



Keeping Pet Chickens at Kindy.

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Name of the project

Keeping pet chickens at kindy. This title was inspired by our first conversations with children. When asked “How do you feel about having chickens at kindy?” A child with english as a second language replied “I love eating chicken”. I quickly realised my language, questions and conversations needed to be more clear. Educators are deliberate, purposeful and thoughtful in their decisions and actions (NQS 1.2.1, ACECQA, 2018).

Telling the story

In my own suburban backyard I have been keeping chickens for 7 years. When I commenced a full time teaching contract at C&K Paddington community kindergarten in May 2018, I saw the potential of converting an enclosed garden house into a chicken coup. I started conversations with the teaching team and children services manager. At the next staff meeting, we discussed the practical logistics of converting the garden house into a chicken coup. I am always keen to use recycled materials and low cost resources. With a few minor repairs to close up holes in the wire and addition of a few nests and shelter, we were already set up. Staff had questions about the practicalities of the extra tasks of feeding the chickens and cleaning out their coup. I used the existing C&K policies and procedures to outline best practice. Educators work with mutual respect and collaboratively, and challenge and learn from each other, recognising each other's strengths and skills (NQS 4.2.1, ACECQA, 2018). I explained how feeding them would be embedded in the children's program. I explained the deep litter method of maintaining the chicken coup with regular bales of straw and the chickens natural foraging and scratching behaviours which work well together. Then the conversations with children began. More questions were raised and posed from their prior knowledge and their voices documented in learning stories. Parents were surveyed by email and by paper near the sign in area. Their replies (2 A4 pages worth) revealed a very strong interest from many families who mostly live in apartments in the city. Parents' views are respected (NQS 6.1.2, ACECQA, 2018).

Linking the Learning

This project brings together an integration of oral literacy, respectful conversations, living sustainably and for many children an increase in personal confidence. As the children families and educators experience each stage of the project and the ease at which keeping chickens has become a natural part of our day, we are all learning and teaching together. Based on the children's initial strong interest we integrated many information and fiction books with children. We used measurement to include numeracy and also set up an small world play area for children to share and express their existing and new knowledge in an unstructured manner. The project has provided children with a real life understanding of the cycle of life from food scraps/worms, chickens, eggs, human food, as well as the emotional joy the children experience when they spend unhurried time with the chickens. *Nature introduces children to the idea, to the knowing, that they are not alone in the world, and that realities and dimensions exist alongside their own* (Louvre, 2008). From the beginning of the consultation process with families and children even I experienced new realisations in my own learning. When the hens started laying eggs, some children (and their parents) thought the eggs were fake. They did not yet know that different species of chickens lay different size and colour eggs. Most children (and their parents) assumed the eggs had a chick inside and asked how long they would take to hatch? I found myself explaining many many times how we need a rooster for the eggs to have live chicks inside and that these were just eating eggs. Documentation of the parents and children's voices have been recorded and added to our project folder. Keeping chickens as permanent pets on the kindergarten learning environment provides families with a meaningful real life experience more closely linked to the benefits and possibilities of sustainable living. rather than a one off visit from a live animal. EYLF strongly recommend that sustainability be 'embedded in all daily routines and practices' (DEEWR, 2009, p. 29) within early childhood settings, and that early childhood educators need to discuss with children that all 'living things are interconnected' (DEEWR, 2009, p. 29). I value the practices of modelling sustainable living to families, which I personally have practiced for most of my life. *Education for sustainability is education with a transformative agenda – it is about creating change towards more sustainable ways of living* (Davis and Elliot, 2009, p6) Feeding and checking for eggs in embedded in the daily routine. chicken time is provided with an explanation of the rules and turn taking. numeracy occurs when eggs are measured and data recorded. literacy is meaning full when children discuss and make signs. *All aspects of the program, are organised in ways that maximise opportunities for children's learning* (NQS. 1.1.3 ACECQA 2018). Healthy lifestyle. understanding where food comes from. (NQS 2.1.3, ACECQA 2018).

Our group 2B educator assistant Dena also adds "There are many valuable benefits to having chickens at Kindy, such as it teaches the children how to be gentle and respectful to all living things and also how to nurture and care for them. Additionally, having the chickens allows the children to discover the interconnectedness between plants, people, animals and the land, while also learning vital lessons regarding hygiene practices and the importance of hand washing. Finally, the chickens provide us with fresh eggs, compost and minimise our waste, which allows us to be sustainable

members of the community.” Plus “ The changes being experienced at our Kindergarten are that the chickens provide meaningful points of conversation between parents and their children, they have helped children over any fears and anxieties they may have when interacting with animals and there have also been many positive changes in behaviour. Overall, the chickens provide families an ongoing relationship with animals and build stronger relationships within our Kindergarten community”. (NQS 5.2.1, Collaborative learning: children are supported to collaborate, learn from and help each other, ACECQA 2018).

Parent comment: “In terms of learning, emotional well-being, students learning to care for living creatures and understanding the food chain, healthy eating and potential to cook up egg dishes”.

Future Potential

Our keeping pet chickens at Paddington community kindergarten project has the future potential to head in many directions. In consultation with children, families and all educators we can share regularly cooking experiences with our own fresh eggs. (living sustainably with what we have). Even with a few dietary preferences (vegan, gluten and dairy free diets) and egg anaphylaxis we have come up with a few ideas to enjoy our eggs. We will need to carefully research recipes and update our risk assessments. Again children’s suggestions have been recorded and documented. Further ideas also include planting a chicken feed garden, free range in play ground. families bringing their kitchen scraps to feed chickens.

The project will live on as the pets become permanent residents of the kindergarten. New families will have the opportunity to collaborate their ideas, opinions and level of involvement in the program. when families live and learn in environments which value sustainable living practices children grow up valuing these practices. Reference to research here. This project has strong appreciation from the inner city, apartment living families.

Dena also adds “I believe there is endless potential to further enhance our educational program to provide opportunities to enrich the children’s learning about ecology, nature and relationships. The chickens will provide a real and meaningful learning experience demonstrating to the children their connection with the environment and the world around them”.

Photos

1. Within a few weeks the children were independently sharing turns and passing our chickens amongst themselves. This includes children with diverse learning needs. In 3 months we've only have one funny run away incident.
2. in late august the hens started laying eggs. Due to their different mixed breeds their eggs are different colours and we know whom lays each type.
3. Children are measuring and recording the weight and size of the eggs.
4. Children have made their own information and rules signs.

