Learning outdoors comes naturally for early childhood educators



Taking the classroom outside and using nature as teaching tools could be a natural way to approach learning in schools.

Early childhood educators learnt more about the concept of nature pedagogy at the final Early Childhood Forum at the SSTUWA recently.

Nature pedagogy expert Wendy Gorman explained the differences between nature play and nature pedagogy and guided early childhood educators through the practical activities they could use with their students.

Ms Gorman said that while nature play was about children spending their leisure time outdoors playing, nature pedagogy was a more structured and teacher-directed use of that time.

“Children need to have extended periods of time to explore, to discuss, to try out, to wonder, to hypothesise and to revisit,” she said.

“Revisiting really very important. One-off activities with a potato peeler are not going to teach you a lot about properties of wood, about how to whittle.

“You need to come back to that time and time again and move onto that progression.

“So it is a play-based pedagogy where the children are spending a lot of time, playing, exploring, self-directing but teachers having a lot of input into those skills along the way.”

Educators were instructed in groups to make a cubby house from sticks, twigs, leaves and other assorted natural materials they had been asked to bring in.

The group nature of the activity built collaborative working skills and allowed educators to explore lines of inquiry as sorting, classifying, 3D shapes and construction techniques.

Afterwards the educators were then asked to construct a narrative around their cubby house, which they were told was constructed for fairies.

SSTUWA Education and Training coordinator Kevlynn Annandale said the explicit learning links were made really clear during the workshop.

“There was a huge amount of learning and a huge amount of opportunities to take this sort of learning back to classrooms,” she said.

In closing the day, SSTUWA General Secretary Mary Franklyn told educators that despite increased political interference in schools, there were committed members whose passion was to champion the cause of quality early childhood education.

“Our number one job is protecting the education of those students, because without an education for those students we don’t exist,” Ms Franklyn said.

“As a union our job will be to stand up and lead the fight to maintain that quality education provision.

“More time teaching, less time marking, less time assessing and less bureaucracy.”

Authorised by Sally Dennis, General Secretary, The State School Teachers' Union of W.A.
ABN 54 478 094 635 © 2026