**PURPOSE**

The purpose of this philosophy is to allow interested parties, including families and educators, an understanding about why Leap Ahead Learning does what we do and in the way that we do. It shares the knowledge of our beliefs, understandings and values regarding the care and education of preschool children. It is a way for parents and educators to see if this philosophy suits what they are looking for (whether it is for employment or as and education and care service for their child). Leap Ahead Learning’s philosophy will be used as a tool to lead to improved outcomes, practices, relationships, policies and procedures. It will be updated annually with input from staff and families.

**BACKGROUND:**

Leap Ahead Learning is a unique program in that it is a ‘Pre-Prep Program’. This equates to us being a ‘bridging’ year between kinder and school and it is, therefore, best suited to children who are in their second year of four year old kinder or those children who would benefit from more structure than what kinder offers.

Children who are in their second year of kinder, more often than not, need confidence building with social and emotional development. We offer explicit instruction within these areas and pride ourselves on being leaders in social skills development in an educational and care setting.

Children at this stage of development are also generally interested in literacy and numeracy and are ready for a challenge with their literacy and numeracy skills. We provide for this by teaching structured literacy and numeracy sessions. Sessions are taught in a fun, interactive, scaffolded and multi-disciplinary way for full engagement of the children.

We also focus on other skills such as fine motor, gross motor, problem solving, expressive and receptive language and other general school readiness skills. All that we do is about developing the *whole* child with a strong school readiness goal.

At Leap Ahead Learning the interest and wellbeing of the children along with the overall quality of the program take precedence. This means that the mental, physical and emotional welfare and development of the children are of paramount importance. Our commitment to this, along with our quality educational program, stem from our dedication and passion, as well as vast experience, working with children. We align this with best practice teaching and the pedagogy of the Early Years Learning and Development Framework outcomes. At Leap Ahead Learning we do everything with high expectations and standards, and this leads to the best support for children’s learning, development and overall wellbeing. Our philosophy provides the foundation.

**PHILOSOPHY:**

Our philosophy has six main focus areas, which are:

1. Image of the Child
2. Cultural Environment
3. Educational Program
4. Role of the Educator
5. Role of the Family
6. Role of the Local Community

**1. Image of the Child**

At Leap Ahead Learning how we see children forms the basis for all of the key areas of our philosophy. This equates to each child being treated as an individual and being encouraged and supported to learn at his/her own pace in a way suited to their own needs and background. It helps us envision and understand the child as an early learner and a contributor to their world. Our beliefs of children are that:

* Each child is unique and their life tells a story. This story is impacted by their relationships, the role of their family in their life, their culture, the physical environment in which they live, their experiences and their individual personality. All of these components, along with the skills and knowledge that they have accumulated since birth, contribute to a child’s learning disposition.
* Every child learns and does so in their own unique way and in their own time.
* Children construct their own knowledge. A child’s natural curiosity enables them to actively learn from their peers, from adults and from their environment while exploring their particular interests.
* We believe that all children are limitless in their capacity to succeed and all successes need to be embraced.
* We believe that all children have the right to participate in a happy, secure learning environment facilitated by nurturing, qualified, competent, dedicated, passionate and compassionate adults.

**2. Cultural Environment:**

The cultural environment of Leap Ahead Learning is extremely important to us and one which enables all who enter to feel welcomed and accepted and free to be themselves. We have a culture of courtesy and respect which has positive effects on the overall program. We promote and maintain a positive culture and environment by:

* providing a safe, warm, nurturing, happy and stimulating environment in which children can thrive, learn and grow and families, volunteers, students and visitors feel welcomed
* respecting the rights of the child and each individual at the service
* encouraging non-sexist, non-racist and non-violent attitudes
* embracing and recognising our Indigenous heritage
* treating all as equals and as individuals, with respect regardless of race, sex, age or religion
* treating all that are associated with our Program with complete courtesy and respect
* being positive and looking on the bright side - “If you look the right way, you can see that the whole world is a garden.” (Frances Hodgson Burnett, ‘The Secret Garden’)
* employing likeminded professionals who are passionate and dedicated with the goal of always achieving the highest standards in all that they do.

