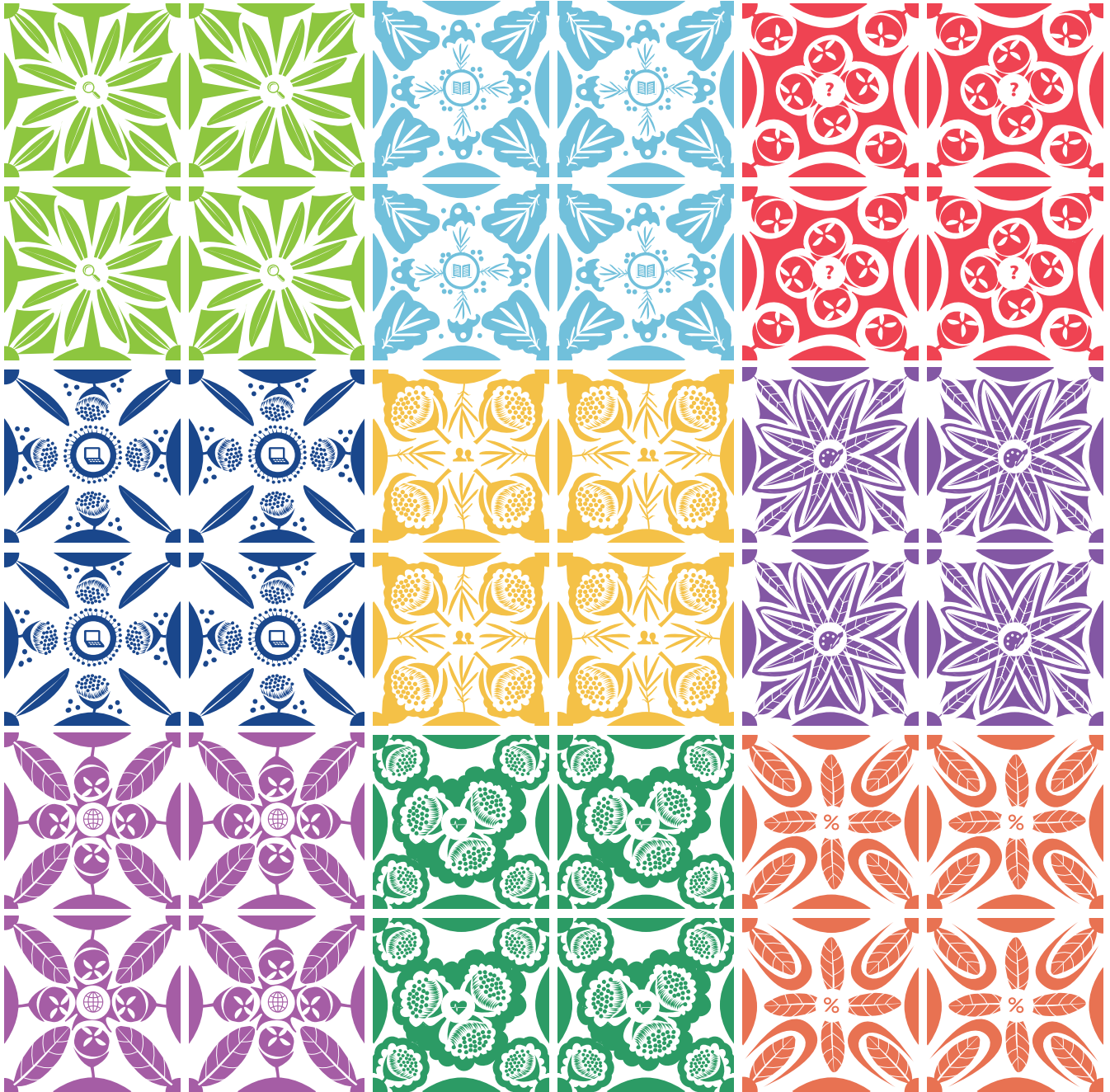


EINGANA

The Journal of Environment Education Victoria



SUSTAINABILITY CONNECTS



ENVIRONMENT
EDUCATION
VICTORIA

Volume 41, No. 02
December 2018



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EDUCATION
VICTORIA**

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Environment Education Victoria (EEV) is a not-for-profit membership-driven incorporated association. EEV provides leadership and a voice for the environmental education sector within Victoria. *Eingana* is the journal of the Victorian Association of Environmental Education Inc., trading as Environment Education Victoria.

