



## Out of School ... But Still Learning

For OSCN, one of our key-notes this year is to ask you to think more strategically about your programme planning. Looking at the year ahead, what sort of priorities does your programme have?

There are often some important practical issues to work out at this time of year – changes in venue, having sufficient staff, welcoming new families to the programme. It's a busy time, for sure. But if we look a little further beyond the urgent stuff and ask, "what's the plan for the year ahead?" we might start to see the opportunities in our programme for children's learning.

If we all agree that OSCAR isn't school and we aren't running a classroom, then clearly we aren't strictly talking about "classroom learning". Whenever an activity starts to feel like a "school lesson" the kids might well turn off. How is an OSCAR activity different? Most OSCAR staff would suggest, more of an element of choice, more flexibility in the way the activity is undertaken, more time to do it, less pressure to do it, no one right way etc.

Even though there is an informal approach to activities, children continue to exercise their innate learning abilities. That "play is learning" is a well-recognised part of early childhood development and this doesn't stop when children reach school age, though some commentators are increasingly concerned for the way childhood is changing and the impact this has on children's learning.



*"Almost all children are naturally programmed to learn, as long as they get the right sorts of experience. But it seemed to me ... that many children weren't getting those learning experiences any more, or at least nowhere near enough of them. The more we integrate playful, exploratory open-ended activity into our teaching, the better children learn. Especially if we can get them outdoors and active. Real life experience is vital for learning."* Sue Palmer "21<sup>st</sup> Century Children – Language, Literacy and Learning"

OSCAR is full of "exploratory, open-ended activity" and it would seem that many educational experts are now seeing this as the key to engaging children in education, especially with the increased prevalence of technology and the influence of on-line media. OSCAR also flourishes in the area of non-cognitive skill development, meaning skills like self-control and interpersonal/social skills such as sharing and leadership.

For the rest of this year we will be sharing more ideas about learning in OSCAR. We encourage you to share these with your staff, with parents and with your children. WE WILL BE LOOKING AT:

- How a positive programme climate can support learning, especially through exploratory play.
- Some of the barriers to learning that crop up in OSCAR & how to work them out.
- Staff skills that are needed to facilitate learning in OSCAR and how can we develop and strengthen these.
- Simple resources to help plan for rich, child-directed learning experiences.



**Images:** Gladstone Post-School Holiday Programme builds boats and then puts them to the test.

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## Confident and Involved Learners—The Aussie Model

The "Framework for School Age Care in Australia" has an extensive focus on learning: "Leisure time experiences constructed by children and supported by informed educators promote children's dynamic, complex and holistic learning."

**OUTCOME 4: CHILDREN ARE CONFIDENT AND INVOLVED LEARNERS**

- \* Children develop dispositions such as curiosity, cooperation, confidence, creativity, commitment, enthusiasm, persistence, imagination and reflexivity
- \* Children use a range of skills and processes such as problem solving, enquiry, experimentation, hypothesising, researching and investigating
- \* Children transfer and adapt what they have learned from one context to another
- \* Children resource their own learning through connecting with people, place, technologies and natural and processed materials





## A Healthy Programme Culture

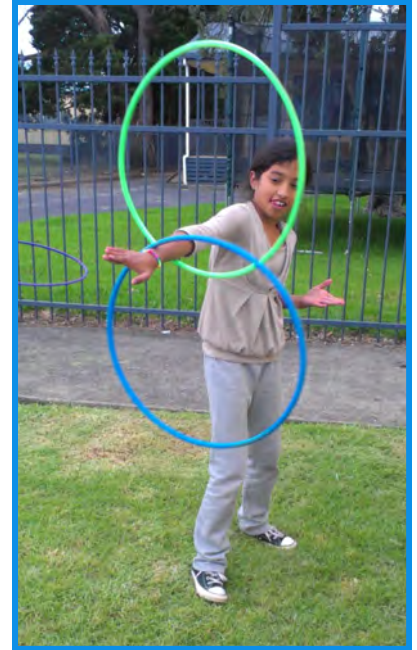
### Learning in OSCAR Part 2

*"It felt very rigid. There was always one planned activity and children were encouraged to do that activity. Aside from kids roaming around the venue there didn't seem to be much else going on and staff were spending a lot of time telling children off, re-directing them from out of bounds areas or trying to stop them from disrupting the planned activity."*

*Each day in this programme is a struggle – can you see why?*

In simple terms, programme culture might be best seen as "the way we do things here." Your philosophy, policies and procedures might be part of this but it's what people actually do each day that shapes culture.

