

# take a walk on the Child Side Playgroup and School

Our Identity- who we are:-

***We are a current thinking, 21<sup>st</sup> century place of personalised learning through authentic work for active children.***

***SIDE BY SIDE, STEP BY STEP, The Child Side way.***

**What we offer:**

- ✓ High adult to child ratio = each child is well-known, cared about and is unlikely to slip through the cracks.
- ✓ Small by design= we can seriously personalise learning and academically challenge every child and humanise the process.
- ✓ Highly researched, innovative practice relevant to living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, connecting children to the world, rather than isolating them behind 4 walls and a door = children whom can cope and thrive with modern living and it's requirements.
- ✓ Stimulating workplace conducive for all children to 'be, belong, become '= engaged and responsive children enjoying their childhood and education.

## **Eye on The Big Picture:**

Though our school is intentionally small by design and the focus is on 'one child at a time in a **community** of learners', the vision extends far beyond the physical school setting, reaching out into the real world to educate, inspire and connect in a multitude of ways. We constantly seek out the real world and draw it back into everyday learning and stories for the children. We have raised expectations for each and every child to make progress and become engaged through our personalised approach to learning. Our focus is on success and skills for life, not success and skills for schooling as an institution.

We are inspired by the philosophies, principles and practices of schools in Reggio Emilia in Italy and Scandinavian countries and Big Picture Education Australia (BPEA). We are based upon strong educational research and evidence based. However we are not trying to recreate schools from elsewhere or from previous eras or to label our approach to teaching or learning as a single pure model such as Montessori or Steiner. We draw certain aspects from these models and weave them into a unique

'picture' that reflects the Child Side Way.

We are informed by Louise Porter's 'Guiding Children's Behaviour Approach', Maggie Dent's Emotional Resiliency Toolbox for Life and by the Nature Play Movement. We are not doing to the child but working with and for the child, alongside them. Responsibility, self-motivation and initiative are the goals rather than obedience, conformity and uniformity. A 'one size fits all' approach does not work for us; even as staff we are all different and unique and come together for a shared and common purpose but still as recognised and honoured individuals, within our community setting...

We are also informed by real people, living real lives, doing real jobs, with real challenges and risks, setting real standards and dealing with real timelines. We are informed by real people living 'unreal' lives exploring all their possibilities. We are also inspired and informed by ordinary people doing extraordinary things in sport, politics, medicine, music, parenting, coping with stress and trauma, travel, engineering, science, health and wellness.... as well as the 'dailyness' and routines of real life. We believe education is about learning about life through life, not about being 'good' at school, passing tests or complying without understanding. Much learning at Child Side is organic (especially in the early years, very similar how we learn to walk and talk) and happens through conversations, hands-on participation, research, informed action and reflection. These are all **steps** in the learning process and we are adamant that **these steps are taken side by side** with educators, mentors, guides, other children of different ages and stages, the prescribed curriculum, families ... in the kitchen, in the garden, in the wetlands, at meetings, designing, building, drawing, reading... authentic, real 'classrooms' that children can understand and connect to. These steps are carefully planned, connected and documented; they are not random, haphazard or left to chance. The physical daily environment is not based on a factory model or the teacher being up-front (the sage on the stage model) telling and instructing still, passive whole groups of children. Instead our physical set-up is based on children's needs, interests and educational research and it is considered by us and to our work as important as being another educator in its own way and right. Children connect and engage with the physical in and outdoor environment at Child Side and care for it alongside adults. This is a 21st century work place for active, curious, creative, resourceful children who have to plan and work within 'real-life' situations. Nothing is handed to them on a 'plate'.

