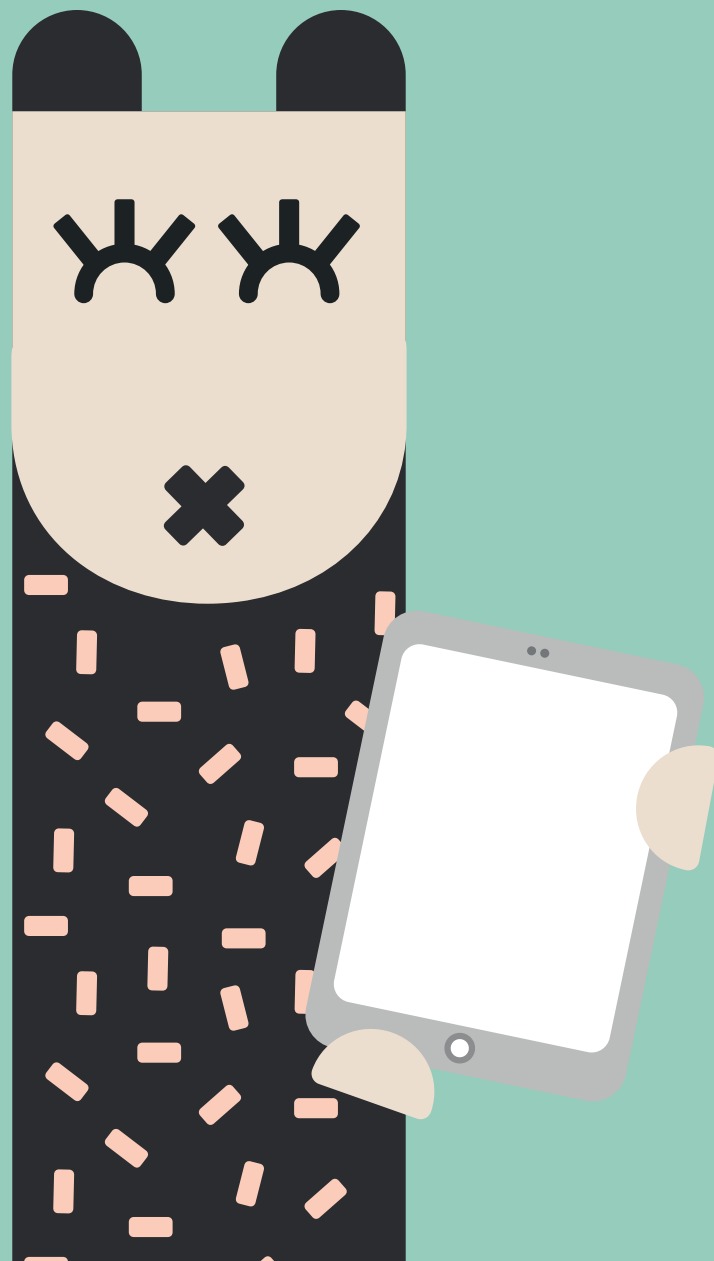




# HEI SCHOOLS LEARNING CENTER CASE STUDY: HEI EMERALD



# HEI Schools Emerald: The Heart of the Community

HEI Schools Emerald is a thriving, community-oriented early learning center in Australia that is near full capacity. Sixty children ages 0 to 5 years old attend the well-known kindergarten, and it has many happy families. Locals have grown accustomed to seeing the children in their fluorescent vests on field trips, whether it's grocery shopping or taking public transportation, and the school is a fixture in the Emerald community.

However, this was not always the case. The kindergarten's location was previously occupied by another privately owned kindergarten franchise, which had acquired an extremely poor reputation over the years. When the kindergarten changed hands and became part of the HEI Schools brand, locals still associated the space with substandard education. However, thanks to the hard work of center director Amanda Patris and her teachers, along with support from HEI headquarters, HEI Schools Emerald now boasts a high status in the educational sphere.