**3. Educational Program:**

Our educational program has clear and explicit outcomes and goals that are authentic and responsive to the children’s collective and individual needs. The goals, whilst coming from the children’s needs, are based on our experience and beliefs on how children learn best along with current best evidence-based practice. Our learning program is based on a strong wellbeing and resilience component and is aligned with the philosophies of *The* *Resilience Project:* [*https://theresilienceproject.com.au/*](https://theresilienceproject.com.au/). Our learning outcomes will:

* state clear and explicit learning intentions
* provide programs that support children to achieve a range of learning outcomes, as defined by The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia - we acknowledge that children’s lives are characterised by *‘belonging, being and becoming’* – and the Victorian Early Years Learning Development Framework [VEYLF]
* be based on our belief in the importance of children participating in a structured ‘Wellbeing and Resilience Program’ and that this program will have positive and long lasting effects
* acknowledge the need for children to learn through socialisation and that at times, this will mean giving explicit social instruction and guidance to help them become a successful and social being. This means participating in our explicit social skills/social thinking program: *‘We Thinkers’/’The Incredible Flexible You’:* [*http://www.theincredibleflexibleyou.com/*](http://www.theincredibleflexibleyou.com/)
* take into account children who are in their second year of four year old kinder and who would benefit from a little more structure and challenges than a regular four year old kinder program
* be flexible to meet the needs and interests of the children and families in the Program
* acknowledge children as active and competent learners
* provide programmes that reflect accurately the different cultures represented in the Program
* provide rich environments where children are able to explore, touch, manipulate and experiment with a variety of real life and diverse materials and where children can ask questions, make hypothesis and develop their thinking. This will also mean providing open ended and science, technology, engineering and maths (S.T.E.M.) experiences
* offer children opportunities to actively explore, to work independently and with others, to make decisions and follow through with their ideas, to solve problems, to engage in real activities and to experience co-operative, symbolic, dramatic or pretend play. These components form a strong part of our play based learning with our *Very Important Play* (V.I.P.) and *Explore Time* play based programs
* demonstrate that we believe that children learn through play and socialisation and that each new experience is another step in the learning process
* encourage social interaction where language support, and scaffolding from adults are central in forming the child’s mind. Children’s development of both receptive and expressive language is integral to all development particularly intellectual functioning and later literacy. Leap Ahead Learning will cater for all areas of the child’s learning; particularly literacy development where we follow a strong oral based program along with *Little Learners Love Literacy:* [*http://littlelearnersloveliteracy.com.au/*](http://littlelearnersloveliteracy.com.au/)
* support that some level of language development occurs naturally by children experiencing a language-rich environment and that fuller development of children’s language capacities requires targeted teaching and encouragement of children’s verbal expression
* encourage sustainability knowledge and practices, knowing that this can have a long-lasting impact on our planet. This will also encompass Indigenous Culture as they were leaders in sustainable practices and being guided by their environment.

**4. Role of the Educator:**

The educator plays a vital role in the child’s learning and in the delivery of the service’s culture. Whilst we employ qualified, dedicated and passionate educators, their input and demeanour have the ability to change the culture in our work~~ing~~ environment. As staff members, we have the ability to create the following positive effects on the service:

* establish a positive and nurturing relationship~~s~~ with each child, which enhances and enriches the child’s learning and development
* build children’s confidence, sense of well-being and security, and their motivation to engage actively in learning with others
* ensure that the interests, abilities and family culture of each child are understood and valued
* commit to having high expectations for every child’s learning
* be a leader in best sustainability practices, which sets a good example for children as well as having a direct impact on the environment
* ensure that every child experiences [their own] success and is motivated to accept new challenges to learn and grow by
* understand that children require different opportunities, spaces, and specific supports in order to learn effectively and to thrive
* believe in the importance of, and our ability to work as a team, with a shared vision
* believe in reflective practice that allows for critical evaluation which leads to continued improvement of all that we do. This continual review and evaluation will inform ongoing improvement.
* embrace professional learning and skill development and believe in fostering the growth and development of staff by providing opportunities for training, networking, and through the availability of resources and encouragement
* encourage a strong culture of professional inquiry and professional collaboration
* believe in using sound evidence to inform planning for children’s progress in learning and development
* apply the best evidence-based practices to advance children’s learning and development
* are not afraid to challenge and change some existing practices to incorporate new understandings that would lead to better outcomes
* model a positive, pleasant and professional demeanour understanding that this uplifting attitude will allow children and colleagues to feel more at ease and have far reaching positive outcomes in all areas of the Program. We also understand that this positive workplace culture will produce beneficial staff and work outcomes
* show respect for others and that this collective purpose is likely to advance the agreed outcomes for children’s learning and development
* commit to the highest standards in all aspects of, and roles and responsibilities at Leap Ahead Learning.

