

The Northern Nursery School Philosophy

Our philosophy and vision '**CREATIVITY**' brings us together as a team and as a community, inspiring and guiding us in our work with children.

Our vision for children, families and staff is to create an environment where strong relationships with others, with place, with materials and with things are at the core of our work together. Relationships build our sense of self and our sense of belonging within a community.

Our teaching is inspired by Reggio Emilia (Italy) and 'the image of the child' as a strong, capable, and resilient being. Through creative and intellectual engagement with others, our children become active citizens who are confident, caring, responsible and respectful, valuing of their own and others' uniqueness.

In partnership with our families we build a strong sense of community, grounded in caring relationships, partnerships and connections that shape and inspire our creative and educational program. Our families join with us in our commitment to the wellbeing and happiness of all our children and also in our commitment to creating an inclusive, caring community. We work together in ensuring that all children and adults have a strong sense of belonging and wellbeing at the preschool.

Our team is committed to excellence in all areas of our work with children, families and our community. Together with children, we engage in creative, critical and reflective thinking, which drives our research and practice. We come together with our unique qualities and skills to create a wonderful richness in the resources we have to offer, united by the philosophical approaches to teaching at the Northern Nursery School.

CREATIVITY

C Creativity

Our inspiring, creative and empowering educational environment belongs to and is continually developed by our children, families, staff and the wider community which we are a part of. Our children, families and teachers are integral in the planning and processes involved in learning together, which is underpinned by creative thinking and creative expression. We value children's, teachers' and families' creativity, ideas and theories, all of which inspire the direction and depth of learning that unfolds. We see children as capable and competent, able to take responsibility to explore and engage in collaborative learning with others. We value their uniqueness and individuality, their creative ways of thinking, of seeing and of doing. They are experimenters, scientists, researchers, artists, collaborators, explorers and observers, each with a 'hundred languages'*; or forms, of expression. Graphic mark making, narrative drawing, sculptural arrangements, music, dance and movement are but some of these 'languages' that form the basis of meaning making in expressing and leaving a trace of our ideas. They are communicable acts that inform our dialogue of research, challenging children to think beyond themselves and move from the abstract to the concrete. We encourage the learning styles and contributions of each child in their quest to understand themselves and make sense of their world. Our curriculum enriches children's creativity, strengths, interests, abilities and skills, whilst focusing on their wellbeing, resilience and enjoyment in learning in relationship with others.

*The Hundred Languages of Children' was written by Loris Malaguzzi, philosopher and founder of the schools of Reggio Emilia, Italy whose philosophy and practices strongly influence the Northern Nursery School's approach to teaching.

R Relationships

Relationships and relatedness are at the heart of our preschool. Our spirit of community is embedded in a culture of caring relationships, reciprocal partnerships and meaningful connections that shape and inspire our ways of working and thinking together. Relationships with others, with place and with things build the foundations that support children and adults to live life with joy, confidence and wellbeing. We believe that our journey of knowing and understanding oneself and one's own potential happens through these powerful and positive social interactions and collaborations with others. While developing relationships we learn how to express ourselves, listen to others, debate our ideas and theories, work together cooperatively and share feelings to create connections and deepen our understandings in knowing ourselves and others. Through meaningful relationships we discover difference and embrace diversity and grow in our understanding of what it means to be an inclusive, kind and empathetic person.

Our relationship with families is essential in all aspects of our service operation and our day-to-day work as a community preschool. These strong relationships create the foundations and future planning that ensures that the Northern Nursery School is a wonderful educational environment for children and adults, now and for years to come.

Relationships with our wider community are essential. These relationships enrich our world and the possibilities we have to expand our horizons and our understandings of what it is to be a citizen of the world.

Our relationship with the land we are on is critical, and one that is highly valued and respected. We are caretakers of this land and take responsibility for understanding what it needs in caring for it and ensuring its enduring survival.

E Equity and inclusiveness

Equity and inclusion are fundamental values of the Northern Nursery School. We believe that the right for all people to be treated equally under the law is clearly aligned with our philosophical values of fairness, inclusion, equity and respect. Some of the most significant values we foster in everyday practice are mutual respect and understanding, generosity and kindness in our relationships. This develops each child's and adult's ability and potential to be informed, empowered and responsible advocates for themselves and others. Our program and teaching practices encourage children and adults to be inclusive, caring, and discerning citizens of our community who can recognise and proactively respond to bias and inequity. Each child, family and staff's uniqueness is valued, as are their strengths, abilities, culture and beliefs, each contributing to the rich tapestry of our community. We prioritise the inclusion of children with additional needs, supported by high staff ratios, including a learning support teacher who works closely with children, staff and families to ensure that each child has the best opportunity to grow in all aspects of their development and wellbeing.