What is the culture at your programme? The only way to really find out is to check it out for yourself. Observe behaviour in your programme. How do people talk to each other. What happens when someone is breaking a rule? What happens when someone is getting frustrated with an activity or task? Ask children: "what do you like about the programme?" "What would you change?" What they say will also tell you something about programme culture, customs, values & norms.



A healthy programme culture in OSCAR will be one that is good for children, which we believe is all about promoting learning and development (see the last issue of Five and Up.) **Most children like games** and games can tell us a lot about what sort of culture children need in their out of school time.

Anyone who has lead games with children will know what we mean by "a game will be successful largely because children want it to be successful." That's why, given the chance, children will often suggest effective adaptations to the rules and gameplay. That's also why people leading games are wise to not over-plan and to just "trust that it will work." This practical process of "working it out together" is a lesson in co-operation.

A co-operative approach can help make a successful game. Can that principle be applied to other aspects of your programme? **We say yes, it can.**

OSCAR programmes provide the ideal opportunity for children to gain experience in initiating and taking control of their activities. This is something the children can do for themselves, with staff providing the resources, support, as well as necessary structure and supervision.

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## A Healthy Programme Culture (cont.)

Not every child or group of children is ready for taking significant levels of control, but some simple steps can help make the way forward much clearer.

1. **ASK.** So often adults don't ask, forget to ask, or maybe think they already know the answer, or that children *can't* make good choices. There is a time for certainty, where adults say "this is what is going to happen". There are just as many times when the best course of action is to ask "what do you think?". When the answer is "I don't know..." that's a cue for adults to offer choices and suggestions.

2. **PREPARE.** Set up your programme environment to encourage choices and enable children to do things for themselves. E.g. helping themselves to afternoon tea; setting up their own lists for turns on equipment. Look for what children can do for themselves and build from there.

3. **GUIDE.** When managing activities and behaviour, as much as possible keep children "in the driver's seat" and expect that the destination might be different to what you had in mind. There's a place for enthusiastically joining in, as well as letting things take their own course, which might require you to....

4. **STEP BACK.** Make time to observe and scan the entire group. This gives you a picture of overall participation levels as well as maintaining effective basic supervision.

In programmes where self-reliance is actively promoted, there is often less conflict and arguments. Staff can spend more time facilitating and interacting with a larger circle of children.

In order for children to be learning, the programme culture has to be right. This connection is well-understood by early childhood practitioners who embrace the concept of "ako"

When looking at "who is in control", programme culture can be seen as a continuum: at one end we have adults constantly acting to control children; at the other end, control is shared with the whole group, ultimately creating an environment where children are learning life-long skills of self-regulation.

If we look back at where we started this topic we can see a programme more at the "adult control" end. The challenge is to consistently monitor where your programme sits on this continuum. If you are getting the sorts of problems described earlier, it might be time to act to move things back towards the group-controlled end, where a typical day might look something like this:

*"Things just seem to flow better. It's taken a real effort and staff were sceptical at first, that it would work to have a more open and choice-based programme, but the children are now happier in their after school time. Being given choices and options in the programming side of things definitely flows onto how the children behave. They are learning more to sort things out for themselves and staff can concentrate on keeping activities flowing and giving one-to-one time as needed. While we still have a different planned activity each day, the children's own interests create a lot of the variety. Because we are less caught up with lots of minor problems, we're more able to keep an overview of what is happening with the whole group."*

THANKS TO MANY OSCAR PEOPLE WHO HAVE HELPED US SEE THE "WATER IN THE FISHBOWL" MORE CLEARLY, AND IN PARTICULAR TONI FROM KIDS CRAFTY CLUB.



*"Ako posits the teacher and the learner as equally powerful participants in the learning process. Embracing the concept of ako means viewing children as having mana (status) and also the ability to make their own decisions and to drive their own learning."*

REFERENCE: TE KŌPAE PIRIPONO – CENTRE OF INNOVATION [HTTP://WWW.EDUCATE.ECE.GOVT.NZ/](http://www.educate.ece.govt.nz/)