



Challenges and prizes:

Links to the Early Years Learning Framework	Eco-Focus	Challenge
<p>EYLF: 2.1, 4.1, 5.1 Principle: 3, 5 Practice: 2, 4</p>	<p>Water Warriors</p>	<p>Water Warriors Performance Challenge: learn about how to conserve water and create a short song or music video about water conservation!</p>
<p>EYLF: 2.4,3.2, 4.2 Principle: 3, 5 Practice: 1, 5</p>	<p>Gardens Galore</p>	<p>What do Seeds Need storybook Challenge: Learn about the process of growing plants from seeds and what our plants need to grow healthy and strong. Plant seeds with the children and put their seed nurturing skills into practice. Read the storybook and personalise it with photos and illustrations of your centres plant growing journey.</p>
<p>EYLF: 2.4, 4.1, 5.1 Principle: 1, 2 Practice: 2, 6</p>	<p>Waste Reduction</p>	<p>5R's Waste challenge: Learn about the 5R's and enlist the children to come up with ways to reduce the amount of litter the centre throws away. Practice creativity by reusing and recycling waste items to create new art projects. Containers for Change: set up a container recycling station.</p>
<p>EYLF: 1.1, 2.2, 5.1 Principle: 3, 4 Practice: 1, 5, 6</p>	<p>Culture and Country</p>	<p>Host a Yarning Circle - discuss traditional ownership of the land, how traditional owners have cared for the environment for thousands of years, and how the children feel connected with the chosen animal.</p> <p>Connections to Nature – Sense: Discuss the 5 senses with the children, using the storybook. Ask them about what they think they might see/smell/hear/feel when they are outside. Spend some time outside, asking the children to pick an area where they can sit and close their eyes. Ask them to name things they can</p>

		sense. Create a song or a storybook inspired by the things they noticed in their natural environment.
EYLF: 1.2 ,2.1, 5.3 Principle: 1, 2 Practice: 1, 4, 7	Spread the Word	Toy Swap/Fundraiser- Encourage the children to create promotional material to hand out to parents and hang up at the centre where families can see. Discuss the benefits of hosting swaps with friends/community and how we can get rid of our old things without sending them to landfill and get things that are new to us without buying items. Discuss what kinds of things are appropriate to bring to a swap (in good condition, still functioning, all parts present etc)

Linking to the Early Years Learning Framework:

(Reference guide when documenting a detailed analysis of learning)

Many thanks to Teresa Hatcliffe and educators from Avenues Early Learning Centre Sunnybank Hills for their contributions to this document.

Water Warriors

Principle:

3. High expectations and equity – the Water Warriors challenge facilitates a playful learning experience involving singing/chanting and/or dancing which involves challenging a variety of abilities amongst the children. As this activity focuses on learning through play it additionally promotes inclusion and participation of all children. The creative aspect of developing a song/chant/dance allows the children to also express themselves through song and movement.

5. Ongoing learning and reflective practice –the Water Warriors challenge has multiple components. Children are educated on the issue first, then asked to share their thoughts and ideas and then are able to synthesise these ideas into an artistic format. Children have the opportunity to reflect on water conservation through each component and can then pass on these ideas in their homes.

Practice:

2. Responsiveness to children – the components of the Water Warriors’ activities ensure all children’s strengths and abilities are taken into consideration. Each experience is challenging yet focused and can be completed by most children with the help of educators. This ensures engagement is maintained and children become motivated to help save water.

4. Intentional Teaching – the intentional teaching objective for the Water Warriors activity is to embed water saving practices into the children’s daily routine. The eco-focus challenge is intended to occur during World Water Day where educators will plan opportunities for intentional teaching and knowledge-building experiences leading up to this event. The activity is designed specifically for the early years allowing them to contribute and communicate through open ended questions relating to what they have learnt about water conservation, in their own age-appropriate way. To further extend the children’s thinking and learning, the children’s voices will be shared through song and presented through their very own eco-focus challenge submission.

