

# CASE STUDY 4

**Title: Enhancing Educational Outcomes with Nature Play**

**School:** ..... Yeronga State Primary School  
**Contact:** ..... Principal Debbie Spanner  
**Location:** ..... Yeronga  
**Age of Children:** ..... Year 2, 3 and 4 students  
**Number of Children Involved:** ..... 590  
**Nature Play QLD Involvement:** .....  
Meeting with Nature Play QLD Program Manager to discuss Nature Play QLD initiative and potential options for the school, Nature Play Space Consultancy, landscape architect support, 'Things to Do' lists, Nature Play Passports, Nature Play QLD eNewsletters



Yeronga State Primary School's nature play journey began for a number of reasons. The school wanted to:

- Look for opportunities where children could take greater responsibility for themselves and engage in calculated risk taking;
- Promote engagement with nature for positive mental health and well-being;
- Teach children how to play outdoors as an alternative to screen time; and
- Best utilise and offer great opportunities for children to play away from built environments with the natural spaces on school grounds.

The local community around the school was adversely affected by the floods in 2011 and the severe storm of 2014 as well. Some staff and families were concerned about how well their children were coping after the second event. A conversation with a family member and fellow educator about the benefits of nature play, and another conversation with a parent and physiotherapist about the lack of core body strength for some children these days, propelled Principal Debbie Spanner to meet with Nature Play QLD Program Manager, Hyahno Moser, to develop a plan to implement nature play at Yeronga State Primary School.

The Nature Play Working Party, consisting of parents, the Yeronga Outside School Hours Care coordinator and a chaplain, teacher, librarian and principal from the school, developed an implementation plan, in consultation with Nature Play Space Consultant, Angela Wright, and landscape architects recommended by Nature Play QLD. A visit to Petrie Terrace State School helped the team to see the vision.

Community and student interest was promoted through a nature play photo competition and distribution of Nature Play Passports. The school's P&C contributed financially, and the first space was opened last year. A second space was opened this year after a community

working bee one Sunday, where over 30 parents and their children assisted. Parents reported that their children had insisted they be involved and were incredibly excited by the opportunity to engage in nature.

Yeronga State Primary School now has two nature play spaces and is looking to expand. Principal Spanner acknowledged the contribution of a group of passionate parents who believe in the potential for nature play to make a difference.





## Some observations Principal Spanner made during a recent interview included:

“I have a real passion for helping children to self-regulate their learning, including student autonomy. We want our students to take more risks; to show just how capable they really are, and that’s exactly what is happening.”

“It has been an interesting journey, with some successes and some learnings. This space was initially used as a behaviour reward, but now it is open to all Year 2’s, 3’s and 4’s, and the Outside School Hours Care use it as part of their daily program. OSHC have changed the way they play after school too, encouraging the children to be active straight away and having a snack later.”

“Some parents are reporting that their children are more grounded. It is having a calming effect on students.”

“We have had to educate staff, students and the community about the purpose of the space. When passersby see children moving logs together or building stick houses and sitting in them they can become a little concerned, as it looks more risky than play in our more structured areas. I am comfortable with that, as the children need to be more self-directed and agents of their own learning.”

Many educational outcomes for the students have been observed as a result of the playing in the nature play space, including environmental care and human impacts, child-directed relationship management as the children learn to share the space and the natural resources available and discussions focused on appropriate play behaviours for different play spaces.

After reflecting on the impact of the Nature Play QLD program on the school, Principal Spanner added that after sending home the ‘51 Things to Do Before You’re 12’ lists and distributing passports to all the school’s parents, there has been an increase in parents staying after school to let their children play longer in the nature play space. This suggests that the Nature Play resources have been catalysts for raising parental awareness of the importance and need for regular outdoor play.

The school’s OSHC Coordinator, Tanya Harris, reports that access to nature play has made a phenomenal difference to the children, who seek out the space. Mrs Harris has noticed an improvement in the children’s ability to resolve conflict and engage in teamwork as they experiment with navigating the space. Some children struggle with the terrain initially, as they have always been on footpaths or built spaces.

The involvement of Nature Play QLD has been a great way to reassure parents and staff as the school embarked on this path, especially with regard to concerns about the risks of playing with objects that are usually discouraged on school grounds like rocks, stones, sticks and logs. Principal Spanner plans to distribute passports each year to new parents and publish the lists regularly, in order to keep raising awareness of the importance of nature play.



## What could Nature Play QLD Do Better?

Provide workshop opportunities for networking ideas between schools in relation to increasing the outdoor play for their students.

Action plans for schools to increase their nature play.

