



WELCOME

Tuesday's, after playgroup, I head up to the childcare centre on the corner and transfer a delightful little friend from his morning session in care to his kindergarten just a couple of blocks away. It's a process that takes up less than 20 minutes of my day. Sometimes we chat, other times we observe cars and people and nearly always he races to the stop sign at the corner and hides behind the large pole while I pretend I have lost him. I call out 'Florian, where are you?' and he patiently waits for me to reach him, where he is excited to reveal himself as found and I in turn squeal a dramatic sigh of relief that he wasn't really lost to me at all. It's a predictable routine that we process through every Tuesday.

Today as we entered through the kindergarten gate we came across the word 'Welcome' written in chalk on the pavement with the kind of perfectly neat writing most teachers seem to have. Underneath the same word was written again copied by a child's hand. 'Welcome, welcome' was the message.

What was truly inspiring was how much the environment of the kindergarten reinforced those words. Some old sheets tied between two large gumtrees that made a wonderful, secret place for the children to sit in. There was beautiful music singing out from a CD player under the verandah. There were carefully set out play environments that invited children to explore. A friendly kindergarten teacher greeted us both with a big smile and engaged Florian in a greeting that implied they had been waiting just for him. Of course I was no longer required so we farewelled each other and I headed back to the office leaving my little friend Florian to put a coloured Velcro dot next to his name and find a place in the locker unit to put his bag; a routine that further echoed welcome. I thought about that experience and wondered, 'How does our playgroup say "Welcome"?'

For the purpose of this article I ask you to think about the same.

Perhaps we could have a welcome checklist!

- Is our playgroup environment set up and ready for our little arrivals?
- Do we keep an eye out for parents and toddlers arriving so we can greet them personally?
- Is our curriculum for the day in place?
- Is the coffee brewing or ready to go to provide hospitality with care for parents?

What an encouraging challenge to say 'Welcome' and to have it echoed in all that we do for the families that come into our playgroups.

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