Subscription to *Eingana* is included in organisational and individual membership of EEV. The price of a single copy is \$15.

EEV membership is open to individuals and organisations interested and committed to environmental and sustainability education.

Joint membership for the Australian Association for Environmental Education (AAEE) and EEV is also available.

Volume 41, Number 2, December 2018

ISSN: 0156-7608

Commissioning Editors: Julie Harris and Sarah Allen

Editor: Margie Beilharz

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Acknowledgement: The Editors wish to thank all those who have contributed articles, illustrations and photographs for this issue of *Eingana*.

We welcome contributions and advertising. Please contact EEV office if you are interested in writing for *Eingana*.

Front cover: Curriculum connected by sustainability **Design:** Studio Pidgeon

Back cover: Eucalyptus rhodantha at Melton Botanic Gardens **Photography:** Dominique Dybala

Template design: 46&2: forty6and2.com

Layout and design: Sarah Allen

EDITORIAL

- 02 FROM THE EDITORS
Sarah Allen and Margie Beilharz
- 04 FROM THE COMMITTEE:
REFLECTIONS, CAMPAIGNS AND
STRATEGIES IN 2018
Christina Renowden

FEATURES

- 6 SEEDLINGS: AN EARLY YEARS
SUSTAINABILITY LEADERSHIP MODEL
TO INSPIRE ALL ORGANISATIONS
Verity McLucas
- 10 DETECTING RIVER HEALTH: YOUNG
CITIZEN SCIENTISTS CONNECTING
WITH THEIR LOCAL WATERWAYS
Britt Gregory
- 13 BUILDER OF THE NATION
Greg Hunt
- 15 SUSTAINABILITY PROJECT CONNECTS
SCHOOLS ACROSS THE OCEANS
Julie Wynne

CURRICULUM

- 23 #SUSTAINABILITYBELONGS
CAMPAIGN
Dominique Dybala and Sarah Allen

NEWS & RESOURCES

- 26 TOP EDUCATORS HONOURED AT
THE EEV EDUCATOR OF THE YEAR
AWARDS
Sarah Allen
- 28 FAREWELL BUT NOT GOODBYE TO
WONDERFUL, COLLABORATIVE EEV
Julie Harris
- 29 GROTESQUE, MIRTHFUL, CUNNING
AND QUAINT: 100 YEARS OF
SNUGGLEPOT AND CUDDLEPIE
Margaret Robson Kett



SEEDLINGS: AN EARLY YEARS SUSTAINABILITY LEADERSHIP MODEL TO INSPIRE ALL ORGANISATIONS

Verity McLucas describes an approach that provides a foundation for lifelong learning for sustainability.

Indigenous acknowledgement

I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia, and pay my respects to their Elders past, present and emerging. I respect and uphold their vital and continuing connection to the land, air, waters, culture and all living things.

CONNECTING THE DOTS

What would be the state of our world if people instinctively considered the natural world in their decision-making? Imagine if sustainability was embedded through all levels of education, where children and students were actively supported to learn how their actions impact Country – that is, the land, air, waters, culture and all living things.

Our youngest citizens can, and should, play a key role in shaping healthy Country, because with healthy Country comes healthy people.

THE SEEDLINGS APPROACH

The Seedlings approach contributes to a foundation for lifelong learning for sustainability, and it's a small investment for big returns. It was developed by the local government authorities of Port Phillip, Knox, Melbourne, Yarra Ranges and Alpine, with a 12-month pilot funded through the Victorian Government's Adaptation and Sustainability Partnership in 2012. It ran successfully in 60 services across the five municipalities and resulted in Seedlings winning the Premier's Sustainability Award for 'Community' in 2014.

The City of Port Phillip has continued to deliver Seedlings, with 25 services currently participating. With so many positive outcomes for children, families, educators and the community at large, Port Phillip intends to continue this investment in education for sustainability.

FLEXIBLE FRAMEWORK

The Seedlings framework is flexible, adaptable and transferable to all early years services and settings. It's implemented via a milestone-based approach, the milestones being:

1. Sow the seed: knowledge and understanding
2. Grow the tree: principles and practice
3. Nurture the forest: connections and collaboration.

