

An Environment I Can Be In



OVERVIEW

An Environment I Can Be In invites educators to rethink the learning spaces they create and the impact these spaces have on children's emotional states, wellbeing and ability to engage deeply in play. This workshop explores how environments can become powerful contributors to curiosity, creativity and meaningful learning. Rather than focusing on décor or trends, we examine how spaces can meet children's needs, support autonomy, and nurture a sense of belonging for infants through to preschoolers.

Educators are guided through reflective, hands-on experiences to consider how aesthetics, sensory elements, provocations, invitations to learn, loose parts and the natural landscape shape the quality of children's play. We unpack how flow, involvement and unhurried time influence holistic development, and how children can play an active role in designing and shaping their own environments.

Across the session, participants engage in critical reflection, real examples, and practical activities they can immediately bring back to their service. This workshop builds confidence, strengthens intentional decision-making and supports educators to create environments where children, and educators, can truly flourish.

WE WILL...

- Explore how thoughtfully designed environments influence children's emotional states, autonomy, creativity and engagement.
- Examine the role of provocations, invitations to learn, loose parts and heuristic play in creating open-ended, meaningful learning opportunities.
- Reflect on sensory development, flow and involvement, and how these concepts shape children's capacity for deep learning.
- Engage in guided critical reflection to reconsider current practices and set intentional goals for enriching learning environments in your context.

DELIVERY MODE OFFERINGS:

1. Full-day face-to-face session (up to 5 hours)
2. After-hours in-service workshops with teams (up to 2.5 hours)

Contact us to book your workshop [HERE](#).

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PARTICIPANT OUTCOMES

By the end of this workshop, participants will possess:

1. A clearer understanding of how environments influence children's wellbeing, engagement and learning across the early years.
2. Practical strategies to design aesthetically pleasing, functional and inclusive spaces grounded in children's needs and developmental stages.
3. Increased confidence in using loose parts, heuristic play and open-ended invitations to create rich, flexible learning opportunities.
4. A deeper awareness of sensory development, flow and involvement, and how to support these experiences through environment design.
5. A reflective toolkit to collaborate with colleagues and children in shaping environments that align with their philosophy and the EYLF.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

Loose Parts Theory **Simon Nicholson**

Nicholson proposed that environments rich in moveable, open-ended materials promote creativity, problem-solving and divergent thinking. This workshop uses loose parts as a foundation for designing flexible, child-led spaces.

Heuristic Play **Elinor Goldschmeid**

Goldschmeid's work on exploratory play informs our focus on treasure baskets, sensory exploration and giving infants and toddlers uninterrupted time to investigate materials without adult direction.

Flow Theory **Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi**

Flow emphasises deep involvement, concentration and intrinsic motivation. We apply this theory to examine how environments can support sustained play and deep learning.

Schema Theory **Chris Athey building on Jean Piaget**

Schema theory helps educators recognise the repeated patterns in children's play and how environments can be intentionally designed to extend these emerging ideas and cognitive patterns.

Read more on *Unpacking heuristic play and treasure baskets for the most engaging lesson plans on the Phoenix Support for Educators blog* [HERE](#).

KEY LINKS – NATIONAL

Alignment with National Quality Standard

- **QA1** – Educational Program and Practice (Elements 1.1.1, 1.1.3, 1.2.1): Supports intentional, responsive planning that values play, curiosity and children’s agency.
- **QA3** – Physical Environment (Elements 3.2.1, 3.2.2): Strengthens the creation of inclusive, flexible environments where materials and spaces promote engagement and learning.
- **QA5** – Relationships with Children (Elements 5.1.1, 5.2.1): Reinforces practices that respect children’s capability, autonomy and right to make decisions that shape their environment.

Alignment with Australian Professional Standards for Teachers

- **Standard 1.2** – Know learners and how they learn: Deepens educator understanding of how sensory, emotional and environmental factors influence children’s learning.
- **Standard 3.2** – Plan, structure and sequence learning programs: Supports intentional environment design that scaffolds exploration and sustained engagement.
- **Standard 4.1** – Support student participation: Promotes environments that reduce barriers and enable all children to participate meaningfully in play.

Alignment with EYLF v2.0

Principles:

- Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships: Emphasises collaborative environment design that honours children’s rights and agency.
- Learning through play: Highlights open-ended, exploratory experiences that enrich children’s play and creativity.

Practices:

- Pedagogical decision-making: Strengthens intentional, reflective choices about materials, aesthetics and space design.
- Integrated teaching and learning approaches: Embeds provocations, invitations and loose parts within everyday curriculum decisions..

