



Dr Brenda Abbey

## EYLF ENCOUNTERS

# Outdoor play spaces are integral to high quality programs

The National Quality Standard (NQS), Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) and My Time, Our Place (MTO) have altered educators' beliefs about outdoor play spaces in early childhood education and care settings. This includes how these spaces should look, how and when they should be used, the learning that occurs, and how each of these needs to be documented.

Educators now know that the benefits of outdoor play time extend far beyond the opportunity for children to let off steam and develop their gross motor skills. They no longer limit their involvement with the children to times when children's safety is compromised or to resolve conflict between children. They recognise that outdoor and indoor learning spaces are equal contributors to children's learning opportunities across all domains.

Consistent with the NQS, educators want their services' outdoor play spaces to include a wide variety of natural elements. They look for plants, trees, rocks, mud, water and edible gardens. They ensure children have places where they can play alone or in small or large groups. In addition, educators set up activities and resources so that children can read, draw, paint, dance, play music, build, enjoy dramatic play, or revel in physical activity.

Educators celebrate the learning that takes place as the children dig, plant, care for and pick the harvest from edible gardens; tend to live creatures (e.g. chickens, worm farms or native bee hives); risk-take, explore and discover; and, connect with nature. They document far more than the physicality of children taking part in these activities. They document children's learning across all five EYLF and MTO Learning Outcomes.

It is exciting to see how educators have made the connection between the outdoor play space and children's learning. However, it is even more exciting to see how educators strengthen this connection by applying their knowledge, resourcefulness and creativity with thoughtfulness and intention.

Dr Brenda Abbey [www.childcarebydesign.com.au](http://www.childcarebydesign.com.au) is an early education and care consultant who specialises in the NQS, EYLF and MTO. She provides a wide range of services and products. Brenda can be contacted via mobile: 0419 661 921 email: [info@childcarebydesign.com.au](mailto:info@childcarebydesign.com.au)



First-class dining room, featuring Natural Wood Tables & Chairs

requirements, with the right balance of fun and education."

Dubbo Early Learning Centre opened with STE's natural timber tables and chairs in place, instead of the conventional plastic, metal or laminate products. "I had my point of difference," Erin confirmed, "and everybody commented on the homely feel of the centre. I love it when a centre is ready to open and the staff say 'I can't wait to play!' When adults want to play with the equipment, I know we're onto a winner!"

**"My main objective was to open a childcare centre that had a point of difference"**

*Erin Allen, General Manager Succeed Consultancy*

When Erin managed the opening of Bright Beginnings in Gungahlin she had no hesitation in doing it all again with STE.

For this two-storey design, Erin ordered the natural furniture and a variety of equipment that would give staff the potential to



Spacious, well resourced rooms