We are also informed by: the prescribed curriculum documents; an outside independent education consultant who helps us audit and reflect upon our work each term; AISWA (Association of Independent schools WA); Big Picture Education Australia organisation (BPEA); ANSN (Australian National Schools Network) and most importantly we are informed by the **children**- who they are, where they are at, what they already know, what they want to know or do, what they will need to know and do to become competent and gain mastery. Our goal is to: *“Nudge the children gently but firmly to the edge of their competence.”*

*Elliot Washor, Charles Mojkowski*

Child Side is not an ‘out’ or a soft option. Academic rigour and vigour are embedded and educational visitors to our school comment on the level of our children’s intellectual maturity and understandings. However the **WHOLE** is the opportunity **and long term engagement** with our approach and methodology are essential, rather than short term expectations (especially if children have already dipped in and out of a number of other schools before and after us.) Our approach is better suited for the ‘traveller mentality’ (engaging in culture with world vision- connecting to the big picture, being able and interested to see beyond the ‘immediate’ or just the physical) rather than the ‘tourist mentality’ (surface snapshots-viewing rather than participating, checklists and surface appraisals).

As you can see while you move through this booklet and see and hear living examples in the children’s learning community, that our school design and approach to our work is not random or unstructured. It is very carefully and consciously researched and structured to meet the needs of each and every child **WITHIN** a community setting, not in isolation. Nothing is left to chance and no child is left un-noticed or can hide- mediocrity is not an option at our school. How do we know the children are learning? We can see and feel and hear the engagement. Being small by design, having such a high adult to child ratio and children in our deliberately multi-aged group setting remaining with each educator over a number of years means educators **really know each child**. They know when to push or pull each child intellectually and the expectation of children publically sharing their work through exhibitions and learning conversations helps drive this personal accountability process. Each and every child is making progress although they do not all reach the same academic milestones at the same time in the same way. They do not all start off with us ‘on the same page’ just because they are the same age. Each child has their own starting point

and their learning map is unique in the roads they travel to become literate, numerate, social, and emotionally resilient and connected to the world.

Staff ‘de-privatise’ their practice and share, question, celebrate, develop their work alongside the children and with other Child Side staff, nothing in isolation or behind closed doors. “Education is everyone’s business”- BPEA distinguisher, guided by the professionals alongside the child and family. Our school does not have 4 classroom walls and a door to define where ‘learning’ starts and stops.

### **The Child Side way- Step by Step, Side by Side:**

Our approach is all about **personalised learning** which is very different to individual learning where learning is separated, isolated and traditionally teachers do all the work. Personalised learning involves the learner in every step along the way- side by side with motivated and engaged adults. Learners **AND** educators do the work, the planning, preparation, action, reflection and share their progress publically (families are involved along the way as are a range of other ‘living’ books). Learning takes place through personal interest, relevant connections and personal qualities with the prescribed curriculum tailored to enrich, extend and enable the learner’s understandings and skills. Personalised learning is all about engagement and connection through adult relationships, real world links and curriculum skills, content and capabilities. It is not enough to ‘teach’, learning must occur! The prescribed curriculum is very valuable if slotted in at each child’s point of need (PON) and is used to enable a child to develop knowledge and skills they otherwise may have missed out on **BUT** it must be made relevant to the child and situation not just done ‘because of external mandates’ (this is not how children learn and is not considered professional practice even by external remote experts.) Educators are educational partners with the prescribed curriculum and it is the face to face educators whom need to make the informed and professional decisions given they know each student very well. Learning strategies, expectations and goals transform along the way as the child moves through their various phases of development. **Personalised learning relies upon communication and personal qualities and being able to reason about the world- the learner does matter and must be an active participant regardless of the quality of the mentoring.** The child must want to learn or at least see the point of it, the connections, the truth or beauty in whatever they are doing. The child must have some level of curiosity and self-motivation. Personalised learning through interest does **not**

mean 'fun' or learn what you like, when you like and stop if it gets hard or boring. Personalised learning does **not** mean boiling the flavour out of your favourite 'meal' just because it is the only thing of interest. You only have to love some of your work, not all of it! We engage children non-competitively and non-comparatively with an abundance mentality rather than one of scarcity, punishment or reward.