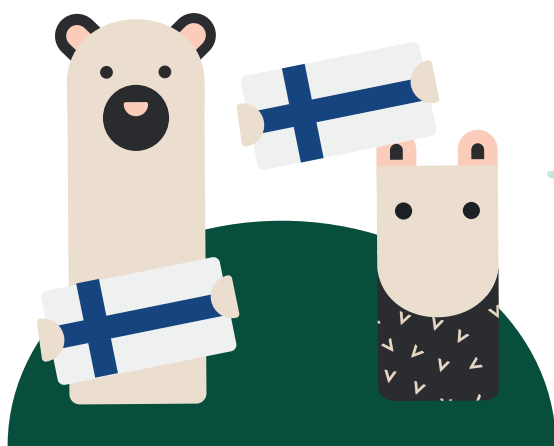


*HEI Schools Emerald, Australia*

## The Beginning

Amanda Patris had decided to make a career change. After almost 30 years in early childhood education, she wanted to pursue a professional path that let her build close relationships with children. In her present role as a busy daycare manager, she did not have the time to foster such connections, and she missed these opportunities. Therefore, to allow for both better working conditions and space to connect with children, she chose to change careers and pursue a bachelor's in psychology with a focus on youth.

In order to earn some income while studying, Amanda began to work as a consultant for several early education centers at the same time. She provided insights and advice to the kindergartens' managers to help them improve their services. One of the centers she worked with had received several complaints and experienced many issues, so she supported the manager as they began transitioning to a new program called HEI Schools. However, the manager quit unexpectedly and Ken Yu, the new owner of the center, offered Amanda a part-time manager position in that person's place. She accepted the role, fell in love with the HEI Schools curriculum and soon took on full-time work in November 2018.



**What is the HEI Schools curriculum?**  
**[Read more on our website!](#)**

## Revamping the Reputation

Transforming the school's reputation was no easy task. Another kindergarten franchise had previously occupied the building, and it had earned a notoriously poor reputation over the previous two decades. Amanda, a resident of Emerald for over twenty years, raised her child in the town, and she chose to take him to a learning center outside of the community rather than have him attend the local preschool. Many parents in the community made similar choices due to the center's substandard service, and because it was the only preschool in the area, all of them had to travel to other suburbs to find high-quality early education.

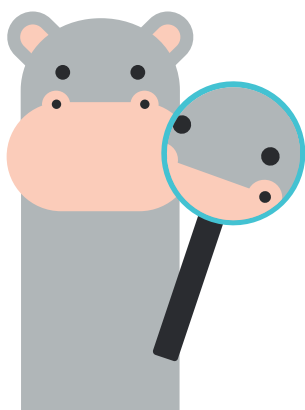
Because of her experience as a parent, taking on this manager role was not just professional. It was personal: "My commitment to providing a high-quality early learning center comes from an emotional commitment to give the families in the community somewhere that they can trust and depend on for their children's education."



HEI Schools Emerald, Australia

When Amanda started working at the center, enrollment was at 25% capacity with only 11 children and 11 teachers. Renovations of the space had just begun in order to follow the HEI Schools design guidelines, and they immediately started receiving inquiries from curious families. To build momentum and increase their visibility, the school's team employed typical marketing strategies like flyers, social media posts and advertisements.

However, field trips quickly became the kindergarten's best marketing tool. Children went out into the community wearing fluorescent vests emblazoned with the HEI Schools Emerald name, and confident educators led them around town, catching buses, taking long walks along the railroad tracks and visiting farmer's markets. Because such activities are unusual in Australia, people became more interested in the center, and inquiries increased even more.



Want to see what our spaces look like?  
[Check out our blog post about Learning Center design.](#)

## Empowering the Educators

Another significant change was in the educators' attitudes, toward both the center and their roles in it. Several teachers stayed on after the kindergarten changed owners, and many of them struggled with their confidence because they felt undervalued by the parents. Prior to HEI Schools, they did not know how to demonstrate their professional know-how in order to earn families' respect. With training from HEI Schools mentor teachers, they became increasingly confident and skillful in their teaching practices. They learned how to lift their own profile in the eyes of families with their approach to drop-off and pick-ups, making sure to warmly welcome every parent and to display their professionalism in their everyday work.

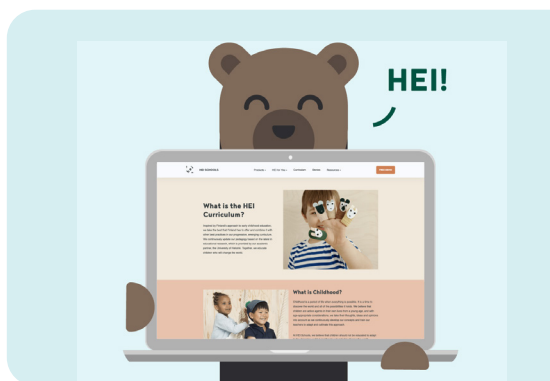


HEI Schools Emerald, Australia

Thanks to HEI, the image of the school changed completely and many people in the educational community took notice. The Department of Education began placing student teachers in the kindergarten for practice placements, and other motivated professional educators sought long-term jobs there as well. One such educator was Amanda Ball, an early years teacher with 8 years of experience. She had worked in other early learning centers, but it was only with HEI Schools that she felt a great increase in her professionalism.