**5. Role of the Family:**

Leap Ahead Learning strongly acknowledges, recognises and respects the importance that families play in the care and education of their child. We also believe that children learn best, and it is best for their wellbeing, if families are also connected to the education and care service. Leap Ahead Learning intends on nurturing and encouraging this partnership by:

* creating a welcoming and inclusive environment where all families are encouraged to participate in and contribute to experiences that enhance children’s learning and development across all aspects of the Program
* acknowledging and respecting differing child rearing practices in a non-judgemental way
* encouraging the participation of parents in their children’s learning as it improves children's motivation and promotes a sense of partnership in the learning process
* recognising the family’s critical importance in their child’s life
* recognising that families are the primary influence on children’s learning and development
* understanding that families have a long-standing relationship with and unique perspective on their child. This includes valuable information about their child’s strengths, abilities, interests and challenges. We will listen to each family’s understanding, priorities and perspectives about their child with genuine interest to inform shared decision-making with an overall goal to promote their child’s learning and development
* recognising that it is of vital importance to establish and strengthen partnerships with families and that this may include partnerships with extended family members and it is in the child’s best interests for there to be effective, sustained, collaborative partnerships between families and all professionals
* actively engaging families in planning for ongoing learning and development in the service and at home.

**6. Role of the Community:**

Leap Ahead Learning recognises that the child’s connection to their local community is central to child’s wellbeing and that children learn best when they are connected with and contribute to their world (local community). The local community also has a lot to offer the child in return. Leap Ahead Learning develops connections with the local community by:

* inviting local community groups to the pre-prep centre (e.g., Edendale Farm, RSL) as part of our educational learning program
* acknowledging the support for cultural diversity that the local community offers. Family and community are valuable sources of cultural knowledge and skills for all early childhood professionals in developing cultural competence
* visiting local community spaces as part of our educational learning program e.g., Were St shops, Petrie Park playground, Eltham Library and to encourage children to participate positively: demonstrating positive community spirit and enthusiasm
* offering support to families by the use of local community resources e.g., Maternal Health Nurse, Eltham Health Ability, etc.
* respecting the local physical environment and assist in its preservation
* applying for grants that are available from local organisations e.g., Eltham Rotary, Banyule Council, etc.
* inviting local community dignitaries to special events at the service, in particular, the Banyule Council Youth and Community Officer and Early Years Community Support Officer, Local MP’s Vicki Ward and Jenny Macklin to thank them for their support of the program.

**“SMILE AND THE WHOLE WORD SMILES WITH YOU”**

(Stanley Gordon West - author)

**LEGISLATION:**

Regulation 55 (c) states that all early years education and care services are required to have a philosophy under their Quality Improvement Plans (QIP).

**SOURCES:**

*Early Years Learning Framework for Australia – ‘Belonging, Being and Becoming’: ‘*<https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/belonging_being_and_becoming_the_early_years_learning_framework_for_australia.pdf>

*The Resilience Project*: <http://theresilienceproject.com.au/>

*Victorian Early Years Learning Development Framework*: <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/childhood/providers/edcare/veyldframework.pdf>

*We Thinkers* social skills program: <https://www.socialthinking.com/LandingPages/Mission>

Little Learners Love Literacy program: <http://littlelearnersloveliteracy.com.au/>

**AUTHORISATION**

This policy was adopted by the Approved Provider of Leap Ahead Learning on 27/03/2018.

This policy was reviewed by the Approved Provider of Leap Ahead Learning on 27/03/2018 and will be updated from the input of children, families and staff. This Philosophy will be continually updated from all these stakeholders.

**REVIEW DATE:** 27/03/2019.

Leap Ahead Learning Philosophy

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