

First5Years Pedagogical Approach

First5Years acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Their culture is embedded in our Centre, our practices and our learning, as we honour and care for their land.

In Early Years Education, we all have one common goal, to see the successful development of children in their initial years of life and to create a lifelong love of learning. How that goal is achieved differs from Centre to Centre, and our Pedagogical Approach details the different methods and pedagogies that we use at First5Years to inspire and shape our practice. We adopt a blended approach that incorporates different theorists and leaders in the Early Years education field, to take advantage of the fact that this allows us to delicately balance intentional teaching by teachers and educators, and spontaneous learning guided by the children.

Values

At F5Y our values are Passionate, Empowering and Inclusive. These values were developed with our team over the course of a two-day workshop with Kellie Tomney, author and career mentor. During this time, we discussed what was important to us as individuals, as a team, and specific to early years education. Kellie assisted us in condensing this information into three key values, and this is what we live by each day at our service. These values work to protect the rights of each child, **empowering** them and challenging bias. We have a strong focus on professional and personal development, to ensure our educators are **passionate**, continuously learning and bringing new ideas to share with the team and your children. We regularly critically reflect on our practice and pedagogy to ensure we are offering a quality program and a caring environment. We provide an **inclusive** environment without bias, respecting cultural, religious and social values and beliefs of each individual, ensuring an equitable world for all. Role modelling, patience, clear and consistent guidelines, positive reinforcement, and a caring and nurturing attitude inform the practice of all our educators and encourages a sense of **Being** for all children.

NQS Quality Area 4, Quality Area 7

Our People

Educators and Teachers joining F5Y must have a genuine love, passion and commitment to Early Years Education, we use carefully crafted questions during our interview process to ensure that we bring the right people into our team.

The Leadership team at F5Y is made up of our Approved Provider, Centre Directors, Assistant Centre Directors and Educational Leaders, each of them is available for frank and fearless feedback whenever necessary. Leadership provides a solid support for our team, families and children, ensuring that we each bring something different in terms of our personalities and skill set. Open communication and collaboration are at the heart of our Leadership Team's approach. They foster a culture of teamwork, where ideas are freely shared, and collective problem-solving is encouraged. This collaborative spirit enhances our effectiveness and unity as an organisation. In an ever-changing educational landscape, our leaders demonstrate strategic thinking and adaptability. They are adept at navigating challenges and seizing opportunities, ensuring that F5Y remains resilient and forward-thinking. The Leadership Team lead by example, embodying the values and principles we cherish. Their passion for education, their integrity, and work ethic aims to inspire others to make a meaningful impact in the lives of the children we care for.

Our team are honoured to be role models in children's lives and approach this task with purpose, care, and respect. At the core of our success is an exceptional team whose dedication, passion, and talent make a profound impact on our community. We are immensely proud to celebrate the collective achievements and individual contributions that define our team. Each member of our team is driven by a genuine passion for early years education. Their dedication to nurturing and inspiring young minds is evident in everything they do, from creating engaging learning environments to providing personalised support for each child. Our team comprises highly skilled and knowledgeable professionals who bring a wealth of experience and expertise to their roles. Their commitment to staying informed about the latest educational practices through our professional development opportunities ensures that our children receive the highest quality education. Collaboration is at the heart of our team's success. They work seamlessly together, supporting one

another and sharing best practices to create a cohesive and dynamic educational environment. Our collaborative approach enhances our ability to meet the needs of each child.

Our Educators and Teachers are always exploring new ideas and innovative approaches to education. Their creativity shines through in the engaging activities and projects they design, fostering a love of learning and encouraging curiosity in our young students. The compassion and care our team shows towards every child and family are truly remarkable. They create a warm, welcoming, and inclusive atmosphere where everyone feels valued and supported, helping children build confidence and a sense of belonging. Each team member serves as a positive role model for our students, embodying the values of respect, integrity, and perseverance. Their influence extends beyond the classroom, shaping the character and future success of the children they teach. United by a shared commitment to excellence, our team works towards a common goal – providing the best possible start in life for every child. The teams collective efforts and unwavering dedication ensure that our organization continues to thrive.

NQS: Quality Area 1, Quality Area 4, Quality Area 7

Play & Learning

All research concludes that children between the ages of 0-8 learn best through play. At First5Years, we use play and playful pedagogies to create stimulating learning opportunities for our children, to teach and guide them through the first five years of life. We are guided by the principles of Reggio Emilia, recognising that “every child is the constructor of knowledges, competencies, and autonomies”. And so our practice is led by the needs of the children in our care, and we respond to each need on an individual basis. We understand that all children are competent learners, and we nurture each child’s personal journey of growth and change by observing how each individual learns. Learning is an extension of natural curiosity, supporting this through play builds a passion for learning within children. We scaffold opportunities to stimulate, support and engage each child’s interest in this learning. We believe in the importance of supporting and encouraging children to explore, experiment and discover through creative learning experiences.