Personalised learning is so fundamental to what we do at Child Side that the whole school is designed around it- small by design with a high adult to child ratio and physically being designed as child-friendly with access to many resources and learning spaces both in and out of doors. Children are involved in 'real' work which is authentic to childhood, the curriculum and the world (worksheets -paper or 'virtual'- are not authentic work for childhood or the real world). Evidence of intellectual and skill growth relevant to each child (given that they each have their own different starting points) are our key indicators that we are doing our jobs effectively.

*"Personalisation involves doing what is right for children, pushing and pulling at the right time, not dictating or punishing, but problem-solving and mediating. Overall, the educator's job is to know children well and provide the right measure of challenge and support for each child in each activity to promote growth"- BPE Distinguisher*

Our work is about sustainable and healthy interdependence rather than independence. Even as an independent school we have a wide range of professional and support relationships and we are constantly interacting with families, other organisations, documents and 'living books' and mentors from the real world. We cannot and choose not to survive exclusively without the rest of the world. We have evidence that the children who have been experiencing the Child Side way their whole school careers are extremely capable and competent and can hold their own anywhere, anytime in the real world. Some of these children have been achieving at advanced sporting levels over many years, engaging and receiving high levels of recognition in technological challenges involving over 30 000 school children nationwide, coaching and mentoring other children both in and out of this school, engaging in community service and have academic skills and reasoning processes over and above what is required at the same age elsewhere. There are no 'educational glass ceilings' at Child Side, yet nor are children 'hot-housed' or expected to meet unrealistic expectations far better suited to learn when their brains are more mature (why struggle to do today when they can something learn

with ease 'tomorrow'?) Personalised learning matters! Educators do have to justify why, how, what now, what next.... it is hard work to personalise rather than just work in a linear fashion.

We are not just 'any' place or a 'franchise' or carbon copy of another school or community. We are unique but not separate, isolated or exclusive. We aim to 'walk the talk'. We stumble, we fall, we crumble, we crawl, we sing, we dance, we expect a great deal, we are committed and passionate. The bottom line is that we are professionals always seeking, researching, implementing, reflecting, and adjusting to give your child the best chance they can to be themselves and grow skills and understandings for life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We are not THE way but one way, one educational choice each enrolled family and employed staff member has made based upon the educational credibility of our school. Please remember this when your choice maybe challenged by others (even within our own community this can happen when people are indecisive.)

Almost everything at Child Side **will** be different to what our own adult generation experienced or expected at or from a school and will possibly be different from what others in society expect a school to look like and act like now. Everyone has an opinion, however not everyone has the same level of educational credibility as us nor has any background knowledge that we have on particular children or situations. We do not condone putting others down or negating their choices so please be an advocate for us and your children's learning community when others do it to us. Please remember we are based on much educational research and have links to many strong educational voices for learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century such as Big Picture Education and Reggio Emilian practitioners who have been studied by Harvard University and other respected educational places around the world. We are also mandated to implement the prescribed curriculum just like any other school is, except as an independent school, we have a choice to do it the Child Side way. STEP by STEP, SIDE by SIDE.

***"The purpose of life is life with a purpose."***

- Dr Louise Porter.

**A word of caution:**

Our educational inspirations and informers (Reggio and Big Picture Education) cannot be simplified and understood in bite sizes. Both are themselves shaped, informed and inspired by many of the same education theorists such as the writings of Dewey, Montessori, Piaget, Vygotsky, Bruner, Gardner and Malaguzzi which promotes social constructivist

learning principles, “the idea that knowledge is socially constructed in a cultural setting”, and considers that “there is no knowledge independent of the meaning attributed to experience (constructed) by the learner, or community of learners” (Hein, 1991: 1; Hill, Stremmel & Fu, 2005: 7). Students are encouraged to “take leadership in planning”, assume “responsibilities” for their own learning, and using a “multi-symbolic approach”, access a wide range of mediums to express meaning. (Edwards et al., 1998: 359; Katz, 1998: 33).

