



Authentic Learning Environment

Environmental Policy & Procedure

March 2021

Written by Clare Caro

Contents:

- Statement
- Aims
- Objectives
- Outcome
- Definitions
- Section 1 Practical Application
- Section 2 Teaching Tools
- Section 3 Procedure

Statement

Lens: Authentic Learning Environment carefully considers the **environmental impact** of all of our behaviour, activity, purchases, buildings and installations, and landscaping. We seek to develop an **Eco-literacy lens** in all those participating in Authentic Learning Environment activity.

Boundaries: Our environmental responsibility includes the right to turn away materials entering the environment that do not comply with the zero-waste target or add value to the learning environment.

Balance: While Authentic Learning Environment seeks to educate, teach and develop *Eco-literacy* skills with a *zero-waste target*, we understand that we live in a culture where this target is not always possible.

Aims

- Set up and maintain an ecologically sound environment, indoors and outdoors.
- Teach the skills to set up and maintain an ecologically aware environment.
- Embed eco-literate thinking and behaviour through total immersion and practical experience.

Objectives

- *Connection and interconnection*: embed the understanding that everything is connected within the *biosphere*, life-cycles and ecosystems, the importance of these interconnections and our part in it
- Mindset: empower individuals with the mindset-tools to tackle a collective environmental crisis
- Language: skills for communicating and problem solving with others towards eco-literate solutions
- Caretaking: the ability to take care of plants, animals, insects and materials by imposing the right amount of human aid
- *Zero-waste* target: with the catch phrase, “leave no trace”
- *Circular Economy* awareness: the ability to make choices that calculate qualities of materials, their impact on the environment through use, the resultant volume of waste and how to return waste back into the cycle effectively

Outcome

The outcome is an education model that embodies Eco-literacy. The participants will develop the practical skills, for immediate and long-term positive environmental impact. Our actions in providing this model will positively impact the environment, the ecosystem, individuals and communities that we work in. An authentic Eco-literate curriculum offers learners the skills they need to make a positive impact on the planet.

Definitions

Eco-literacy is:

- To think holistically, considering the circular-cycle and the entire ecosystem
- To evaluate all materials brought into the environment, and how they will impact in the environment, in the short term and the long term
- Make choices for the collective best outcome creating sustainable human communities
- The understanding that we are part of nature and play a role in the interconnection of everything
- Understanding that the living web of natural systems make Life on Earth possible
- Knowing the individual flora and fauna species in the immediate local ecosystem

Circular-cycle

- A *circular economy* is a system aimed at eliminating waste and the continual extraction of resources. The *circular-cycle* is the model of behaviour where we **choose, use and dispose** of the materials we use, taking full responsibility for our purchasing, actions and the environmental impact.
- As educators, we apply the **circular-cycle** model to the physical learning environment. We consider the land, buildings, infrastructure, educational materials, art materials, tools, equipment; extending to

cleaning products, food, drink and hygiene.

Sustainability

'If we can *keep* doing it and the environment is not damaged in any way, it is sustainable.'

- We consider the wider impact of the materials we bring into our circular-cycle; the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services, in relation to natural resources, social equity, location, and how ethical the companies and organisations that we source from are
- Sustainability is meeting our own current needs without compromising future generations' ability to meet their own needs

Zero-waste

- Zero-waste is a set of principles focused on waste prevention. Nothing we dispose of is sent to landfills, incinerators, off shore or dumped into the ocean
- The products procured are reused, or they break down without releasing toxins and harmful chemicals into the environment

Ecocide

The destruction of the natural environment by deliberate or negligent human action.

Content & Conditions

- Content; activities, tools, and materials we provide.
- Conditions:
 1. We provide the continual application of the circular-cycle and sustainability
 2. We provide, furnish and maintain our indoor and outdoor environment

Activities

Refers to product-based or goal orientated learning, activities work towards producing the desired end product.

Play

Refers to process-based learning, where there is no end product in mind although a product may be the result of the play.

- There is no adult led 'starter' to start players playing, the play is initiated by the children
- There is no expectation of a product, or the play being manipulated to produce one

Section 1 Practical Application

The eco-literate lens, furnishings and behaviours apply to the following areas:

We apply Eco-literate furnishings and behaviours to the following areas;

- Physical Environment
- Session Structure
- All Materials for the Learning Environment (including Educational Materials and Activities, Play Provisions & Daily Living Materials)
- Celebrations and Rituals
- Information and Workshops
- Merchandise
- Habits and Attitude

Physical Environment

The site, buildings, landscape

We choose sites that offer plenty of outdoor space with free and safe access-all-areas.

- The buildings we create will be off-grid
- With access to gardens, projects and play

Session Structure

Set-up, rhythm and clean-up

Whether a session for play or a craft activity, indoors or outdoors, the way we design and run all our sessions adheres to Eco-literate principle aforementioned.

