

Friendly Street

A case study from a preparatory classroom

This example shows how **investigations can be used as a context to facilitate valuable and purposeful learning experiences**. These events took place in a multi-age classroom that included a Preparatory class, Preschool group and Year 1.

In *Young Investigators — The Project Approach in the Early Years*, Harris Helm and Katz (2001) emphasise that "projects provide a natural provocation for learning and using mathematical and scientific thinking".

This case study shows:

- examples of child-responsive planning and thinking in practice
- how children's ideas were used to develop curriculum planning that met their needs and interests.

The left column gives comments on the co-construction of learning experiences, while the right column shows the links to the early learning areas in the *Early Years Curriculum Guidelines (EYCG)*.

Co-constructing the learning experiences	Learning experiences	Links to <i>EYCG</i>
<p>Catalyst for investigation</p>	<p>Background information</p> <p>In our classroom there were eight Preschool students, eight Prep students and eight Year 1 students. These three groups started the year in separate classrooms and combined to form one class as of Week 5 in Term 1.</p> <p>For whole group sessions, I would call for children from Preschool, Prep and Year 1 to join together on the mat. Some students queried the need to use all group names separately.</p> <p>Children: <i>“Why do you always say Preschool, Prep and Year 1?”</i></p> <p>Teacher: <i>“Why not? That’s what you all are.”</i></p> <p>Children: <i>“It’s too long.”</i></p> <p>So we discussed changing from Preschool, Prep and Year 1 to just one name that we could all agree on.</p>	
<p>Uninhibited generation of ideas</p> <p>Children negotiate and participate in decision making. Teacher turns conversation into a teachable moment.</p>	<p>The children brainstormed many ideas for a name. Sesame Street was one suggestion.</p> <p>“No — that’s on TV!” others commented.</p> <p>Other ideas given by the children included:</p> <p>“The Strawberry Room, because it’s fun.”</p> <p>“The Spooky Room, because that’s my favourite show.”</p> <p>“The Lovely Room, because it is lovely.”</p> <p>“Well what about Friendly Street? Because we’re all friends,” a Year 1 student asked.</p>	<p>Language learning and communication— Oral language</p> <p>Monitoring and assessing</p> <p>Contributes ideas and shares information in group settings, responding to others, usually when asked.</p>
<p>Children participate authentically in decision making.</p>	<p>A Prep child asked if we could vote to see if everyone could agree on a name. I wrote the options on a piece of butcher’s paper for children to choose from. The vote was taken using a show of hands. All agreed on “Friendly Street” as the new name for the classroom.</p>	<p>Social and personal learning—Social learning</p> <p>Monitoring and assessing</p> <p>With some prompts, willingly considers others’ ideas, feelings and needs while negotiating in learning situations.</p>

Co-constructing the learning experiences	Learning experiences	Links to <i>EYCG</i>
<p>Children demonstrate existing understandings.</p> <p>Children consider possibilities.</p>	<p>Jake thought Friendly Street was a good name because of his new friend in the room: “Rex doesn’t like it if you’re mean.”</p> <p>Emma thought Tweety Bird (our pet budgie) wouldn’t like our new name, because “He’s a cranky little bird – not friendly!”</p> <p>A Prep child then suggested that the classroom needed a sign so that everyone would know the new classroom name.</p> <p>A child said, “You can get some tools and make a sign and then paint it.”</p> <p>This idea generated many excited comments and suggestions about how this should be done and the form it should take.</p>	<p>Active learning processes—Technology</p> <p>Monitoring and assessing</p> <p>With support, discusses some ways that ideas are represented.</p>
<p>Children communicate existing mathematical understandings.</p> <p>Teacher uses open-ended questioning to encourage children to develop the idea further.</p>	<p>“It should be round and long like a ... a cylinder! With numbers on the side,” said Rochelle.</p> <p><i>“Numbers, that sounds interesting,” I commented.</i></p> <p>“Yeah, so you know where we live,” said Carly.</p>	
<p>Teacher extends children’s prior knowledge of address systems and numbering.</p>	<p><i>“I wonder what numbers we would put on it?”</i> I asked.</p> <p>“Mine has a three at home,” said Rana.</p> <p>“But we can’t have the same, Rana,” said Sam.</p> <p>“Why not?” I asked.</p> <p>“Because we’ll get all Rana’s mail!” Sam answered.</p> <p><i>“So we need a different number?”</i> I suggested.</p> <p>“A five! I’m five you know!” said Kaitlyn.</p>	<p>Early mathematical understandings—Early numeracy</p> <p>Monitoring and assessing</p> <p>Recognises familiar numbers.</p>