#### **What Child Side is NOT:**

- A short term proposal until children are ‘fixed’ or family/life issues are resolved.
- Miracle workers, entertainers, social workers, politicians to be voted for, doctors, brain specialists, elite coaches or talent contest judges. We are educators walking alongside children helping them make meaning of the world and opening up doors through literacy, numeracy, socialisation and communication.
- A safety house for society’s ‘too hard basket’ or those who are reacting to bad experiences. We exist for families and staff whom have their eyes on the big picture and whom choose to be with us, not because they feel forced to by lack of alternatives or negative experiences elsewhere. While personalised learning meets the needs of everyone, our school is not designed to cater for a disengaged school population. Being part of the real world we are inclusive of a wide range of needs and learning styles, however this must be matched to a genuine long term desire by the whole family to be part of our community with the energy to contribute. Everyone is welcome if they fit the ‘match’ with our school’s identity. Why they come is more important than why they leave other places. Many families choose our school from the bottom up and follow through the whole way. We are a ‘1<sup>st</sup> Choice’ school rather than a ‘last resort’ school.
- Society’s punching bag. We have quality staff whom identify with the Child Side way and we walk a parallel road with others in education whom desire the same outcomes and have similar aspirations for children but have just chosen a different route on the map. We have families whom want what we offer and value and identify with our work through the educational inspirations and informers such as Reggio Emilia and BPEA, in particular the ‘small by design’ principle and personalised learning approach.
- Personal family punching bag or glory bag. We cannot be responsible for the trials, troubles, learning difficulties of individual children or families nor can we take the credit for life happiness and exceptional talent, job satisfaction, winning the lotto.
- A ‘shop’ to pick and choose ‘parts’ of the Child Side way. The WHOLE is the opportunity. Regular and long term attendance is the most beneficial for each child and the children’s learning community as a group work place. Fragmented learning minimises the potential of the big picture and group cohesion.
- Religious. It is every family’s personal and private choice and we respect and honour their rights just as we expect them to do for other families’ choices. Religion is not part of our community life at school however it is respectfully and openly discussed if part of a learning discussion and if it has curriculum links eg: history. We acknowledge the original Christmas and Easter foundations and we do have a shared gathering round these times however the focus is on family, community, sharing food and creating emotional memories together rather than based upon religion. Religion is part of the world so it is not avoided but it is not part of what we do. Unlike most other independent schools we do not exist because of a religious viewpoint, we exist because of our approach to teaching and learning the Child Side way.
- Evasive. To be able to do our work as educators and do the right thing for and with the child, we will inform families when/if their child needs specialised help over and above what we can offer. We need parents to be responsive, interested and informed, not defensive, and be able to work closely together as a team. The school offers opportunities called “Learning Team debriefs” on Wednesdays (early close- 2pm before Staff meetings) to meet with families and work as a team to support their child’s learning.
- An easy option. We expect every child to work, participate and be challenged. We rely on families to help maintain the physical environment, to fund-raise, to be part of community events, to engage with their own child during morning work and other people’s children in a range of different

mentoring ways. We expect parents, staff and children to be readers and seekers of relevant information and to act upon their knowledge within our framework, the Child Side way. We are not bottomless pits of empathy, one-way support nor are we a charity. We are a not-for-profit organisation and have bills and wages to pay with deadlines just like everyone else. As an independent school we have to operate like a business in order to function as an educational entity.

**What we are NOT:** (continued)

- An alternative/fringe model. Rather we are a niche school of life, designed to be small and real and meet the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. We advocate 'small' in order to personalise learning and to humanise childhood and education. No child whom has been at our school **long term** has been educationally disadvantaged. Some of our long term students are planning to be engineers, others have visions to be writers, wild life conservationists, zoologists.... and through quality teaching relationships, technology, real world connections and thorough step by step, side by side learning they are all on track to chase their goals if they continue to want to do so down the track. Some of our oldest long term students have participated in STEM (Science, technology, Engineering and Maths) challenges nationally and in sport nationally, being at a small school has not held them back or prevented them from being highly competent in different arenas.
- A Factory model of education for industrialising students. We are designed to meet the needs of living and learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Just like everything in our daily lives , home, social, family, community lives is different to 50 years ago we have evolved to match the current way children need to be educated in modern society. As we draw so strongly on the real world and authentic experiences our children are active participants in modern life and do not have to shed any industrialised/institutionalised habits when they leave our school.
- A school here to be 'changed' for personal visions or needs. We clearly and confidently know who we are, what our work is, we know who informs and inspires us and where we are going. Just like the local footy club is for those interested in, passionate about and committed to the game of football, we are not here for those whom