All Materials for the Learning Environment

All materials we bring into the learning environment (including stationery, educational equipment, art supplies, games, puzzles, outdoor tools and equipment), living will be assessed on the following:

- Circular-cycle - the impact and exit of the material
- Sustainable – our choices supporting best outcomes for all
- Packaging awareness – what invisible products are we buying

All play provision materials (*open-ended-loose-parts and fixed landscape features*) will be passed for being multi-purpose for play;

- Multi-purpose
- Authentic real objects (no replicas)

All daily living materials (*food, cleaning products and utensils*) will also consider the following;

- Cleaning products must be safe to return to the ecosystem (non-toxic)
- Bulk buying
- Refill shopping

- Make and grow-your-own to avoid packaging and food miles
- Utensils are chosen for longevity, non-plastic, refillable, purposeful/necessary

Celebrations and Rituals

Meaningfulness and accessories for celebrations

- We bring attention to our place in the ecosystem by celebrating nature's seasonal rituals in an eco-literate way
- We make *eco-literate adjustments* to widely celebrated events and rituals when we purchase ~
 - Gifts and wrapping
 - Party decorations
 - Dress and costume
 - Activities

Information and Workshops

- Where possible, information is provided electronically to save paper
- Printed material is available on request, and printed to order to avoid unnecessary waste
- Workshop materials are minimal, biodegradable and/or long-lasting

Merchandise

All merchandise must be from a sustainable source, chosen for non-toxic materials, and part of our circular-cycle.

Habits and Attitude

Eco-literacy is not just an activity, it is a way of life, reflected in our attitude, language, beliefs and habits. The practice of Eco-literacy is significant for all those creating, maintaining and holding the space for learners, their families and the wider community – we cannot direct people on the path we do not walk.

Section 2 Teaching Tools

Teaching the skills to set up and maintain an Eco-literate educational environment.

We teach by providing the following

- Belonging
- Circular-Cycle
- Composting
- Lens Development
- Sustainable Thinking
- Making Opportunities to be Inspired By Others

Belonging – the nature connection

We recognise the critical importance of developing a sense-of-belonging in nature in childhood. This sense of belonging (based on childhood connection) has been recognised as an antidote to overwhelming feelings/states of despair and hopelessness. This belonging is the intrinsic motivation for caring for the environment, for becoming eco-literate.

We provide:

- Continuous indoor-outdoor access and freedom of movement
- Natural 'playgrounds' in nature with natural materials
- Include and welcome parents in groups that provide time, space and place for the nature connection to develop or reconnect.
- Frequent and lengthy periods of time outdoors
- Choosing the language and attitude for being out in all weathers, seasons, hours and moods

Circular-Cycle – inside our immediate environment

We actively use the circular-cycle model when providing content and condition for inside and outdoor learning environments, as well as for our organisational requirements. We are mindful of ~

Consumerism (enter: what we bring into the learning environment)

- Consumption and impact (impact: what we use and how we use it)
- Waste (exit: what goes out of the learning environment)

Sustainable Thinking - outside our immediate environment

We actively consider the sustainability of our actions and those we work with.

Considerations include;

- Socially ethical
- Mass and batch production
- Buy local
- Long-life products
- Long-term impact on the ecosystem
- Refill and repair

Composting

The practical skill of composting our own waste offers learners a real-life context when learning to apply the circular-cycle.

- Working compost baskets will be established in most learning environment settings
- Families are encouraged to keep working composting baskets at home

Lens Development

A practical teaching resource will be used by facilitators and available to the public to develop the Eco-literacy lens. All meetings will reference the use and development of the lens.

The lens is developed in the following way:

- Observation skills / See environmentally
- Questions for choices / Think environmentally

- Make empowering choices
- Communication with others/mindset and language
- Making distinctions
- Choose your attitude

Inspired By

Visit places and project that further our knowledge and understanding in Eco-literacy.

- Be inspired by existing models operating a zero-waste target, sustainable options
- Seek opportunities to learn from others, and work alongside and collaborate with existing organisations

Section 3 Procedure

The procedure expands on how we apply the theory into practical daily happenings. The role rests with the adults who are leading the learning environments.

Part 1 Implementing Policy Procedure

- Online and Websites
- Social media
- Marketing Materials
- Merchandise
- Group Sessions
- Waste Disposal

Part 2 Refusing Procedure

- Common Use Items
- Personal Use Items
- Gentle Reminders

Part 1 Implementing Policy Procedure

Online and Websites

- Eco-literacy Standard on all websites
- Eco-literacy Standard on all activity and session information
- Eco-literacy Standard on all merchandise information
- Blog posts on Eco-literate activity ideas

Social Media

- “Thinking about our environment” on going campaign
- Solstice and equinox celebrations

- February campaign “We celebrate trees”,
- July campaign “Plastic free July”
- Post infrequently with selected petitions, positive stories about sustainable topics, amazing aspects of nature, and artists who work with natural objects (loose parts)
- “Purposeful Activity” posts
- “Loose-parts facilitate play” posts with natural objects found in nature

Marketing Materials

- Eco-literacy Standard Stamp on all advertising
- Eco-literacy Standard Stamp on POS leaflets, posters, cards