Early years services in Port Phillip are provided with ongoing, tailored support to move through the milestones and develop principles, practices and policies relating to:

- understanding early years education for sustainability
- nature
- waste
- water
- energy
- health and wellbeing
- stewardship
- sustainable governance and leadership.

ALL ABOARD

To genuinely embed sustainability, people need to be on board, particularly the director or manager of the service. To be 'on board' means to understand why something is important and therefore enable its progress.

In practice, this looks like:

- supporting educators to enrich pedagogy with the principles of sustainability
- supporting staff to gain professional learning
- strengthening service philosophy, policies and procedures by incorporating sustainability
- committing to and actively reducing environmental impact associated with operations
- communicating sustainability goals regularly to children, staff, families and the relevant broader community.

CONVERSATION TRUMPS SPENDING

Conversations with children have so much impact. If the principles of sustainability are understood by an educator, they can be consistently woven through almost anything a child is engaged with, reinforcing the principles of sustainability with each conversation. It could be while eating food, drinking water, playing house, using the bathroom, digging in the garden, drawing with chalk on concrete, sitting under a tree, feeling hot or cold, noticing the rain, drawing on a piece of paper, using glitter, putting something in the bin or breathing in and breathing out! There is always a sustainability thread and an opportunity to educate. And it costs nothing.

BUSINESS AS USUAL

When you embed sustainability genuinely, it is woven through the work you do, *replacing* existing elements rather than adding new elements. Sustainability eventually becomes business as usual, not an extra 'thing' staff have to do on top of everything else. Ideally, the director drives this progress and supports staff at all levels to create and implement actions to meet agreed, achievable goals and targets.

SEEDLINGS IN ACTION

Throughout all 25 Seedlings services in Port Phillip, there are many examples of sustainability becoming embedded within both pedagogy and operations. Here are just two.

ALBERT PARK KINDERGARTEN

“Our centre’s partnership with City of Port Phillip has had a significant impact at our service. The mentoring provided by Brett and Verity supports our service to continue to learn and grow. With their guidance, we have not only become more sustainable, we’ve strengthened our program [and] community engagement, and developed the skills needed to turn dreams into reality. Every day the Seedlings team comes to visit is a great day for us all and there is always something new to discuss and discover.”

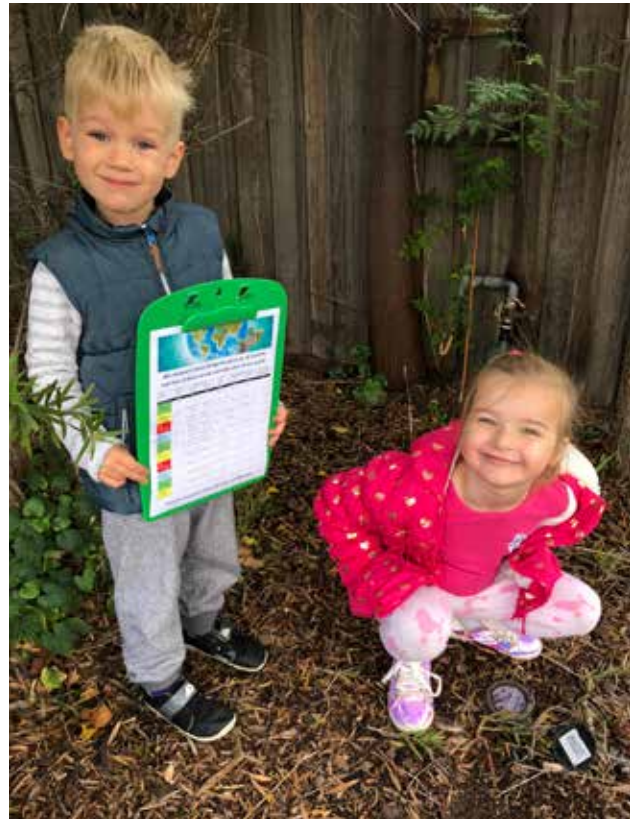
Jenny Whelan, Director

Albert Park Kindergarten (APK) has a shared vision with the local Boon Wurrung people to keep their promise to Bunjil the eagle (the Creator): to take care of the children and the land. It is this vision that guides their daily actions and long-term plans for embedding sustainability. Anyone who comes into contact with APK knows that by the end of 2019 they plan to be Australia’s first accredited carbon neutral kindergarten. This goal shapes their operations, pedagogy and communications, both internally and beyond their gates. APK’s staff, children and families are all on board and actively support this carbon neutral goal. The children are responsible for recording weekly electricity and water meter readings. As they go through the motions, they are incidentally learning about reading, writing and maths. They also understand that it’s for a greater purpose, beyond themselves, which is to measure their usage of natural resources and use that data to make decisions about how to reduce their impact on Country.