desire us to change into a 'cricket' club. The Child Side way is not open for change. There are plenty of other educational alternatives around for those whom seek something different. The Child Side way is why we exist.

This list of 'nots' or 'knots' (above) are just as crucial to understanding who we are . These 'nots' are also part of a number of other independent small schools' experiences (we are part of a Small Schools Collegiate Group) as well as our own. It is important we define and clarify them so we are not bogged down with misunderstandings or unrealistic expectations from families (or even staff). Enrolled families and employed staff are assumed to have endorsed the Child Side way upon acceptance of enrolment or employment. Sometimes we only find out afterwards how different our expectations and assumptions are. All small schools experience what larger schools experience but being small often means things are felt more intently and the ripples reach the edge of the pond far quicker and are far more visible than in a large organisation. By making this 'not' list visible and open for a clarity conversation (even writing does not make things black and white for the reader as it does for the author, so follow up conversations are important) we are trying to minimize the inevitable adult politics intrinsically part of any organisation whether it be sporting, an actual political party, interest based clubs.... As we are role models for children we have to try and 'stand up' for our work but still be flexible enough to understand that everyone has their own 'take' on it.

*"Remember you are the only person who sees the world like you do!" Maggie Dent.*

**So what exactly is Our Work in a 21<sup>st</sup> Century School?**

We acknowledge the WHOLE of our work is what makes a difference and the WHOLE is the opportunity for each child over 8 years (maybe more) at Child Side School K-6.

***Please read this slowly, word for word as each word is educationally loaded + has distinct meaning.***

**The ultimate goal of our work is to help children to develop and maintain personal and world engagement and connection while they become literate, numerate, explore and refine their abilities to reason (socially, empirically and quantitatively) and communicate on multi-levels (personally, digitally, graphically, expertly, through text and a variety of media, through the arts and through their individual uniqueness) and define and refine their personal qualities within a community setting. (Big Picture Education- 5 learning goals + Reggio Emilia principles, EYLF.)**

We nurture and support children at the same time we push and pull them to the edge of their competence so that their capabilities are being challenged and their competencies are growing. We meet children at their point of need (PON) and interest. (*Personalised learning; Academic vigour; small by design, one child at a time in a community of learners- Big Picture Education distinguishes.*)

We provide a physical, social and learning cultural environment that is conducive to all children 'being, belonging, becoming' (*EYLF, Reggio Emilia principles + ABC- Act, Belong, Commit practices*). We acknowledge a child's ultimate right to be a child within a whole community of children (*Reggio Emilia + brain based research*). We guide and teach children how to manage their behaviour responsibly and how to begin to resolve conflict without blame or creating a 'victim' mentality and understanding that conflict in a group is inevitable not personal (*Louise Porter, Dr Donna Cross, Maggie Dent*). We work alongside children with equal dignity (*Reggio Emilia*) also knowing that we are the responsible adults that need to set beautiful boundaries, work ethics and healthy social norms. (*Maggie Dent*)

We scaffold learning tools, strategies and protocols relevant to developmental phases and personalise to each child STEP BY STEP, SIDE BY SIDE. We do this through:

**Morning Work** practice and fluency sessions, (often side by side with available parents)

**Morning Meetings in learning groups** – tuning in to the day, last time..., this time..., next time..., clarity conversations, collective conversations, reflective conversations, speculations and wonderings, active and responsive listening, planning... (*Big Picture Education and Reggio Emilia*)

**Skill Builder** sessions focusing specifically on the skills needed to be literate and numerate and to work collaboratively within a community. (*Prescribed Curriculum and Point of Need*)

