggio Emilia philosophy, natural play spaces, children as competent learners, play-based learning

Evaluation of the current environment

- What was the context and setting for our centre?
A new Early Learning Centre in a converted Prep building, on a College site
- What features did we already have that we wanted to stay?
Large bright indoor spaces; wide covered verandah; large outdoor space with real grass, trees, large sandpit, a fixed structure, a slope, swings
- What elements did we think we wanted to add?
A water course, water pump, bridge; a slide in the slope with a pathway up; a sensory garden; a bike track; vegetable and herb gardens

The Research ...

Possibilities:

Ideas from *'Best Practice Guidelines in Lutheran Education Queensland Early Childhood Physical Environments'*, (Walsh, 2006, Open Book, pages 123 – 144)

Playground design considerations:

1. Organisation of the space:
 - Quiet retreat areas (sandpit, nooks, secret places, cubby area, quiet seating)
 - Aesthetics of the environment
 - Secret spaces to 'hide', rest and observe
 - Open spaces (open lawn, mounds, pathways, places to run, skip, jump)
 - Active area (fixed equipment, swings, space for moveable equipment)
 - Nature areas (gardens, vegetable and herb patches natural bushland, digging patch, water course, water tank)
2. Variety (inviting, diverse, rich potential for play and exploration, different surfaces)
3. Flexibility (choices, multiple uses, natural items, good 'flow', complexity to sustain interest)
4. Accessibility (flow from area to area)
5. Sensory richness (sight, touch, hearing, taste, smell and body movement)
6. Safety (shade, plants)
 - careful siting of the elements in each area
 - scaling to provide safe usage (under 500mm)
 - surface materials to minimise impacts
 - sufficient shade (trees, shade sails, verandah)
 - compliance with safety standards
7. Sustainability (one we added as we talked)

Ideas from *‘Natural Playscapes - Creating Outdoor Play Environments for the Soul’*, (Keeler, 2008, Exchange Press, pgs 52 and 74)

Soul: Children experience the world with their whole being – body, spirit, energy, minds, hearts, compassion, tears, laughter, anger, pride, learning, understanding, love and soul. Children play, grow, and feel the world around them intensely. Their outdoor space should be a swirl of spirited delights and playful discovery. Some places on your playscape should provide a rush of excitement. Other spots can offer the solace of calm. The elements you choose should be magical and made of honest, natural materials. Carved wood structure suggests something deep. Ceramic tiles and mosaics sparkle as imaginations soar. Living plants befriend children and create atmospheres from peaceful to wild. Environments for children are sacred places. They speak to the spirit. **They are made of soul.**

Plants: All playscapes need plants. Plants provide moods, seasonal interest, secret places to play, natural shade, color, smells, sounds, and sometimes even food. Try to work with local plant people who can recommend which plants are safe and will grow well in your area. Select plants for their shape, colors, foliage, effects in the wind, and scents. What’s also interesting for children are the natural “loose parts” plants provide for play, such as flowers, seed pods, fluff or fruit. All these elements feed children’s imaginations and can be used in creative ways, both indoors and outside.

Ideas from *‘Inspiring Spaces for Young Children’*, (Deviney et al, 2010, pg42-43)

Seven Principles of Design:

1. Nature inspires beauty
2. Colour generates interest
3. Furnishings define spaces
4. Texture adds depth
5. Displays enhance environment
6. Elements heighten ambience
7. Focal points attract attention

What the National Quality Framework says ..

- Quality Area 3: Physical Environment
 - Outdoor and indoor spaces are welcoming and suitable for children
 - Buildings, furniture, equipment and resources are safe and well-maintained
 - Children can participate in a range of experiences
- Element 3.1.3 Outdoor spaces include natural elements and materials which allow for multiple uses
- Element 3.2.1 Outdoor and indoor spaces are designed and organised to engage every child in quality experiences in both built and natural environments.
- Element 3.3.1 Sustainable practices are embedded in service operations.
- Element 3.3.2 Children are supported to become environmentally responsible and show respect for the environment.

What the Early Years Learning Framework says ..

- Spaces with plants, trees, edible gardens, sand, rocks, mud and water invite open ended interactions, spontaneity, risk taking, exploration, discovery and connection with nature (2009, p15-16).

Nature Kindergartens ... Why a Natural Environment?

- Open ended resources
- Limitless experiences
- Play affordance for children
- Greatest learning potential
- Visual harmony and beauty
- Environmentally friendly and sustainable

Risk Benefit Assessment - Risk Aware not Risk Averse

- Potential to achieve positive outcomes
- Children have the right to choose to engage in challenging activities
- Make judgments about the benefits

The Collaboration ...