Merchandise

All merchandise put out onto the market with our branding is to fulfil the following;

- Purposeful products
- Part of a healthy circular economy
- Sustainable resources
- Working with ethical companies, organisations and manufacturers

Group Sessions

- Verbal introduction at every session
- Guideline hand-outs, practical instruction to leave no trace
- Frequency. Visit eco-locations regularly. Repetition is learning
- Projects and holistic learning, avoid compartmentalised thinking by fracturing learning into subjects
- Collect rubbish at the beginning and end of every outdoor session to take away and dispose of safely at waste collection and composting points
- Refrain from dropping compostable material in woodland, it’s not from there
- Avoid using recycling and landfill/incinerator bins
- Advise on small healthy snacks
- Advise on sustainable and non-toxic sunscreen, insect repellent, clothing and footwear
- Process-learning Sessions: All process-learning sessions (play, art, creativity, self-directed learning and open-brief projects) provide open-ended loose parts, no set ups and no adult agenda. The adult is there to ‘stage manage’ the learning environment for learners. Process-learning has no “product” attached to its time or setting
- Product-learning Sessions: All product-learning session (craft, skill building experiences, lessons, visits and set brief projects) are required to tie into an authentic ‘real life’ purpose

Waste Disposal

- Avoid using materials containing poisons and toxins eg.
 - aerosols

- batteries
- products that contain mercury
- hazardous household products such as oven and drain cleaners
- bug killers and sprays, mouse poison, pesticides and weed killers
- Compost all compostable material
- Dispose of all liquids safely
- Avoid using recycling and landfill/incinerator bins
- Returning single use plastics to manufacturer.

Part 2 Refusing Procedure

A key part to working with a zero-waste target is to refuse certain materials from entering the learning environment. While we hold responsibility for our personal items and the learning environment setting, we are only partly responsible for items that families bring with them.

Common Use Items

When materials for use in the learning environment are brought into the learning environment that; a/ cannot return to the eco system safely, b/ come from an unsustainable source, c/ are not necessary, then we have the following options to help return the environment to our Eco-literate standard:

- Return items
- Put away until the end of the session
- Remove rubbish to be disposed of safely
- Refer to information in verbal introduction and guidelines

Personal Use Items

When a person brings in personal items that are a/ cannot return to the eco-system safely, b/ come from an unsustainable source, c/ are not necessary, then we have the following options to help return the environment to our Eco-literate standard:

- Request that items be put away while attending the session
- Any rubbish to be kept and taken off site by person
- Refer to information in verbal introduction and guidelines

Gentle Reminders

There may also be times where, as maintainers of an Eco-friendly environment, we need reminding if something does not meet the standard. We also need prompts for what does fit in with the ethos of Eco-literacy and purposeful creative play.

Activities Products

It is important that we consider all physical products we make for their purpose, impact and necessity. Every activity product must have a real life purpose.

Say No To...

An Authentic Learning Environment consciously avoids providing toys and activities for children that take the learning initiative away from the child. Avoid

~

- Activities that teach content or skills out of context and in isolation
- Activities designed to keep children busy and fill their time/day
- 'Ready-mades' that take the creative opportunity from the child: eg. a ready-made children's stove, fire station, dolls house, pretend fruit and food. The child without 'ready-mades' uses their creativity to make what they need for their play
- Activities that result in end products that have no useful real-life purpose, which eventually end up in the bin, and do not comply with the circular-cycle model

Say Yes To...

An Authentic Learning Environment promotes activities and products must that have real life purpose.

Examples:

- dying clothes *for wearing*
- making lanterns *for a festival*
- birdfeeders *for feeding wintering birds*
- seedling trays *for the garden*
- book binding *for journaling*
- sewing *for carrier bags*
- seed bombs *for insect populations*
- making cards *for birthdays and special occasions*
- making jar labels *for jams and pickles*
- making jams and pickles *for the labeled jam jars*

Play Equipment

It is important that we consider all physical items that we bring in to the learning environment to facilitate play.

Materials – what are the play provision materials made from? We understand that players form relationships with materials and objects they play with.

Purpose – is it fake-for-play or does/did it hold an authentic purpose. We understand the hidden messages around worthiness from having real or fake objects provided especially for us when we are 'children'.

Storage – equipment used for making play materials available

How we make play equipment available for player without influencing players' developing skillset, agenda and play outcomes

All items in the play environment must consider multi-purpose, environmental impact from use, authenticity, age appropriateness and potential hazard status.

Say No To...

We consciously avoid toys and kits that are replicas for or of real life. We say no to materials that cannot re-enter the ecosystem safely.

Say Yes To...

An Authentic Learning Environment promotes repurposing and reusing things that have real-life purpose and open-ended loose parts.

- choose old clothes, scarves and fabrics etc. *instead of dress up costumes*
- old kitchenware *instead of toy kitchens*
- blocks, sticks, acorns and leaves *instead of fake food and toy role-play kits*
- trolleys or wheel barrows *instead of toy prams*
- building materials *instead of ready made dens, cars, dolls, guns etc*