Case study: Falling in love with the earth (and what it provides)

Helping children understand where the food on their plates originates is one of the main aims of the CERES early childhood programs. CERES is a not-for-profit sustainability centre and urban farm located on 4.5 hectares in Melbourne. Lauren Kaszubski is the Early Childhood and Waste Programs Coordinator at CERES, delivering sessions and experiences that range from a focus on food, to 'worms and minibeasts', to the 4 R's program (Rethink, Reduce, Reuse and Recycle), as well as offering a bush kinder experience.

In her six years at CERES, she has been surprised at the range of vegetables that visiting children can already identify. CERES includes a maze-like community garden. ‘Not all children will know the names of the assortment of green vegetables in the garden but many know quite a few already.’ The Farm to Fork program takes children through the life cycle of where food comes from. ‘We start with the soil, looking for insects, holding worms, and think about what we could grow.’ Children are given a seed which will be simple to grow, like a broad bean, which will grow even on a window sill. Then the children might do some ‘seed yoga’, role-playing the growth of a plant, before they move through the market garden talking about what they can touch, feel and smell. There is a beehive and chooks that forage through parts of the garden.
Education programs at CERES are driven by the ‘heart, head, hands’ framework for Education for Sustainability. These three elements are education in the environment (heart), about the environment (head) and for the environment (hands). In addition to offering excursions, incursions, and bush kinder, CERES offers professional development for early years educators in areas such as sustainability and nature play. All programs are aligned with both the National Quality Standards and the EYLF. Educators in other states and territories may find that their local councils support activities such as composting or worm farming. For example, Logan City Council south of Brisbane has a School and Community Waste Education Program with professional development for early years educators. The Hills Shire in New South Wales is offering free composting and worm farming workshops throughout the year. Clarence Council in Tasmania has created a PDF with examples of easy pants to grow with children. It’s worth searching your local council website to see what they have on offer.

Understandings of Indigenous Australian food traditions

If you have read Dark emu by Bruce Pascoe, you will appreciate the farming traditions of specific groups of Aboriginal people. A focus on food provides opportunities for children to learn more about traditions and the histories of different groups.

The seasons and flavours of Indigenous baking web page elaborates on the work of Bruce Pascoe in relation to Aboriginal farming and baking traditions.

Pimp my plants: Bush Tucker at Indigenous school explores how one school went about creating a bush tucker garden. Find good tips and suggestions about plants.

This short video features Aboriginal chef Mark Olive who shows how to cook with indigenous ingredients.

Celebrate a particular ingredient with foods (and associated recipes) native to Australia showcased on this site. Find an easy recipe for lemon myrtle biscuits in the 2017 NAIDOC resource pack.

In ‘Goanna ate my homework’ from the Little J & Big Cuz series, Little J gets confused hunting bush tucker. Find resources for early years settings here.

The botanical gardens of most Australian cities feature local Aboriginal food and plant traditions as excursion opportunities. For example, in Melbourne, the You and Me Murrawee tour explores indigenous plants in the Children’s Garden, and the Brisbane Botanical Gardens offers a self-guided Aboriginal Plant Trail. Search the websites of your local botanical gardens for ideas.
Resources

SNAC
The SNAC website provides many reliable resources to help you provide a healthy eating environment at your centre, including fact sheets, recipes, videos and quizzes. It requires users to register to gain the most out of the site.

Healthy eating in the National Quality Standard
This webpage includes information on menu-planning, case studies, recipes, allergies and policies related to healthy eating in early childhood settings.

Healthy kids: Publications
This webpage includes the downloadable resource *Caring for Children – Birth to 5 years (Food, Nutrition and Learning Experiences)*. Also available are menu-related checklists, a weekly menu template and information sheets such as Transitioning textures for infants – birth to 1 year, Creating a healthy non-meat (vegetarian) meal for early childhood services and the Ingredient quantity guide for NSW early childhood education and care services.

‘Get up and grow: Healthy eating’ series
This resource provides non-commercial, evidence-based information to assist in developing healthy habits for children from birth to five years.

Fresh for Kids
Sydney based Fresh for Kids aims to encourage children to eat more fresh fruit and vegetables with some great recipes.

Eat a rainbow
‘Eat a rainbow’ of fruits and vegetables is a simple and effective concept promoting fruit and vegetables to young children and their families.

Nutrition Australia
This organisation hosts resources such as *Simple solutions for using up vegetables*, recipes and fact sheets.

In celebration of Nutrition Week (2018), the cook at Great Beginnings Aveley prepared a variety of delicious snacks in different colours for each day of the week. National Nutrition Week runs from 13–19 October 2019.
Veg it up
This [website](#) hosts some great downloadable posters as well as recipes.

Munch & Move resources
Explore a range of [resources](#) including videos, a sample nutrition policy, posters, resources to support physical activity for babies and toddlers and information about equipment that enhances active play.

feedAustralia
This [initiative](#) has been designed with the aim of addressing childhood obesity. Topics include the exploration of nutrition-related behaviours and modifying nutrition environments for young children. A central element is an online menu planning tool.

National Allergy Strategy
This [website](#) aims to provide access to best-practice, evidence-based and consistent information about allergic diseases for a range of groups in the community.

Leveraging local businesses
Businesses such as the local fruit shop, bakery or major supermarket and hardware chains may provide opportunities for excursions or other forms of support. Many children have been part of tours that provide insights into how bread is made and/or how fresh produce is stored. Some of the larger organisations assist with environmental projects such as establishing a vegie garden or worm farm. It's worth making contact with your local businesses to build this connection.