- Children's voices
Pictures and words
- Family voices
Ideas, offers of assistance, people who know people ..
- Staff voices
Enthusiasm, passion, ideas, research .. then the 'mud map' plan

The Plan ...

- Real – an achievable plan
- Relevant – fits with the aim, philosophy, quality early childhood environments; sustainability
- Responsive – to how the children use areas; to children's ideas
- Relational – building links within and outside of the centre
- Recycled – reusing products in innovative ways

The Spontaneous ...

- Fund raising - our Bake Stall on Election Day; selling the herbs from our garden
- Community people to talk to the children
 - Salad Growers
 - Gold Coast City Council Water Wise program

The Progress ...

- Project to date - photos
- The next steps – planning the sensory garden

The Ideas ...

... are endless and exciting!!!

Philosophy of Trinity Lutheran College Early Learning Centre

(12th April 2013)

Psalm 127:3 says 'The young child is a gift from God': We believe that:

Hopefulness should fire our vision of young children as capable and confident learners;

Individuals should be nurtured to grow within the context of shared relationships between family, staff and the wider community (Bronfenbrenner 's Bio-ecological Systems Theory, 1917 – 2005);

Light focuses fully on the child and the child's journey of discovery and empowerment;

Openness to the Holy Spirit and our strong beliefs are imperative to guide our lives within our Christ-centred community;

Supporting the uniqueness and potential of each child's gifts helps to build resilient learners;

Operating within, and being guided by, ethical, moral and Christian values of love, justice, compassion, forgiveness, patience and service underpins all we do;

Promoting and accepting diversity builds respect, compassion and kindness towards each other;

Honestly evaluating and critically reflecting on our progress helps us learn and continually improve;

Yearning and striving for excellence, and a sense of awe, wonder and joy, builds a vibrant learning community.

How this presentation links to theme/s of the conference:

This presentation links with:

1. What shapes quality education in a Lutheran School?
2. What does a transformed 'mind, body, heart' look like?

Biography of presenter:

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Deviney, J. Duncan, S. Harris, S. Rody, M Rosenbury, L (2010) *Inspiring Spaces for Young Children*, Gryphon House, USA

Keeler, R (2008) *Natural Playscapes - Creating Outdoor Play Environments for the Soul* Exchange Press, USA

Mind Stretchers <http://www.mindstretchers.co.uk/nature-kindergartens.html> retrieved 2011

Walsh P (2006) *Best Practice Guidelines in Lutheran Education Queensland Early Childhood Physical Environments* Open Book, Adelaide

Websites of interests

<http://www.cubbyhousekingdom.com.au/products/moreInfo/147/362/TWS-Turbo-Wave-Slide--Green>

<http://www.playgroundaccessories.com.au/products/moreInfo/Giant-Cool-Wave-Slide-3.2m-YELLOW/55>

<http://pinterest.com/maryk77/garden-recycle-ideas/> (photo's)

<http://www.google.com.au/search?q=recycled+garden+ideas&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ei=4E0dUrKmAc4kgWRhIGwDw&ved=0CEUQsAQ&biw=1440&bih=648> (photo's)

<http://sustainablegc.goldcoast.qld.gov.au/waste/recycle-organic-waste>

<http://www.renos.com.au/bargains/qld/> (find a bargain)

<http://www.therubbishremovers.com/recycle-shop> (find a bargain)

<http://www.endeavour.com.au/Shop-with-us/Tip-Shops> (find a bargain)

<http://www.recyclebuild.com.au/search/c.landscaping> (cheap & free stuff)

<http://www.gumtree.com.au/s-garden/gold-coast/page-2/c1839813006035> (cheap & free plants)

<http://au.ziilch.com/services.php> (where good stuff goes free)

<http://www.creativeplaygrounds.com.au/early-childhood-playground-photo-gallery>

http://www.ediblekidsgardens.com.au/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&layout=item&id=14&Itemid=55

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<http://www.livingthing.net.au/rc/PP/ClimbLittleGreenSteps.pdf>

<https://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/earlychildhood/licensed/pn5a-natenvironments.pdf>

<http://tessaroslandscapes.blogspot.com.au/p/eylf-and-natural-environments.html>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4LC9mi9dsXI>

<http://www.livinggreener.gov.au/waste>



Dragonflies and Daisies – using children’s interests to share the wisdom of God’s world

Susan Shaw

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¹³People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these (Mark 10: 13-14)

‘The path to spiritual experience and nurturance are many .. (and may be) inextricably integrated with:

- Being observant and in touch with nature;
- Experiencing stillness, quiet and wonder;
- Belonging and relationships;
- An appreciation of simplicity’

(Elkind, et al, sited in Thomas and Lockwood, 2009, p 4)

Making authentic and meaningful links between the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) and the Christian Studies Curriculum (CSC):

Our learning journey, what we tried first ...