Learning outcomes:

Outcome 2: children are connected with and contribute to their world – children are able to understand that they have a responsibility to conserve water in this eco-focus. They are taught the connection between using the toilet or the sink (human activity) and how that effects our local environments. They are also taught of the importance of conserving water on a global scale as it is a privilege to have access to clean water. This awareness is then shared with each other, educators, and their families.

Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners – the Water Warriors activity allows children to express interest in their environments, particularly in terms of water as a finite resource. Children then use play-based experiences to explore these ideas further such as the “to flush or not to flush” game. The discussion component allows children to think of ways to conserve water and make predictions about how this can help our environments.

Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators – children share the message of water conservation through verbal (discussions) and non-verbal (visual game cards) means. They are also able to use a variety of media from online sources to artworks, to verbal communication to share these ideas and new information (creating a song/chant).

Gardens Galore

Principle:

3. High expectations and equity- in the Gardens Galore challenge, children are given equal chances of hands-on learning. The activity of growing seedlings is set up in a way that does not discriminate to any child's learning ability. It is an open and inclusive activity for all ages and cultures.

5. Ongoing Learning and Reflective Practice– children are educated on plant growth through being shown an interactive ‘Plant Appreciation’ video. This activity acts as a precursor to the upcoming practical learning experience of growing plants from seeds. In the growing journey, children observe the different stages of growth and through that actively learn about the plant growing process. They are encouraged to reflect on each growth phase and vocalise their opinions and ideas of what they have experienced and how their experience compares with the initial “Plant Appreciation’ video they viewed. Educators are then able to develop an overall understanding of the children’s learning progression, from the educational video to their first-hand experience of seedling growth. With this understanding, educators can critically reflect and review the children’s learning outcomes derived from the challenge.

Practice:

1.Holistic approaches - children connect deeply with nature and the natural world through the hands-on practice of gardening which fosters cognitive learning. The discussion component also allows a spiritual and cultural connection to nature through understanding how environments work, the importance of plants in ecosystems and our role in the cycle of nature.

5.Learning Environments – Through the experience of growing their own seedlings children are introduced to the practice of gardening which provides them with the opportunity of collaborative learning and playing in an outdoor learning space. By incorporating the natural environment into the children’s regular learning environment, children are able to develop environmental awareness and are provided with more opportunities for exploring, discovering and connecting with their natural surroundings. This overall eco-focus contributes to children’s responsibility to care for the environment and consequently fosters hope, wonder and knowledge about the natural world.

Learning outcomes:

Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world- the seedling growing activity ultimately broadens children’s understanding of local environments and ecosystems, particularly the plant world. The discussion component allows children to express their own opinions, identify issues in nature, and therefore allows them to create their own sense of connectedness with nature. Through experiencing seedlings growing children are given an opportunity to ‘infer, predict and hypothesize’ stages of growth and then are able to check their predictions throughout the activity.

Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing – the seedling growing activity is a hands-on activity that stimulates and facilitates motor-sensory skills. Additionally, the act of gardening in itself promotes physical wellbeing, promotes calmness, and improves mood for children. If growing produce, children understand the concept of healthy eating, organic produce and gain self-respect and self-confidence.

Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners - As children oversee their own seedlings to sprout they take responsibility and understand the process of plant care and patience. Therefore, children are learning attributes such as persistence, commitment, curiosity, resourcefulness, and exploration of their environments. At the end of the activity, children can reflect on the process, learn from what has happened and consider solutions to the potential problems they faced.

Waste reduction

Principle:

1. Secure, respectful, and reciprocal relationships – educators are able to focus on this principle during the sorting card game through encouraging all the children to voice their thoughts and opinions on how to correctly dispose a waste item. Through this open discussion, educators are given the opportunity to become more attune with the children's thoughts and feelings and therefore support the development of the children's communication skills. By prompting each child to participate in this challenge along with their peers, it assists them in developing confidence and feel respected and valued in a group setting.