Joining HEI Schools in February 2019 as an assistant kindergarten teacher, Amanda learned a pedagogy more positive, individualized and adaptable than any she had experienced before: “In public services, children are all treated the same, but at HEI Schools, we recognize children as unique individuals. If they can't achieve something yet, that's okay. We do not set high expectations. We show empathy, and we follow children's interests. As educators, we continuously learn from the children, and this allows us to become more flexible in order to meet their needs.”

She and her lead teacher Taylah have since developed their kindergarten room so well that they received an 'exceeding quality' mark from a recent regulatory check by the Australian Department of Education. Amanda says she would definitely recommend the program to other educators: “It allows children choices and freedom, but in a structured way, so that they are simultaneously independent, creative and prepared for primary school.”



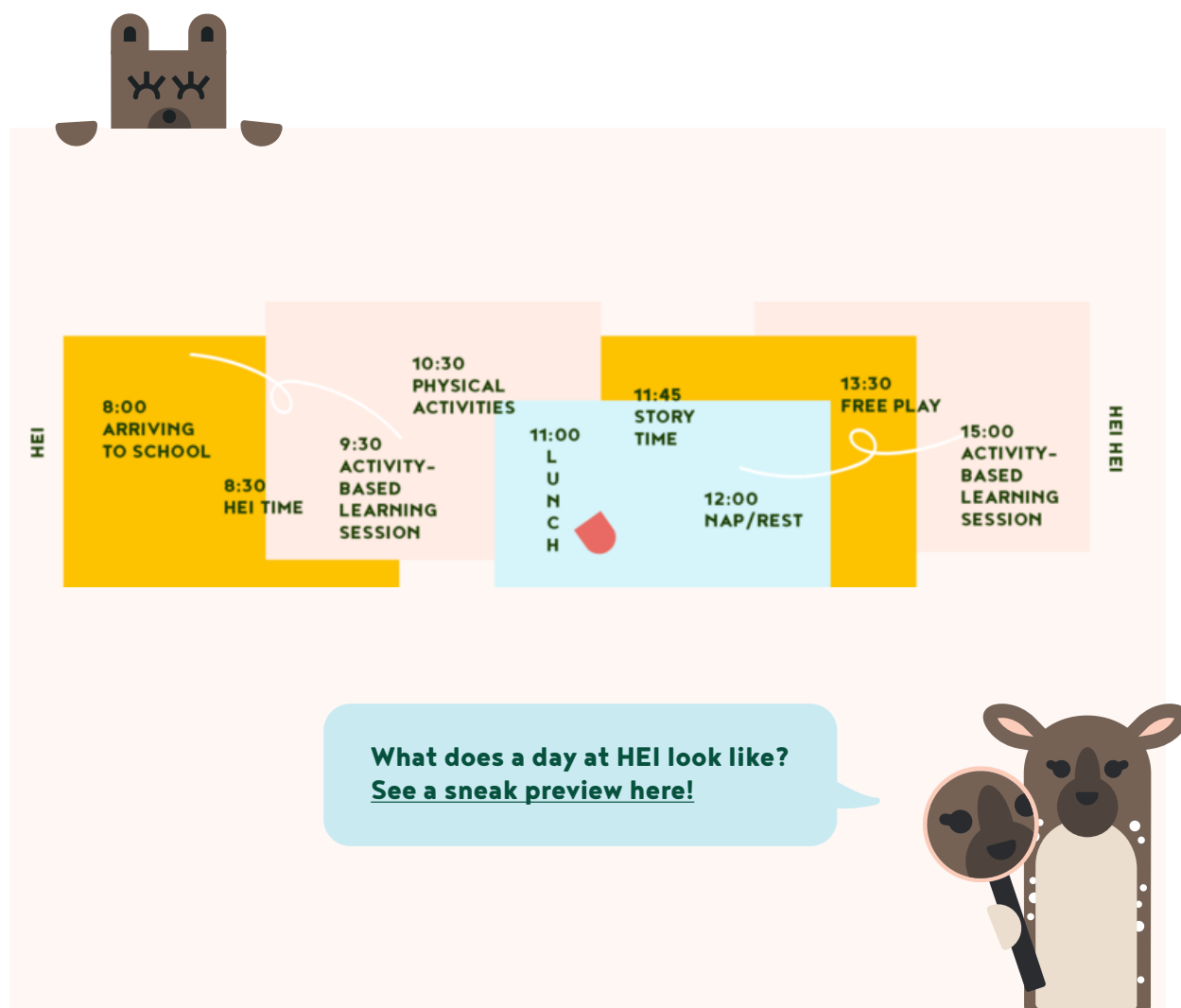
**Learn more about what HEI Schools can offer you as an educator, no matter where you are in the world.**