- Conversations around our philosophy/beliefs/values while developing our Continuous Improvement Plan (QIP)
- A commitment to providing a strong Christian element, embedded within the play-based, child-centred learning
- A review of the EYLF and CSC documents: What do they say? How do they connect?
- Brainstorming how we might provide the Christian element
 - Saying grace before eating
 - Reading books – Bible stories and others
 - Talking about values – desirable qualities and attitudes
 - Singing songs
 - Setting up a sacred space in each room and in the foyer
 - Discuss Christian events with the children – Easter and Christmas
 - Linking with the College – Pastor and congregation, Church and chapel services
- Using the QLECS resources – *'Integration of the Christian Studies Curriculum Framework and the Early Years Learning Framework' / 'A Beginners Guide to Spirituality' (2010)*

Reflections on our journey ...

- Skills and knowledge audit – what do we currently understand?
- How did staff feel? Unsure, nervous, not wanting to make a mistake or say something wrong, scared, lacking confidence to respond appropriately to children's questions
- How are we linking our program to the EYLF and the CSC? Development of observation and planning formats and a coding system for the EYLF and CSC
- Pastor – worried that the Chapel service message would be above what the 2-5 year olds could comprehend / that they would not sit still for 20 minutes
- Parents / Families – happy for children to attend Chapel – excursion permissions signed (including two Muslim children)
- New information / reading:

Ideas from *'Nurturing the spiritual child: Compassion, connection and a sense of self'*, (Thomas and Lockwood, 2009, ECA Inc)

- Children have a right to time for 'being' – unhurried, nurturing of the spirit, 'Spirit and soul' time each day, peacefulness, slowness (pg 2)
- Children need areas for solitude and silence (pg 3)
- Building relationships is pivotal
- Nurture a sense of awe and wonder; share the miracles of nature (pg 17)
- The 'pedagogy of listening' (Reggio Emilia schools) is a gift (pg 15)
- Children relate to their natural world – plants, insects, birds, etc (pg 3)
- Spirituality is often linked to our search for connection, compassion, joy, respect (Christian values) (pg 5)
- Spirituality fosters resilience (especially in times of adversity) (pg 9)

- The staff team need to reflect on their personal beliefs and attitudes

Ideas from 'A Child's Book of Values', (Wright, 2001, Dorling Kindersley Ltd)

- Values develop character, integrity and purpose
- Christian values are essentially the 'fruit of the Spirit'
 - Love (love)
 - Forgiveness (forgiveness)
 - Kindness (compassion)
 - Generosity (humility)
 - Patience
 - Gratefulness (appreciation)
 - Responsibility (quality)
 - Honesty (justice)
 - Bravery (courage)
 - Faithfulness (service)
 - Joyfulness (hope)

(In brackets is the cross-reference to the ten Core Values from the LEA's 'A vision for learners and learning in Lutheran schools')

Improving our practices ...

- Through reflections and discussions, at team meetings, in small groups, throughout the day, with the College, with families (mostly informally)
- Four staff members participating in *Pathways* training with the College Pastor
- Attending Church services
- Opening our eyes to the potential within the children's interests and comments
 - ... the most meaningful events came from the children ...
 - Danny the Dragonfly (CW2.1 / EYLF 4.3, 4.4)
 - Children's' conversations at Easter (CB1.1 / EYLF 4.3)
 - Planting our gardens (CL3.1/ EYLF 2.4)
 - Sitting silently and listening (CW2.1 / EYLF 4.3, 4.4)
 - Discussions about what a prayer is – children writing their own prayer (CC3.1 / EYLF 1.3)
 - At the table 'God is everywhere' (CC1.1 / EYLF 4.1, 5.2)
 - Reflection pages sent home after first College Chapel visit (CB3.1 / EYLF 1.1, 1.2)
 - The 'Bible stand' (CC2.1 / EYLF 4.4)

Show and tell of resources that we have found useful ...