2. Partnerships – the waste reduction challenge is intended to complement and enhance the current knowledge children have of correct waste disposal. This challenge indirectly facilitates a partnership between educators and families to ensure that their children are learning how to correctly dispose of their waste in everyday events. Children are given the opportunity to actively participate and engage in learning about waste and different common waste streams in which they can utilise that knowledge when disposing of waste at home.

Practice:

1. Responsiveness to Children– the sorting card game facilitates open ended questioning between the educator and the children which provides the educator with a better understanding of the current knowledge the children have regarding waste disposal. Through sharing their thoughts and ideas in a game format, educators and children can strengthen their responsive learning relationship. Overall, educators can form better curriculum decisions based on the children's general responses to the sorting card game.

5. Learning through play - playing a sorting card game as a collective and creating art promotes children's abilities to 'discover, create, improvise and imagine' especially when educators advise children on the creative process but ultimately allow the children to take charge. Attributing the notion of waste awareness and appropriate waste disposal to the artwork streamlines the children's critical thinking in terms of what to create.

Learning outcomes:

Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world: children begin to express their opinions on the state of our local environments and connect their individual behaviour with consequences to animals and plants and show concern for environments. Through the process of creating the awareness artwork, children will think critically about what the artwork means for local areas and are more likely to spread the information learned outside their centres. They can also use the artwork as a reference poster within the centre as a means of spreading their knowledge on the correct practice of waste disposal.

Outcome 4: Children are confident and involved learners: the Waste Warriors competition allows children to become interested in the state of environments and how this is connected to the actions of humans. They begin to question such actions and explore ideas on how to mitigate the harmful effects of these actions, for example, disposing of rubbish incorrectly or creating unnecessary waste. Creating an artwork with a message allows the use of reflective thinking as well as critical thinking to ensure not only children, but the community learn from the art.

Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators: the sorting card game requires the children to verbally exchange ideas and questions, encouraging them to engage with peers and their educators and learn in a collaborative manner. The combination of speaking, listening and actively learning are all qualities required for effective communication. Developing these communication skills within this age group is crucial to improving a child's social skills and self-confidence.

Culture and Country

Principle:

3.High Expectations and Equity – the yarning circle component of this eco-focus is intended to act as an equitable and effective way to ensure that all children have an opportunity to voice their opinions and achieve learning outcomes. Educators can use this period to gain an understanding of potential communication barriers children may have and therefore, the educators may respond with encouraging their participation.

4.Respect for diversity – this eco-focus has an underlying theme of belonging to culture whether that be of indigenous/cultural heritage or being a part of a community. Educators are able to share knowledge of traditional custodians in a way that is relevant, respectful, and informative with the overall goal to establish a deeper connection to nature in children.

Practices:

1. Holistic Approaches – The Culture and Country eco-focus provides a holistic learning experience for the children through drawing attention to their personal, social, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing. The Nature Collage challenge requires the children to find connections between their individual selves, Aboriginal culture, and the natural items they choose to use as tools for the artwork. This activity aims to highlight the interconnectedness of nature to the children whilst allowing them to recognise the mind, body, and spirit links they experience through their participation.

5. Learning Environments – this activity is undertaken outdoors and therefore encourages the children to explore and connect with their natural environment. This allows the children to play with and utilise natural tools such as sticks, leaves and soil. By giving the children the opportunity to explore their surrounding natural spaces with clear intentions they are given the freedom to discover and connect with nature whilst developing environmental awareness of their outdoor environment.

6. Culture Competency – Through the connections to nature experience educators will assist children in developing their cultural competence by gaining knowledge of different cultural practices and developing a positive attitude towards different cultures through conversations had during the yarning circle times and embedding this into their everyday practice.

