

Spotlight on under eights

Initiated by the Early Childhood Association, Under Eights Week celebrates the importance of learning in the early years child's life.

Running for more than 60 years across Queensland, celebrations this year focused on the theme "Children celebrating play and learning".

St Margaret's students in Prep to Year 2 celebrated Under Eights week from Monday 31 May to Friday 4 June with a range of engaging and interactive activities coordinated by Prep teachers Georgi Eadie and Camille Poupardin.

According to Raising Children Network, "playing outside teaches children about how their environment feels and how they respond".

Georgi said there were many benefits to children engaging in outdoor play.

"Outdoor play helps to encourage an active lifestyle in young children and develops an appreciation for the natural environment and understanding of the world," Georgi said.

Camille added outdoor play also assisted in developing important fine and gross motor skills in early childhood.

"Gross motor skills are the abilities to move our large muscles in the body such as our arms and legs. There are many ways outdoor play can contribute to the development of these skills including ball play, hopscotch, swinging, climbing and running.

"Fine motor skills on the other hand are the ability to make movements using small muscles in our hands or wrists. These are critical in the classroom environment as they are needed for tasks including writing, drawing and using scissors," Camille said.

Observing the Preps during the Wild Ideas workshop, hosted by illustrator and author Megan Forward, their wonder and excitement were obvious as they joyfully engaged with their natural surroundings.

The little explorers, magnifying glasses and nature journals in hand and imaginations in full flight, went on a journey of discovery through their outdoor environment.

It was a sensory discovery that promoted the use of all five senses: touch, smell, see, hear, and finally, taste as the young adventurers finished with a lemon tea and bush cookie.

Georgi said the workshop was intended to inspire the students.

"We're hoping this experience will ignite opportunities for creativity in nature play and that they find inspiration in their adventures which will carry through to their creative writing," she said.

"We also hope it will grow their appreciation for the natural environment so that the students understand the natural environment and their place in it."

Camille agreed: "It's teaching them there is a story everywhere and in everything and getting them to think a bit more open and a bit more broadly about the world around them."

Other activities throughout the week included a Mad About Science workshop and outdoor games and activities focused on gross motor skills.

Students from each year level also observed garden to plate cooking demonstrations incorporating produce harvested from school's own Maggie's Garden including strawberries, zucchini and basil.

This activity was about connecting students with the natural world, highlighting how the food we eat and enjoy regularly is enjoyed. It also again provided an opportunity for the students to engage all five senses. One Year 2 student exclaimed, 'wonder what squash tastes like?', before giving a big thumbs up on tasting this new food. Another was overheard stating 'smells gorgeous' as she smelt a handful of basil leaves.

The cooking demonstrations also provided inspiration for and important links to the students' writing including procedures, structure of a recipe, the ability to follow instructions and the introduction of new vocabulary.

Under Eights Week concluded with a day of adventuring outdoors with parents joining in the festivities of the day. Together girls and their parent or guardian enjoyed bracelet making, journey sticks, storytelling in the park, a nature scavenger hunt, construction, flying kits, a reading forest, chalk drawing and contributing to a collaborative artwork.