- Children's Bibles – the 'Sneaky Snake' is a favourite
- Prayers
- Felt stories
- Books – ordinary and bible stories
- iTunes
- Music, College intranet
- Reference books

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EYLF LEARNING OUTCOMES

OUTCOME ONE:

EYLF 1.0	Children have a strong sense of identity
EYLF 1.1	Children feel safe supported and secure
EYLF 1.2	Children develop their emerging autonomy, inter-dependence, resilience and sense of agency
EYLF 1.3	Children develop knowledgeable and confident self-identities
EYLF 1.4	Children learn to interact in relation to others with care, empathy and respect

OUTCOME TWO:

EYLF 2.0	Children are connected with and contribute to their world
EYLF 2.1	Children develop a sense of belonging to groups and communities and an understanding of the reciprocal rights and responsibilities necessary for active community participation
EYLF 2.2	Children respond to diversity with respect
EYLF 2.3	Children become aware of fairness
EYLF 2.4	Children become socially responsible and show respect for the environment

OUTCOME THREE:

EYLF 3.0	Children have a strong sense of wellbeing
EYLF 3.1	Children become strong in their social and emotional wellbeing
EYLF 3.2	Children take increasing responsibility for their own health and physical wellbeing

OUTCOME FOUR:

EYLF 4.0	Children are confident and involved learners
EYLF 4.1	Children develop dispositions for learning such as curiosity, co-operation, confidence, creativity, commitment, enthusiasm, persistence, imagination and reflexivity
EYLF 4.2	Children develop a range of skills and processes such as problem solving, enquiry, experimentation, hypothesizing, researching and investigating
EYLF 4.3	Children transfer and adapt what they have learned from one context to another
EYLF 4.4	Children resource their own learning through connecting with people, place, technologies and natural and processed materials

OUTCOME FIVE:

EYLF 5.0	Children are effective communicators
EYLF 5.1	Children interact verbally and non-verbally with others for a range of purposes
EYLF 5.2	Children engage with a range of texts and gain meaning from these texts
EYLF 5.3	Children express ideas and make meaning using a range of media
EYLF 5.4	Children begin to understand how symbols and pattern systems work
EYLF 5.5	Children use information and communication technologies to access information, investigate ideas and represent their thinking

The Christian Studies Curriculum:

Christian Living(CL)

CL Key Idea 1: (EYLF 1.4)

CL 1.0	Christians believe that God creates people to live in relationship with him and with each other
CL 1.1	Children describe ways God cares for individual people

CL Key Idea 2: (EYLF 2.2, 2.3)

CL 2.0	Christians are called to love and serve all people
CL 2.1	Children hear stories about God's helpers and discuss ways they are helped and can help others

CL Key Idea 3: (EYLF 2.4)

CL 3.0	Christians have a responsibility in and for the world
CL 3.1	Children discuss their experiences of God's world and demonstrate how they can care for it.

Christianity in the world (CW)

CW Key Idea 1: (EYLF 4.1, 4.2)

CW 1.0	Religious beliefs and ideas shape people's thinking and actions
CW 1.1	Children identify and acknowledge that people think and live differently

CW Key Idea 2: (EYLF 4.3, 4.4)

CW 2.0	People express their spirituality in various contexts within and beyond Christianity
CW 2.1	Children begin to explore spirituality by describing experiences of awe and wonder

CW Key Idea 3: (EYLF 2.1, 3.1)

CW 3.0	People made decisions using a range of religious perspectives and ethical frameworks
CW 3.1	Children make connections between their actions and consequences for themselves and others

The Christian Church (CC)

CC Key Idea 1: (EYLF 5.2, 4.1)

CC 1.0	Christians believe the Bible is God's word.
CC 1.1	Children tell what they learn about God and his story in the Bible.

CC Key idea 2: (EYLF 4.4)

CC 2.0	The Christian community is shaped by and shapes its cultural and historical contexts.
CC 2.1	Children identify different Christian Churches in their community

CC Key Idea 3: (EYLF 1.3)

CC 3.0	Christians pray, worship and celebrate the sacraments
CC3.1	Children share their experiences of Christian prayer, worship and celebrations

Christian Beliefs (CB)

CB Key Idea 1: (EYLF 4.3)

CB 1.0	Christians believe God is one God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit
CB 1.1	Children explain their ideas about God and who God is

CB Key Idea 2: (EYLF 5.1, 5.2)

CB 2.0	The person and work of Jesus the Christ is central to Christianity
CB 2.1	Children identify stories about Jesus and discuss what Jesus said and did

CB Key Idea 3: (EYLF 1.1, 1.2)

CB 3.0	A Christian worldview is shaped by the biblical teaching of sin and grace
CB 3.1	Children demonstrate an awareness of the Christian belief that God creates people and loves them unconditionally

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