We use children’s interests to create intentional teaching opportunities, whereby an experience that began as one thing, such as a socio dramatic concept, can then lead to the exploration of maths, letters, and scientific themes. Intentional teaching is an active process and a way of relating to children that embraces and builds on their strengths, interests, ideas and needs. It requires teachers to be purposeful in their decisions and actions (QCAA, 2024). Each of our Educational Programs is created based on the children’s interests, and from these interests’ teachers and educators can plan an array of intentional teaching opportunities. We draw on the Highscope approach of purposeful, planned, and reflected learning processes, which is clearly documented within each Educational Program and Learning Cycle. Each experience is planned through careful observation and input from our families to give them more meaning to each child. The range of experiences that we offer creates the ability for children to express their ideas, problem solve, build relationships, and develop a sense of agency within their environment. Most importantly, we provide a fun and happy environment that sparks joy in each child.

Learning is the byproduct of connection building, and young children make connections by embracing and experimenting with their curiosities, engaging their senses, and sharing meaningful moments with their caregivers. Numbers, letters, shapes, and colours are all around us in everyday environments, there is no particular day, week or age where these symbols will suddenly be adopted by a child. As demonstrated over the years, worksheets, colouring in, flashcards, and prescribed events such as "letter of the week" do not ignite a love of learning in a child. Instead of isolating symbols and concepts out of context, we focus on highlighting these things in everyday and meaningful context, as children are naturally surrounded by and exploring numbers, letters, shapes, and colours every single day.

NQS: Quality Area 1, Quality Area 5, Quality Area 6

Environments

We consider a child’s environment as ‘The Third Teacher’, a concept developed by Loris Malaguzzi as part of the Reggio Emilia Approach (Malaguzzi 1996). We want to bring children back to nature, through the Centre environment and the wider community, which is why regular excursions play such an important role in our Educational Programs.

We adopt the ‘Bare Walls Theory’, an approach highly regarded by Maria Montessori (Montessori 2002). Studies have identified that highly decorated and ‘busy’ classrooms can have a negative impact on a child’s learning, finding that

children taught in these environments can be more distracted and score lower on tests, than when they were taught in a room with bare walls (Baker 2014). We provide large art galleries in each classroom, providing designated spaces where children's art and projects can be displayed, creating a sense of Belonging for children, without covering our walls with bright and loud decorations.

Drawing on Waldorfs theory, which promotes the importance of integrating social consciousness within early years education, we embed a respect for our planet. We are all passionate about encouraging respect for our environment in the early years, instilling a love and value of this into each child by embedding sustainable practices into our program. From the native plants filling our gardens, to the excursions exploring local wildlife, we teach our children to care for our planet. By proactively connecting with our natural world both indoors and outdoors, we teach the importance of caring for our planet, the wildlife, flora, fauna and communities who live within it.

NQS: Quality Area 2, Quality Area 3

Resources

At F5Y we look to Reggio Emilia and Montessori and their approach to resources, which involves exposing children to nature through the use of natural and open-ended resources. Our Centres are filled with wooden resources, avoiding plastic, specific items wherever possible, a plastic doll with long hair is exactly that, whereas a wooden person shaped resource can be a boy, girl, child, adult, superhero- anything the child imagines it to be. Through the use of open-ended resources, we adopt an interactive, heuristic approach to learning where children can discover and learn for themselves.

The resources provided are based on children's interests, meaning that we adopt a rotation model, whereby resources are added and removed in line with current learning goals within the classrooms. By rotating our resources we avoid creating overwhelming classrooms, and are able to engage children throughout the year by changing the items available to them.

Sustainability is important to us and so we avoid plastic wherever possible, opting instead for high quality resources that provide many opportunities for play. We also embed typical, day to day items into our environments too, for example our home corners feature real kitchen utensils, plates and bowls. We repurpose items such as food boxes, containers, and other real-life items, to create a link between the everyday world and the Centre, whilst also promoting sustainability.

NQS: Quality Area 1, Quality Area 3

Rituals

In our rapidly developing world, adults and children are often rushed from one experience to the next, as we fill our days with busyness. This limits quality time and opportunities for connection, which is imperative in early years education as we care for children. By moving away from the standard routine, and into the theory of rituals, we are able to use gestures, actions and our behaviour to bring intention and a positive energy to day-to-day tasks (Lyon & Christie 2022). At F5Y we approach our daily rhythm and rituals with purpose; mealtimes, nappy changes and rest times are not viewed as simply a job that needs to be ticked off the list, but a beautiful relationship building opportunity that can contribute to providing a secure attachment.

We appreciate that each child has unique needs, interests, and strengths and therefore each child is catered for as an individual. Understanding that all children develop at their own pace through an identifiable sequence of physical, cognitive, social and emotional changes allows us to provide care and education best suited to them and their personality. We **empower** young children to develop independence, resilience and empathy as they grow with us.

NQS: Quality Area 1, Quality Area 2, Quality Area 5, Quality Area 7

Relationships

Relationships in early years education are foundational to a child's development, shaping their social, emotional, and cognitive growth. A strong, positive bond between educators and children fosters a sense of security and belonging, which is crucial for children to explore, learn, and thrive. These relationships help children develop trust, empathy, and effective communication skills, laying the groundwork for future interactions. When educators are attuned to the individual needs and personalities of each child, they can provide tailored support, encouraging resilience and

confidence. The quality of these relationships deeply influences a child's overall well-being and long-term success in education. At F5Y, we use Bowlby's (1958) theory of attachment and the Circle of Security to build relationships with children from the moment we meet, getting to know their individual personalities, creating a sense of **Belonging**, and ensuring they feel protected and valued.