A Aesthetics and environment

The indoor and outdoor learning environments of Northern Nursery School are highly valued and viewed as the 'third teacher'. We believe that the environment is integral to the curriculum as it inspires, enables, deepens and exhibits children's learning potential. Our valuing of the environment is demonstrated by our

attention to natural beauty and purposeful design. We are inspired and influenced in our thinking by the schools of Reggio Emilia, Italy, where aesthetics, harmony, relationships, active learning and intentional planning are paramount and express our respect for children, families and teachers.

Our image of children as capable, responsible, curious and creative inspires the way we organise our indoor and outdoor environments. Our spaces invite investigation, imagination, deep thinking, creativity, problem solving and meaning making. Our thoughtful learning environments and approach to teaching values time as fundamental to children's learning. We immerse children in experiences that build their autonomy and resilience. We provide opportunity for challenge and success in exploring relationships with people, space, equipment, materials and resources that challenge and build their resilience and skills in multiple ways. We create a sense of belonging and instill a welcoming atmosphere of joy, peace, inquiry and collaboration for all who attend and visit the preschool.

Northern Nursery School takes full responsibility as caretakers of this land in respecting the natural resources that we have and use within our environment and community. Children, families and teachers develop an awareness of the natural environment through active engagement and contribution to its care. We encourage children to respect the First Australians as knowledge holders and custodians of country, including all of Australia's waterways, seas, land and sky.

Our policies, practices, resources and recycled furniture reflect our beliefs about environmental sustainability. Teachers carefully select materials for their qualities and potential to support open-ended exploration, problem solving and learning. We are on a journey of rethinking our practices by reducing, re-using and recycling as many of the resources as we can at the preschool. We aim to understand, promote and embed sustainable practices to build respect for the world in which we live as a finite natural resource, which needs us all to advocate on its behalf.

T Teaching and thinking

Our approach to early childhood education is embedded within our philosophy at the Northern Nursery School. We have a firm belief in the capacity of children as described by Loris Malaguzzi, the founding philosopher of the schools of Reggio Emilia, Italy, in his 'image of the child' and in his poem 'The Hundred Languages of Children'. We are guided by the National Quality Framework, comprising of the National Law and Regulations, the National Quality Standard, the assessment and quality rating process of continuous improvement and 'Belonging, Being and Becoming' - The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia. All support play-based learning and a rich educational program co-constructed by children and adults in close partnership with families and community.

Our project work is a collaborative process of design, discussion, planning, research, reflection and outcomes. It emerges from the diversity of knowledge, interests, ideas, questions, challenges and wonderings expressed by children, teachers and families, all of whom can be authors of the curriculum. Our curriculum builds children's abilities in critical thinking, in listening to others, in sharing ideas, and in making meaning by learning how to learn together. Children are full of questions, theories and prior understandings and see possibilities in people, places and things. They engage in dialogue with others and the environment, thus establishing a rich educational foundation for life. The culture of our preschool is unique and precious to us, and is upheld and maintained by dedicated people and respectful relationships.

For our teaching team, time to think, reflect, research and intentionally plan together is essential to our quality of teaching and professional learning. Our pedagogical documentation provides a window into how children think, imagine and make sense of their world. It makes visible children's learning and gives opportunity for us all to be engaged in critical reflection and ongoing planning. It reveals the processes and

outcomes of our project work and celebrates what is possible when children are given the opportunity to take real and meaningful responsibility for their own learning.

Evaluation and assessment of each child's progress and development is a process of continual reflection carried out by the teaching team in discussion with families, using the National Quality Standards and the Early Years Learning Framework to guide practices and shape our long-term goals for children. The Northern Nursery School endorses Early Childhood Australia's (ECA) Code of Ethics to determine and maintain the highest professional standards and best practice in teaching and learning.

I Imagination, investigations and project work

The Early Years Learning Framework emphasises the importance of young children having time to 'be and to play'. At the Northern Nursery School, children are provided with time and space to extend their imagination and creative intelligence, expressing theories and ideas, verbally and non-verbally, through the '100 languages' of creative expression available to them. Time is considered an essential part of a child's experience, bringing focus, depth and thoughtfulness to their work. Children are encouraged to enjoy working together through a play-based curriculum; to experience the wonders and delight that stem from their collective imaginings and ideas and projects that involve the whole group.

We value and build on learning experiences through project work where, together with the children, we document and reflect on the conversations we have, the work we have done, future planning and theories and wonderings that inspire and stimulate further learning. Documentation is more than a record of what has been done. It is a way of making children's thinking and learning visible and is a communication tool to stimulate critical thinking, reflection and planning. Children and adults instigate 'projects' or investigations, which have varying durations and can be conducted individually, in small groups and or as a whole group.

