The great outdoors and the role of play in sustainability

As the need for sustainability becomes more apparent, so does the importance of including education about sustainability in our programs for children.

When children participate in environmentally sustainable learning through play they gain knowledge, skills and attitudes which help them to become environmentally responsible. The NQS and the Early Years Learning Framework recommend that sustainability be ‘embedded in all daily routines and practices’.

Providing opportunities for children to observe and experience the natural environment is a good starting point. There are many ways educators can approach this, for example:

- providing plants and other vegetation – involving children in the planting and care of indoor and outdoor plants and gardens; planning activities which support their knowledge about the benefits and uses of different herbs, fruits, vegetables and plant species
- introducing activities which allow children to interact with the natural environment through imaginary play, such as materials that can be used in many ways, mud cooking, camping and nature exploration
- supporting children to assess and take appropriate risks through natural play experiences, such as stepping stones or tree climbing
- cooking and eating outdoors
- using natural materials as resources to support learning – for storytelling, balancing, counting, matching and in craft activities
- exploring how things work through science experiments with natural materials, such as exploring wind power as an energy source.

Interacting with the natural environment allows children to understand and feel a sense of connection with the environment, thereby fostering a respect for the natural world.

The possibilities are endless and adopting a collaborative approach with children, families, educators and the community, including participation and discussion of differing views, will help build a shared vision and commitment to sustainability now and in the future. See more at: http://www.acecqa.gov.au/Article.aspx
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