**Big Ideas** where children use their skills to become personally engaged in a Big Idea which integrates the prescribed curriculum and the real world. Children develop their Big Idea over a term or more and STEP BY STEP learn the 'tuning in' process, project proposals, developing central or guiding questions, research skills, presentation skills, how to generate ideas and interest and most importantly how to maintain and develop ideas and interests until a defined point is reached and communicated. Educators, families and other mentors act as 'living

books' to make real world connections SIDE BY SIDE. Children in the middle and upper years have an accountability to share their Big Idea journey publically within our community. Big Idea development "balances life to text and text to life-bringing children's interests and the prescribed curriculum into balanced alignment through strong relationships and relevance". *E.Washor and C. Mojkowski. – Big Picture Education*. Our young children engage in their Big Ideas through SIDE BY SIDE conversations, engaging in and reflecting on 'serious' play that develops these ideas and exploring the theories that young children generate about everyday phenomena and things that interest them such as "Where does your shadow go at night? Where does the sun go at night? Do trees breathe? Can we catch a rainbow?" (*Reggio Emilia*). Big Ideas are outdoors as much as indoors especially in the Early Years K-2. Curiosity and speculation, theory exchange and theory repair through conversation and graphic means, characterise learning through Big Ideas in Early childhood K-2.

**Exhibitions include the 6 A's** (*Big Picture Education*)

**1. Authenticity**- show how is this work important and to whom in the real world or ourselves.

**2. Active learning**-show how the work has been hands-on.

**3. Adult relationships**- show who your side by side people were and what support or role they played, how you found this person.

**4. Academic vigour and rigour**- show how your work was deep and challenging and what two (at least) curriculum areas it delved into; 'talk' curriculum and make it visible for parents and any subject area step by step work you did to get there. Show any criteria based expectations.

**5. Assessment**- show how work is evaluated or progress made, e.g. "*last time I found it hard to find relevant material but this time I used a list Lisa made for me to go straight to these internet sites... Some were very useful and most used lots of challenging words. Next time I will use this particular site again because... and I will try and find a living book to help me connect....*" Children critique ONE aspect of their learning or final product and/or find some progress to share at their exhibition, **Last time..., this time..., next time...**

**6. Applied learning**- Pre-existing or newly learned skills, knowledge, processes that are transferred to other areas of learning, work and life. Making the intellectual and practical links and USING them in a range of contexts.

**Life Skills** especially pertaining to health, sustainability and caring for one's self, our community and our local environment. These are

particularly focused upon and explicitly developed through **Fitness for Life** sessions, **Kitchen Garden** sessions:- planning, preparing, sharing meals together daily and cleaning up as a shared responsibility, and through working in and for our

**local environment** (seasonal wetlands, adjacent habitats) or on a **community project** (eg: Boyanup Ramble Walk Plaques). We actively teach children about hazards and risk management through these practical, active, relevant sessions and we approach risks through 'care-not fear' as risks are an inevitable part of life. (*Staying Safe: A Consultation Document-DCSF 2007,b*). We actively teach children the ultimate life skill of learning to tolerate and work together to get a job done. In life one cannot choose their siblings, neighbours, work colleagues or team members in a sport. Personal qualities are required (such as persistence, courage, time management, organisation, patience, kindness, ability to mentor and be mentored, personal and social boundary adherence, following through, 'can-do' attitude... *"Attitudes are contagious. Are yours worth catching?" Steve Waugh- cricketer*

**Learning Conversations** where educators, experts in a particular area (eg: chinese, drumming, animation, filmmaking or sewing) and children of mixed ages and competency levels engage in active, hands-on work SIDE BY SIDE, STEP BY STEP to learn or develop skills and knowledges in a variety of areas eg: technology, LOTE, the Arts. The younger children use this time as opportunities to explore different media and techniques to express themselves and their theories creatively. Small groups actively engage in learning conversations while they work and share ideas, resources, problems, solutions and discoveries as they become increasing competent and capable over time.