Our curriculum is founded on the development of relationships that involve children working together, engaged in discussions, explorations, collaborations and processes of learning. These processes of learning give children opportunities to explore music, drama, physical expression, movement, dance, the visual arts and media studies, all of which enable children to express their thoughts, feelings and experiences in multiple ways. Language and literacy, numeracy, science and technology, and sustainability are embraced in our teaching and learning. The importance of nature, food and nutrition, and physical, mental and social health, wellbeing and safety is also embedded within our curriculum. Our teaching is intentional and focused, valuing the uniqueness of each child, providing children with opportunities to develop a wide range of skills, competencies and knowledge. Through active involvement and meaningful engagement, children build their understandings of the roles that creativity and multi-literacies play in their lives as powerful forms of communication and self-expression.

V Values

Our values are shaped and guided as we experience day-to-day life within our families, our preschool and the world in which we live. Our core values at the Northern Nursery School are focused on our ethical relationships where integrity, honesty, generosity and kindness are integral in our behaviours and communication with others. We encourage critical thinking and advocacy for others, using these skills to recognise stereotypes and bias, respecting differences and similarities within society, and showing empathy, care and regard for each other. Our collaborative discussions provide children and adults with opportunities to consider other points of view when forming their own ideas and expressing their opinions. We promote values that support us all in becoming active contributors to, and responsible citizens in, society. Our teachers create opportunities where children can safely and constructively work together. We encourage the development of a strong sense of self and self-esteem so that children can express their ideas and challenge each other without causing emotional or physical hurt. We support children in understanding which forms of expression are appropriate in resolving issues that may arise. Our children also enjoy, care for and learn about our beautiful indoor and outdoor physical environments each day. In doing so they gain knowledge about and learn respect for place and nature and indigenous custodianship

of country. We are all involved in environmentally sustainable practices, knowing that our choices and actions, however small, can make a difference to our world today and tomorrow.

I Image of the child

Central to our vision is a powerful 'image of the child' who is a citizen of their world from the moment they are born. Children are full of potential, competent, intelligent, capable and empathetic and we are always challenged to ensure that our teaching and learning environments live up to the image we hold of children. Our pedagogical approach is underpinned by prominent theorists such as Loris Malaguzzi, Bruner, Vygotsky, Piaget and Freire who have been responsible for transforming early childhood education perspectives and practices throughout the world.

Children are powerful contributors to their own learning and, accordingly, they play an active role in governing the direction of both independent and collaborative investigations, projects and research. The role of early childhood teachers has changed from instructors to co-researchers; co-constructing and researching knowledge together with children and families. Through engaging in critical and creative thinking and expression we explore ideas and interests, which shape the direction of learning. Through intentional planning and collaboration, children learn how to learn in dialogue and relationship with others, building on their lifelong skills in working with others towards a common objective. Through our pedagogical documentation and shared collaboration and reflections, we are able to critically reflect and learn more about children. This, in turn, provides valuable research on the learning of both teachers and children, building on the quality of our educational program and our teaching.

T Training and professional development

The Northern Nursery School employs highly qualified and experienced staff who are specialists in their field. Our director and teachers work in collaboration with each other to create an inspiring educational curriculum and environment that embraces and engages all children.

In our commitment to best practice we prioritise professional development, believing it to be pivotal to quality education in our preschool. We approach professional development as an act of collective and shared research; a continual cycle of action and reflection and integral to our everyday practice. When an individual staff member shares knowledge with others, it benefits the team and the organisation as a whole. Through ongoing provision of internal and external professional learning opportunities for all our staff, the team is aware of contemporary research and current philosophy, practices, legislation and initiatives within early childhood.

Y Yesterday, today and tomorrow

Since 1936, the Northern Nursery School has educated children according to best current early childhood pedagogical policy and practice. As a community preschool we are governed by a Management Committee of parents and representation from Mosman Council, who lead by example in their strong vision for the preschool, and underpinned by financially and regulatory responsible practices. They advocate for children with exceptional commitment for quality outcomes within our educational program. This is evidenced by the provision of high staff to child ratios, excellent professional development for staff and significant investment in improving the physical environment, which we value as the 'third teacher'.

Our strong history and relationship with the Mosman community is demonstrated by our families returning across generations in addition to our initiatives in connecting with our broader community through our excursions, social functions, community garden, Alumni, website and Facebook. Our historical partnership with Mosman Council and Councillors and their commitment to the preschool with representation on our Management Committee and leasing us the land, continues to ensure our ongoing viability in the future.

Our commitment is, and has always been, to our children and families past and present and to those who will attend our beautiful preschool in the future, providing a wonderful foundation of early childhood education for all.

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