At Alma Bugdlie Preschool, an integral part of Alma Public School, we see play as being at the heart of our preschool program. The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) defines play based learning as, “A context for learning through which children organise and make sense of their social worlds, as they engage actively with people, objects and representations”.

Within the context of play there exists a myriad of learning opportunities. Children explore social relationships, contribute ideas and take on the ideas of others. Play provides the opportunity to experiment, explore, discover, and to solve problems. As children play there are opportunities to talk, to listen and to explore language. There are also opportunities to relax, to have fun, to experience and to express joy.

Our team of educators plays an important part in supporting children’s learning within the context of our play based programme. We provide resources which support children to form connections, to explore, create, construct and solve problems. We maintain a balance between experiences which are initiated by the children and those which are supported or facilitated by thoughtful and intentional teaching.

We believe that preschool should be an enjoyable and fun place for children to be. We see children as being active participants in their own learning and recognise that this will happen best in an environment which provides fun, enjoyable and engaging experiences. Bugdlie is a place where children are supported and encouraged to be creative and to think creatively, given time to explore their environment, test out ideas, investigate, express curiosity, ask questions and wonder in their environment.

The Alma Bugdlie Preschool team acknowledges and respects the uniqueness of each child and his/her family culture, structure, language, beliefs and customs. We acknowledge that children learn within the context of their family and extended community and that they bring this knowledge and a wide range of experiences with them to preschool.

In line with the NSW Department of Education and Communities’ (DEC) Equity Strategy, we give priority access to the most disadvantaged children within the local community, particularly those who would not otherwise be able to access children’s services. We share in the NSW DEC’s purpose and vision for Early Childhood Education. We place value on ensuring that our program is accessible and meaningful for all children as well as includes and supports children and families with diverse abilities and alternative perspectives. Our team extends this attitude of inclusion, respect and acceptance to visitors, students, and preschool team members. We acknowledge that the preschool stands on the land of the Wilyakali people and that this land continues to be sacred to them. We pay our respects to elders past and present.

Our Educators recognise that all children, their families and staff are part of a wider community. We place a value on building connections between a child’s home, family and the preschool. Supporting these connections helps children develop a sense of belonging and self-worth when they know that their educators and families have a shared interest in what’s happening in their world.

We believe that community, along with connections within our community, are essential both individually and collectively. These help to contribute towards a child’s positive personal development and a productive society. We endeavour not only to nurture and foster a connected community, but also to look outwards to form connections with people and places outside the preschool. We believe that it is important for children, and adults, to have an understanding of what it is to belong to a community. We endeavour to help children to understand this in a number of contexts. We believe that children are citizens in their own right and as such have the opportunity to participate, contribute and engage meaningfully within their world.

We place value on providing a caring and nurturing environment for children, their families and for our preschool team. If people feel cared for and nurtured, healthy emotional, physical and mental development is supported, along with a sense of
belonging, self-worth and connection. We also endeavour to promote practices which care for, nurture and sustain our environment.

One of the key elements of our preschool program is supporting children to develop the tools, knowledge and insights to interact effectively with others. This includes how to communicate, initiate, develop and sustain positive relationships and social connections. In terms of having a sense of belonging, relationships are pivotal. We endeavour to place an emphasis on communication, positive relationship building and learning within social contexts throughout our day. We believe in the importance of supporting and fostering positive, respectful relationships and communication between our educators and families as well as amongst our team.

Research tells us that environment has a crucial and formative impact on the way children's brains develop. We believe that our preschool environment should be a source of pleasure and enjoyment within a social play based context. By effectively utilising our space and resources, we support the development of children who can make choices, think independently, explore ideas, appreciate beauty, respect diversity, ask questions and feel nurtured. We aim to place an equal value on the learning through play that takes place both indoors and outdoors. We believe that a gentle rhythm to the day helps create a sense of security, however we also believe in an environment that is responsive to a child’s own rhythm, interests, ideas and contributions.

We believe in the capacity the environment has to influence thinking, mood, behaviour, learning and emotions. With this in mind we aim to establish an environment that is aesthetically pleasing, with an emphasis on high quality materials, use of natural and found objects, and acknowledgement of sustainable practice.

At Alma Bugdlie Preschool, we are mindful that the EYLF reminds us to focus on a child's "being" as well as a child's "becoming". This is a recognition of the here and now as well as future development and transitions. We support all areas of the curriculum through our play-based program. Foundations of literacy and numeracy and other pre academic skills are learnt both in the context of play, and through responsive and intentional teaching. In practice, this means that rather than "teach" the alphabet, or "practice" counting or implement off the shelf reading/phonics programs, we instead look for opportunities to engage with children, for example about text and meaning, language, rhyming, ordering, counting, matching, and spatial awareness, in a natural play based context. Our program aims to equip children for a positive transition to school. Our team pays attention to research that suggests that emotional and social preparedness are key drivers in terms of being ready to commence formal schooling.

The early childhood years are crucial and formative years. What takes place during these years plays an important part in determining the way a person feels about him or herself, the way a person relates to others, their capacity to solve problems and the way a person thinks and learns.

At Alma Bugdlie Preschool we recognise the tremendous importance of these early childhood years and the subsequent importance of our role as early childhood educators in supporting, nurturing and facilitating growth and development of children.

With this in mind, we believe that it is important to establish a professional culture of reflective practice, one where ongoing professional development for educators is supported and encouraged, an environment where there are high expectations for the quality of the educational programme and a mutual respect between families and educators as we work together to ensure a positive start in the early years.

Our service philosophy is seen as a living document, continually evolving in the light of new research, the ideas of team members along with input from children and their families.

Reviewed April, 2015.