NQS: Quality Area 5, Quality Area 6

Culture

Our culture is one that takes work and dedication to develop and grow the way that it has. From initial interviews with potential team members, they are taught about our values and our philosophy, that outlines the why behind everything we do. We pride ourselves on creating welcoming and inviting environments, that create a feeling of belonging for our team members, families and visitors. Each individual who enters our Centre is greeted warmly, and made to feel like they are part of our First5Years family.

We adopt Rachel Robertson's 'no triangles approach' to foster respect, innovation and build productivity. This essentially empowers team members to problem solve and handle conflict in a respectful manner, directly with the other person (Robertson 2013).

Our Senior Leadership Team role model our values within each Centre, maintaining respectful and professional relationships with team members, whilst also being able to join in and socialise in a more informal setting. This ensures there are no hierarchy or barriers to the team in having open and honest relationships where everyone feels heard without judgement.

NQS: Quality Area 4, Quality Area 5, Quality Area 7

Community

At F5Y, we are **passionate** about the fact that family is the greatest influence in a young child's life, which is why we actively collaborate with our families to form connections and build our knowledge about each child's culture, family and community. We draw influence from Reggio Emilia and their theories of community, which believes that families and the wider community have a collective responsibility of children. It is an inclusive, village-style approach that engages children, parents and the community as all being essential components to the learning process. We understand that a family can be made up of any combination of caregivers, and we look to support our families wherever possible in all aspects of raising and educating our future generations. Through this, we ensure we are providing a smooth transition between home and our Centre, enabling children to feel safe, secure, supported, cared for and loved at all times.

We value families input greatly and take a collaborative approach in all aspects of a child's care and education. Educators and Teachers provide an array of opportunities for families to be involved, whether that is sharing a child's interest from home, attending an excursion, or asking for input on the classroom layout. Within our classrooms display of the Educational Program, there is a whiteboard and markers provided, where families are encouraged to contribute. Information provided by families can be used to plan the upcoming months program, set goals for children, or simply to start a conversation whereby families and team members can get to know each other on a deeper level.

Ensuring the community plays a part in our children's care and education, we have great relationships with a large number of community organisations, and we utilise these relationships to provide experiences for our children that they may not have access to otherwise. Some of these organisations include Emerald Gymnastics Club, Outback Exploratorium, Temple Wellness, PracNPlay, Emergency Services, CP Dental and local schools. We have fortnightly, monthly and quarterly centre based events where these services visit us and provide additional programs for the children, at no additional cost to the families. Families are busy, and extra curricular activities expensive, so we ensure that children can enjoy these activities without families having to pay extra, or take time out of work to take them to various clubs and events. We also plan regular excursions to engage our children with the wider community, heading to the Gymnastics Club to use their equipment, the park to explore nature with our Bush Kindy program, and the post office to send letters and cards to loved ones.

F5Y works hard to maintain collaborative relationships with Allied Health Services, which are often not readily available in our regional areas. Our aim is to bridge the gap between families and these vital services, ensuring that they are more

accessible to those who need them. Sometimes families will approach us with questions or concerns regarding their child's development, and other times we will have gentle conversations with them to bring these matters to their attention. This process can begin in a number of ways, such as identification of milestones not being reached in our bi-annual developmental milestone completion, or through behaviour observations completed by educators. We follow our Behaviour Guidance policy to complete these observations and assist us in identifying any potential cause for the behaviour. This information is tactfully communicated to families either through a catch up conversation or a meeting, depending on each families needs. We are then able to support families in seeking professional advice, providing further supporting documentation for paediatrician or allied health appointments. Our goal is to ensure all children receive the support they need to succeed in all aspects of life, and to guide the families as much or as little as they need. We then open our doors to health care professionals for observations of children in the care setting, completing assessments, or providing a meeting space for the families. We take our position as an advocate for the children and families very seriously, and work to assist wherever we can.

Utilising other services available to us such as Inclusion Support, provides a wealth of positive outcomes for supporting children's needs. These services **empower** us to support children in their educational journey. Through our Strategic Inclusion Plan we identify different areas in which Educators and Teachers require support, and create strategies to improve the outcomes for each child within our care. Often, Inclusion Support can provide funding for an additional Educator in the classroom to support all children, this always has a very high success rate. There are also opportunities to borrow from their Specialised Equipment Library to use resources that may support particular child's needs, and to attend professional conversations and development to further enhance our skills and knowledge.

By working as a part of our community, we are able to offer an **inclusive** environment, that focuses on providing an equitable experience for all children and families. At F5Y it is important to us that we work towards a fairer world, and equality and equity are two processes through which we can achieve this. Equality means everyone is treated the same exact way, regardless of their needs or any other individual differences. Equity, on the other hand, means everyone is provided with what they need to succeed, and that is what we aim to achieve at F5Y.

NQS: Quality Area 6