EARLY LEARNING AND CARE IN CATHOLIC SETTINGS

- Catholic Education provides a comprehensive education and care choice for families
- Long day care, three year old programs, playgroups and outside school hours care are offered on many school sites as well as kindergarten in all our primary and composite schools
- Catholic schools and care settings nurture relationships based on Gospel values
- Our educators recognise and celebrate families as the child's first and foremost educator
- Early years programs offer opportunities to explore, imagine, investigate and engage with the joy and mystery of our created Universe
- Catholic education values diversity, embracing cultures and communities central to children's lives and learning

CATHOLIC EDUCATION
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Catholic Education WA provides families with a genuine choice in education and care by providing access to holistic, values based programs and pastoral care for children from birth to year 12.

Our schools and child care settings, including outside school hours care, cherish each child as a special miracle and provide opportunities for them to engage in meaningful experiences for successful, creative, life long learning.

We acknowledge that families are the most powerful influence on children's lives and that learning outcomes are most likely to be achieved when educators work in partnership with families. Our schools and child care settings support parents in their important role as the first educators of their children.

"...the Catholic system recognise the benefits for children and families feeling welcome and valued..."

Relationships the key

Early childhood educators in Catholic schools recognise that warm and respectful relationships with familiar adults are fundamental to children's learning and development. Educators acknowledge the benefits for children and families of feeling welcome and valued in their early childhood setting and work hard to ensure these relationships are formed and maintained.

Professor of Child Health and Development at the Harvard School of Public Health and Graduate School of Education, Dr Jack Shonkoff (2002) indicates:

'We have some amazingly compelling neuroscience that shows us how... the quality of the relationships that children have with the important people in their lives, the interactions and the feelings that go with those relationships, actually influence the emerging architecture of the brain. They sculpt the wiring of the brain'.

In Catholic Education we believe children...

- Are creative and independent thinkers, great problem solvers, communicators and thinkers who learn and grow through play
- Are strong, competent and unique
- Develop strong attachments to those who care for them
- Should be encouraged to develop a positive image of themselves and others
- Are a precious gift from God

Brain development

Catholic schools and early learning and care settings provide quality programs based on an understanding of current brain development and early years research.

We know that the early years are when brain development is most active. At this time, all children's experiences – physical, cognitive, linguistic, religious, spiritual, social and emotional- are critical, as they impact on learning and later outcomes in life.

> 'The early years... have the most important influence of anytime in the life cycle on brain development and subsequent learning, behaviour and health' (McCain & Mustard, 1999).

Children have a natural curiosity and desire to learn. Child development experts indicate that children in the early years learn most effectively through play based experiences. It is through these experiences that children make sense of their world, as they engage with others and the environment.

Learning through play

The early childhood programs in Catholic education involve learning that is a balance of intentional teaching and play based learning, that provide children with opportunities to explore, discover, imagine and engage in purposeful and meaningful experiences.

'Children who engage in quality play experiences are more likely to have well-developed memory skills, language development and are able to regulate their behaviour, leading to enhanced school adjustment and academic learning' (Bodrova & Leong, 2005).

> "Children have a natural curiosity and desire to learn."

In Catholic Education we believe families and communities...

- Are the first and most influential educators
- Are valuable and are central to the children's lives and their learning
- Should be respected and actively encouraged to collaborate
- Are rich and diverse

Early Years Learning Framework

Catholic early childhood educators design learning programs that 'capture the integrated and complex learning and development of all children' by pursuing the five outcomes in Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia. This framework clearly stipulates that children:

- Have a strong sense of identity
- Are confident and involved learners
- Are connected with and contribute to their world
- Have a strong sense of well-being
- Are effective communicators

The Early Years Learning Framework is implemented in Catholic schools and care settings in conjunction with the Western Australian Curriculum Framework and Western Australian Kindergarten Curriculum within the context of a distinctive Catholic program which aims to develop children as followers of Jesus in today's world.

> "...learning programs that 'capture the integrated and complex learning and development of all children'..."

Acknowledging diversity

The rich and diverse communities of which the children are a part are valued and understood as central to their lives and learning. Catholic early educators respect the history, culture, language and traditions of families and communities and see learning in a social context built on collaboration and community participation.

In Catholic Education we believe educators...

- Are deliberate, purposeful and reflective in their planning, documenting and evaluating of children's learning
- Provide holistic learning based on child development and early years pedagogy
- Respect the history, culture, language and traditions of families and communities and see learning in a social context built on collaboration and community participation
- Work closely with primary caregivers to ensure that strong attachments are formed