Our work also involves our commitment to our young people as a community in three separate but continuous phases and structures: **Playgroup (parent assisted)**, **School K-year 6, FLA- Family Learning Association (parent assisted and self-funded)**. As we share a site and philosophies our work involves generating interest, respect and care for the whole spectrum of childhood from birth through to early adolescence. Our work is about making the links, connecting children and the world, knowing each child really well, building community through our own engagement and interest in **all**.

Educators and children in the upper years have access to handbooks from BPEA which detail the 5 learning goals and the work structures and protocols to help them develop these. BPE calls their Big Ideas LTI-Learning Through Internships. These are written

specifically for high school students and they are used in the FLA as they are more developmentally appropriate. We modify and adapt these respectfully (so the original and value intent is not changed or lost) to personalise the needs of each child and their developmental stage. We adapt them into Big Ideas and LTI—Learning Through interests (little 'i' so as to distinguish). Our skill builder sessions reflect the prescribed curriculum and meeting children at their point of need (PON) and our Big Idea (BI) and Life Skill sessions develop the reasoning goals developing some of the specific BPE language. Such as, older children might be learning how to work out rates and ratios during skill builder sessions, they then practice equations during morning work and when preparing lunch in a kitchen garden session they might have to use Quantitative Reasoning (QR) to work out that the ratio of rice to water is 1:2 cups but that serves 4 people, we need to feed 40! Our work recognises that childhood is transformational and changes as the brain matures, so we honour and trust the research into brain development and our own experiences and use these to inform us how to evolve the STEP BY STEP and SIDE BY SIDE process developmentally so that we are not hot- housing children or putting them under undue pressure which ultimately leads to disengagement- the very thing we are trying to avoid! We are also mindful of not putting a 'glass-ceiling' on children due to year level curriculum expectations which can also lead to disengagement if children are only taught what the prescribed curriculum says they need to know. Our work is **highly intentional**, scaffolded STEP BY STEP.

**Our administrative work** involves ensuring the school complies with the required regulations that inform us as a registered independent school. We have split the role of principal into a shared responsibility to cater for the dual needs of a school-

- educational integrity
- business and administration integrity.

These co-principals are the informed decision makers that work alongside educators and our GC (Governing Council) to ensure the health and sustainability of our school. We all work alongside parents and children as the 'crew' SIDE BY SIDE, STEP BY STEP.

This 'snap-shot' is a very condensed version of a very long and thoroughly researched process and as we are professionals and take our work seriously it does contain plenty of education jargon. An indicator of effective teaching and learning is; *"There is sophisticated and nuanced language used between the student and the teacher as well as other students that is meaningful to them."* (BPE) so naturally we

will discuss our work using technical vocabulary of our profession. Please engage with us in a clarity conversation if you are curious to find out more.

**Our Origins and History:**

This playgroup and school originated through a quest by a small group of dedicated parents (who were also educators) to create a child-friendly, family-friendly place of education that was small by design and personalised (for children, families and staff) in a quality learning culture based on research into the developing brain, emotional resilience and life skills in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The founders' collated research and their own professional experience, which determined that the quality of the learning culture was as important as the physical learning environment in impacting upon children and their long term education. In particular, a culture where children's voice and choice were honoured and academically developed in a real life context and where relationships were the key to connecting children, learning, families, staff, life...

Child Side School began as a playgroup in 2002 in an old house in Joshua Brook on loan to us while we awaited registration as an independent school. The school began officially in 2003 in the same house with 7 children. In 2006 the playgroup and school moved into its permanent residence in semi-rural Boyanup with the families physically providing the labour and funds for our first building. The school has grown (within our 'small by design' philosophy) to support our playgroup, school K-Year 6 and a separately funded not-for-profit organisation, the Family Learning Association (FLA)- a home schooling group for years 7-10 aligned with the Child Side way. This 'whole' is the opportunity for families and children to stay intellectually and emotionally connected and to act, belong and commit together as a positive educational community.