Learning outcomes:

Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity – the ability to share thoughts and feelings in a yarning circle allows children to maintain and develop respectful and mutually trusting relationships with other children and with educators. Children learn the importance of communication, listening, conversing and develop a sense of belonging to diverse cultural communities. Children develop their sense of identities through sharing aspects of culture, language, and storytelling. This experience also provides an opportunity for indirect engagement with Elders and community members.

Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world – this experience allows the exploration of culture and heritage and how this connects with protecting and caring for our local natural environments. Children learn about differences in indigenous communities but also recognise similarities in common ideas and values such as being stewards of the earth. By understanding how natural items can be used in a sustainable way to create tools, jewellery, art etc., children grow an appreciation for natural environments.

Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators- the yarning circle component allows children to communicate, share personal experiences, manage emotions, and understand the feelings of others – therefore supporting their own and others wellbeing, as well as develop their communication skills. The hands-on experience of collectively creating a nature collage allows children to use their sensory and motor skills.

Spread the Word

Principle:

1. Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships – the Go Green for EcoMarines challenge creates the opportunity for the children to develop more secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships between their families and wider community. Through the children's engagement with their community members they widen their network and begin to recognise and respect the feelings of the people they interact with. This experience helps them develop the skills and understandings to interact positively with others, not only with their peers but also people from a range of demographics.

2. Partnerships – this Spread the Word eco-focus is primarily about connecting centres with families. The components of Go Green for EcoMarines celebrations ensures collaboration between children's families and the work that centres do to be more sustainable and foster environmental education elements. Additionally, the Green Gifting activity complements the objectives of Go Green for EcoMarines in a creative and generous manner. The potential fundraising component has the potential to facilitate a growing relationship between centres and local business/organisations.

Practice:

1. Holistic Approaches – Go Green is a celebration for sustainability with the aim of connecting the children with their families and local community. This event also highlights the value of collaborative learning and the importance of community participation. Additionally, the complementing activity of Green Gifting gives the children the opportunity to give back to their community through the act of either presenting a loved one with a gift or using the product to fundraise for a local business/organisation. This eco-focus combines learning through physically creating upcycled gifts and through interacting and engaging with the greater community.

4. Intentional Teaching – This eco-focus facilitates social interactions between the children and the rest of the community which may pose a challenging experience for them but in-return very rewarding. The involvement of children's families and the local community reflects the collective efforts of making more sustainable changes within the community, which were led by the children. The Green Gifts made by the children are products of the gratitude the children wish to express to their families and/or local community

7. Continuity of Learning and Transitions- Spread the Word is aimed to create a bridge between the children and the community through giving the children the opportunity to share what they've learnt throughout each eco-focus with their friends and family. By facilitating these connections, educators are encouraging children to positively influence their family's behaviour towards protecting the environment. This experience will help children feel secure and included as individuals within their communities, as they transition from early childhood settings to local community settings.

Learning outcomes:

Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity – this eco-focus helps the children develop relationships with themselves, their families, and their community. They're given the task of creating hand-made gifts through a sustainable practice and therefore fostering a greater sense of individuality and confidence within their abilities. The intention behind the Go Green for EcoMarines is to celebrate their individual and collective sustainable achievements throughout the year as young stewards of Earth.

Outcome 2: children are connected with and contribute to their world – as this eco-focus brings families and communities together for the purpose of the environment, children can develop a sense of belonging to the community. They particularly begin to understand that caring for the environment is a community-wide effort and that small differences together make big impacts. Through the activities, children increase their understanding of the environment and the connectedness between our actions and effects on our animals and plants. Green gifting also promotes bringing communities together through the gifting of upcycled items, by facilitating connection between the children and their social networks. The notion of creating gifts with recycled materials also encourages the children to challenge their perspective on what a present 'should be' – it doesn't necessarily have to be a new bought item to be appreciated.

Outcome 5: Children are effective communicators – a big component of spread the word is to communicate what they have learnt about making positive choices for our environments and sharing this with their wider community. They achieve this through a variety of mediums whether that be art, dressing up in green, or sharing stories.