Learning Outcome:

- Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity: Environments support belonging, autonomy and emotional safety.
- Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing: Environments nurture sensory regulation, flow and deep involvement.
- Outcome 4: Children become confident and involved learners: Flexible spaces promote curiosity, problem-solving and sustained engagement.

Alignment with National Principles for Child Safe Organisations

- **Principle 1** – Child safety and wellbeing are embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture: The workshop supports environments where children’s emotional safety, agency and rights guide decision-making.
- **Principle 3** – Children are empowered and participate in decisions affecting them: Promotes involving children in designing and shaping their learning spaces.
- **Principle 5** – People working with children are suitable and supported: Builds educator capability in designing environments that reduce stress and support children’s regulation and wellbeing.

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KEY LINKS – QLD

Alignment with the Kindy Uplift Key Priority Areas

Social & Emotional Learning

- Strengthens educator understanding of how environments can support emotional regulation, autonomy and a sense of security.
- Builds capability to design environments that nurture flow, involvement and unhurried play, promoting deep engagement and intrinsic motivation.
- Supports educators to recognise how provocations, invitations and loose parts can foster collaboration, problem-solving and social connection.

Culturally Safe, Inclusive and Responsive Programs

- Supports intentional inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives through materials, environmental elements grounded in Country and place.
- Promotes equitable access by creating flexible, low-barrier spaces that meet diverse sensory, developmental and cultural needs.

Physicality

- Promotes movement-rich environments that support children's natural drive to explore, transport, balance, climb and use their bodies in meaningful ways.
- Encourages thoughtful arrangement of indoor and outdoor spaces to maximise physical challenge, risk competence and gross motor development.
- Supports educators to integrate schema-informed planning to extend physical exploration aligned with children's developmental patterns.

Alignment with QLD

Wellbeing

- Deepens educator understanding of how environments influence children's emotional safety, sensory regulation and ability to experience calm, comfort and connection.
- Supports children to build resilience and self-regulation by providing predictable, nurturing spaces where unhurried play and involvement can flourish.

Communicating

- Supports opportunities for rich language use as children explore spaces, share ideas, collaborate and make meaning through materials and the environment.
- Encourages environments that invite storytelling, symbolic representation and expression through multimodal, sensory and creative experiences.

Active Learning

- Strengthens the design of flexible, open-ended environments that promote curiosity, experimentation, problem-solving and sustained engagement.
- Encourages the intentional use of loose parts, heuristic play and provocations to enrich exploration and build persistence and concentration.

KEY LINKS – VIC

School Readiness Funding Menu

Please note this workshop is not on the SRF menu. It can however be utilised under flexible funding provisions. For more information on flexible funding go to the Victorian Department of Education website here:



For more information on the Phoenix Support SRF offerings, including those on the menu as well as flexible funding options, head to our website here:



Alignment with the SRF Priority Areas for use under Flexible Funding Options

Access & Inclusion

- Strengthens educators' ability to design inclusive, flexible environments that reduce sensory, social and physical barriers, ensuring all children can participate meaningfully.
- Supports reflective practice so educators can recognise how their beliefs, assumptions and environmental decisions influence their sense of belonging and access to learning.

Communication (Language Development)

- Creates environments rich in open-ended materials, invitations and collaborative play opportunities that naturally stimulate language, storytelling, questioning and meaning-making.
- Encourages the use of aesthetically pleasing, interactive spaces that promote verbal and non-verbal communication, supporting children to express themselves in multiple ways.

Wellbeing (Social and Emotional)

- Builds educator capability to design emotionally safe environments that reduce stress, support regulation and promote sustained involvement and flow.
- Strengthens understanding of how sensory experiences, autonomy, and unhurried play contribute to children's social and emotional growth and everyday coping skills.

Alignment with VELDYP

Outcome 1: Identity

- Builds environments where children feel valued, respected and understood by ensuring spaces reflect their cultures, interests and sense of self.
- Strengthens children's confidence and agency by involving them in designing and shaping their learning spaces, supporting ownership and belonging.

Outcome 3: Wellbeing

- Encourages opportunities for choice, independence and movement, supporting children to develop resilience, self-regulation and body awareness.

Outcome 4: Learning

- Promotes deep engagement, creativity and problem-solving through open-ended materials, loose parts, provocations and uninterrupted time for exploration.
- Strengthens children's capacity for sustained concentration, flexible thinking and curiosity by designing environments that support flow and involvement.