

# “Children connect with the world around them.”

## 1 Background

This action research project was inspired to give children the opportunity to explore learning about themselves and the world around them. Leaders in the centre intentionally extended the learning environment to the outdoors, to shops, libraries and parks in order to offer children more opportunities for making connections and open ended interactions.

We wanted our children to develop their sense of belonging and connectedness to a community to feel valued, respected and cared by others. In this way, children were more likely to learn about themselves, construct a strong identity and a positive sense of self and strong relationship with others (DEEWR, 2009).

## 2 Aim

As children develop, community connections help them to find their place in the world, to develop understanding of how society works, and to recognise and understand the shared values that underpin their society (UNCRC, 2006; Jackman, 2008).

Our aim was to have a curriculum that is practical and linked to the real world so our children have the opportunity to be active citizens and have a real sense of ownership and belonging to their community.

Essentially, we looked at our role as facilitators, supporting children to investigate real questions in practical ways. We wanted to embed Key Learning Areas (KLAs) such as literacy, mathematics and science into each journey, rather than teaching discrete subject areas. In this way, we could develop a curriculum that was about learning the questioning, language and skills to become life-long learners.

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## 3 Approach

Social constructivist theory (Vygotsky, 1978) informs this study, acknowledging the zone of proximal development where a child’s development can be scaffolded through social and community contexts.

To co-construct the learning activities, educators discussed learning goals with children and families and invited suggestions on the best ways to investigate them. For example, to help children understand more about occupations, we invited families to share with their children what they do every day for work.

**Jack:** “My mom is a car driver. She drives everywhere.”

**Ella:** “My daddy does some very important things on very important stuff like computers.”

**Fisher:** “My mom sells things like a grocer.”

To help develop their sense of belonging to the group and understand reciprocal rights and responsibilities, educators encouraged children to celebrate their personal and group positive actions by acknowledging cooperation and collaboration e.g., ‘That was a good choice Jessica that you decided to let your peers help you in your construction’.

Children started learning to understand their own abilities, needs and interests and to explore their power and be able to make right decisions within the context of their families and communities (DEEWR, 2009; Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

As children built trusted relationships with their educators and their peers, we planned ways to explore learning beyond the classroom. Detailed risk assessments and excursion plans were developed and communicated with families. We discussed learning goals and how we would embed Key Learning Areas (KLAs) such as literacy, mathematics and science into excursion activities as intentional teaching strategies. Educator-to-child ratios were also increased beyond the prescribed ratios to ensure adequate supervision during the excursions.

The learning environment was extended gradually, allowing children and educators to build their confidence and sense of connectedness to the community. We practiced the route from school to the local market, before venturing further to the local library and parks. Feedback from all stakeholders was documented for reflection and future planning.

## 4 Results

Our intention was to respond to children’s interests and develop their understanding of ‘the reciprocal rights and responsibilities necessary for community participation’ (DEEWR, 2009).

The project helped children make connections between their interests and the real world, develop their sense of identity in their environment, and supported their understanding of what makes each and every one of them unique.

After a few months of mastering small group excursions, educators and families met to discuss the learning that had occurred. Educators and families are now co-constructing an excursion curriculum to continue children’s connection with the community and natural world.

## 5 Conclusion

Our pre-schoolers especially, are ready to take the next step and begin to discover how the broader community supports us. Buses, trains, art galleries, museums and construction sites - these are all learning resources our children have at their disposal.

## 6 Acknowledgment

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### References

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