Since 2016, APK has:

- decreased water use by 71%
- decreased electricity use by 57%
- decreased gas use by 82%
- decreased landfill waste by 50%.

In June 2018, APK took a leap forward in their dream to make good on their promise to Bunjil: they turned off their gas meter after installing solar battery storage and a solar heat pump.



Top: Albert Park Kindergarten’s ‘meter defeaters’. **Photography:** Albert Park Kindergarten. **Bottom:** The children at Clarendon Children’s Centre enjoy their homemade guacamole. **Photography:** Clarendon Children’s Centre

Page 8: Children connect to Country. **Photography:** Verity McLucas

CLARENDON CHILDREN'S CENTRE

“Initially, the concept of sustainability was quite overwhelming, but with Verity and Brett’s positive enthusiasm, partnership and support, we have come to fully understand that taking small steps can make a big difference.”

Linda Davidson, Centre Coordinator.

Clarendon is a wonderful example of embedding sustainability at both the operational and pedagogic levels. Sustainability is business as usual at Clarendon, right down to how their cook engages with the children. She educates them through fun conversations about food and cooking. She invites children into the kitchen to look in the fridge, focusing on foods that look old, wilted or damaged. “Should we throw these out?” she asks, holding out a wrinkly, squashed tomato and a bunch of wilted spinach. Many of us would decide these vegetables don’t measure up. But the children at Clarendon know that this is perfectly good food for making pasta sauce, tomato sauce or salsa.

The children help the cook make food and collect any extra ingredients from their herb and vegetable gardens. After eating, the children are responsible for sorting the leftover food scraps into separate buckets for the worm farms and compost bins. They know what the worms like to eat and what they don’t. Every day, the children sit around the outdoor table chopping up the worm food with scissors while chatting away happily to each other. They know that it’s easier for worms to eat food when it’s cut up small and that this also means the food will be processed faster. Once processed, the children collect the worm ‘wizz’ and castings, then bottle, bag and label it. They sell it to the families who take it home to use as rich, organic fertiliser for their gardens.

This simple yet thoughtful daily practice encompasses myriad real-world learning and developmental experiences for the children. It has also saved hundreds of kilograms of food waste going to landfill *and* raised hundreds of dollars. The children decide what to spend the money on, with only one condition: that it’s used to improve the garden.

At Clarendon, water consumption has reduced by 17% and they are now producing more electricity than they’re using, thanks to behaviour change and solar panels. Last summer they even received a credit from their energy retailer.

WRITE IT IN!

If something is not written in, then it doesn’t really exist. For example, if your service is trying to reduce or eliminate its volume of waste to landfill and recycling, but there is no guiding Sustainable Purchasing Policy and Waste Policy, then efforts are usually wasted. When the staff members who were driving the action move on from the service, it’s likely the practices that they put in place will fall down if they aren’t part of a formal policy or procedure. Soon, no one will remember anything about it.

A policy should be short and easy to read, and it should contain agreed goals and targets with supporting actions. Some services will include these actions in their quality improvement plan to strengthen their accountability.

Key written policies and procedures that can successfully guide a service to embed sustainability include:

- Philosophy
- Sustainability policy
- Sustainable purchasing policy
- Waste policy
- Shut-down and open-up procedure
- Recruitment policy
- Induction process (for educators, families *and* children).

SEEDLINGS GROW UP

The Seedlings approach belongs at the heart of early years services, and ideally throughout all educational stages. Children soon become adults and their connection to Country shapes their approach to life. Seedlings supports children to shape their own sustainable future.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Verity McLucas is the sustainability education officer and Seedlings manager at the City of Port Phillip.

For more information about Seedlings, please email enviro@portphillip.vic.gov.au or phone +61 3 9209 6548.