**[Go to the HEI Schools website.](#)**

# HEI Headquarters' Helping Hand

In addition to acquiring more enthusiastic educators, the center received on-site training from a HEI headquarters member, Paula Hoppu. She arrived at Emerald in May 2019 to mentor the teachers and support the principal as they transitioned to the HEI program. However, aware that she was new to the community, Paula spent the first few months building relationships with everyone, from the children to the parents to the educators: “At HEI Schools, one of our values is a culture of trust, so I made the effort to build that trust with everyone in the community first. I also recognized that good practices were already in place at HEI Emerald before I arrived, so I wanted to observe what they were doing before implementing changes,” she said.

Paula began by working in the rooms with the teachers three days a week to observe their practices, and once she got more familiar with the ways they worked, she started making suggestions to better implement the HEI Way. For example, she demonstrated how to conduct HEI Time, which is an opportunity for the children to practice all kinds of skills, from linguistic to social-emotional, and to help them prepare for the day ahead. She gave the educators advice about how to set up the learning environment and answered any questions they had throughout the day. By the time she left at the end of January 2020, Paula felt that the school was in a good position to deliver high-quality education from both the HEI Schools and Australian perspectives, and she still stays in touch with the HEI Emerald team through monthly pedagogical calls.



## A Parent's Perspective

With the center near full capacity, parents are clearly pleased with the changes that the HEI Schools team has implemented. One such parent is Laura, mother of two children who attend HEI Schools Emerald. She discovered HEI Schools while exploring options for her younger child, Finley. Poppy, her older child, attended a family daycare that had no space for Finley. When she called a local center, they also did not have any availability. Instead, they recommended HEI Schools, noting that the center had recently changed hands and received a lot of positive feedback ever since.

Laura brought Finley to HEI Schools for the first time when he was five months old, and the drop-offs were initially quite challenging. Finley would get very upset at the thought of his mother leaving, so instead of bringing Finley into the school kicking and screaming, the educators collaborated with Laura to find a better solution. They decided that he would stay with the same educator for the majority of his time at HEI so he could feel a sense of consistency and security. The strategy worked, and Finley soon became much more comfortable in the environment.



*HEI Schools Emerald, Australia*

Poppy, on the other hand, was immediately attracted to HEI Schools. After attending some orientations with her brother and seeing him after his good days, she decided that she loved it. After her family daycare closed, Laura enrolled her at the center as well.

There are many parts of HEI Schools that Laura appreciates: “I love the vibe of the center, that it’s very calm without a lot of chaos. The educators are also great and always have time to chat or to answer questions. They are really willing to work with children in order to help them as best they can.”

She also noted positive changes in her children since they started attending HEI two years ago: “They’re very comfortable with teamwork and play well together. HEI Schools has also taught them independence, and we continue that at home. If they want something, they’re able to get it themselves, and they want to do it without my help. They sometimes fight tooth and nail for it!”

## Continuing To Cultivate a Caring Community

HEI Schools Emerald celebrated its second birthday at the end of February 2021, and when asked what made her most proud in the past year, Amanda's answer was simple: "Surviving COVID. And not just surviving, but thriving." The team came together during that challenging time to maintain connections with the community, from hosting weekly video meetings with their children's groups to sending them letters, photos and homework and providing materials for families to pick up outside the center. When HEI Schools Emerald reopened in September 2020, every single child returned to the center, and some even returned with siblings born during the lockdowns.

More than anything, Amanda credits her team with HEI Schools Emerald's success: "Everyone is united to provide a high-quality program, and it has created a subculture of educators who really care about each other and the children. The team is the strongest part of the community, and I'm so proud of the work we've done together."



*HEI Schools Emerald, Australia*



Learn more about what HEI Schools can offer you as an educator, no matter where you are in the world.

[Go to the HEI Schools website.](#)