Co-constructing the learning experiences	Learning experiences	Links to EYCG
<p>Teacher directs thinking towards the existence of multiple ages in the classroom.</p> <p>Teacher-aide develops home-school links.</p>	<p><i>"Is everyone in this room five?"</i> I asked.</p> <p>The children all commented about their ages.</p> <p>Kaitlyn then said, "Well a 4 and a 5 and a 6 then! That's how old everybody is."</p> <p>"Whoa! That's forty fifty-six", said Sam.</p> <p><i>"Yes, it sounds like a big number."</i></p> <p>"Hey, let's have a post box with our numbers on it — 456."</p> <p>"Yeah, we could get some mail!"</p> <p>The teacher aide commented that she had an old post box at home we could have.</p>	<p>Early mathematical understandings— Early numeracy</p> <p>Interacting</p> <p>Discussing approximations of early mathematical ideas and modifying understandings, as required.</p>
<p>Teacher uses a teachable moment to develop dispositions.</p>	<p>"If we put Friendly Street on the sign, people in our room need to be friendly," said William.</p> <p>This then launched a discussion led by me about what being friendly is. We used an easel and paper to record ideas under a large heading: "Being Friendly".</p>	<p>Social and personal learning— Social learning</p> <p>Planning</p> <p>Identifying and expressing ideas and feelings about what it means to be a friend.</p>
<p>Children participate in real-life partnerships and relationships.</p>	<p>Later that day, two Year 10 Graphics students, who participate in a weekly work placement roster, became involved in our project. The children enthusiastically briefed them on our Friendly Street ideas.</p>  <p>The photograph shows two young children, a girl on the left and a boy on the right, standing in a classroom. They are positioned next to a large drawing on an easel. The drawing features a diamond shape with text inside, including the words 'FRIENDLY STREET'. The background shows a typical classroom setting with desks and a television.</p>	

Co-constructing the learning experiences	Learning experiences	Links to EYCG
Teacher changes planned experiences to respond to a real-life learning experience.	Instead of our planned afternoon learning experiences, we decided to employ the help of the Graphics students in designing our sign.	
Children brainstorm and draw a concept map/diagram. Older peers assist children to develop mathematical concepts.	<p>Using an easel and paper, the Graphics students asked for ideas from the class about the shape of the sign. The Graphics students incorporated what they knew about design to help with the questioning.</p> <p><i>What shape?</i></p> <p><i>What colour?</i></p> <p><i>Where would we put writing?</i></p> <p><i>What about pictures?</i></p>	<p>Active learning processes— Investigating technology</p> <p>Interacting</p> <p>Working collaboratively with children to make different products using different processes.</p>
<p>Children make links to technology by making objects (i.e. technology) to meet a personal need.</p> <p>Children collaborate to develop ideas.</p>	<p>After each answer, the Graphics students added the children’s suggestions to the design. The Graphics students then took the pencil design and asked if they could make it on the computer for the class.</p> <p><i>“Then we’ll bring it back to you, and you can tell us if there is anything you would like changed.”</i></p> <p>We all agreed that it was a good idea. The next day it was brought back and shown to the children to agree on or change aspects. This was done by sketching the children’s oral suggestions.</p>	

Co-constructing the learning experiences	Learning experiences	Links to EYCG
<p>Children construct a model to represent the height of an object.</p>	<div data-bbox="568 360 1059 1014" data-label="Image"> </div> <p data-bbox="596 1039 1031 1070">Awaiting some "Friendly Street" mail</p> <p data-bbox="448 1099 1177 1249">A few days later, the post box was brought in, painted by some children and put up. So that children could retrieve their mail independently, a Prep child placed blocks on top of each other to measure how high the 456 Friendly Street post box needed to be.</p>	<p data-bbox="1206 365 1406 427">Active learning processes</p> <p data-bbox="1206 452 1406 515">Monitoring and assessing</p> <p data-bbox="1206 539 1445 723">With support, thinks about and creates own products and systems from their observations and use of technology.</p>
<p data-bbox="209 1312 405 1462">Children make real-life connections by visiting the local post office.</p> <p data-bbox="209 1489 405 1581">Children inquire together about technologies.</p>	<p data-bbox="448 1312 1166 1404">The setting up of the post box stimulated discussion about post offices so, as a group, we decided to visit the local post office.</p> <div data-bbox="464 1426 1163 1946" data-label="Image"> </div> <p data-bbox="596 1973 1031 2004">Looking at the numbered post boxes</p>	<p data-bbox="1206 1312 1406 1433">Active learning processes— Investigating technology</p> <p data-bbox="1206 1458 1406 1520">Monitoring and assessing</p> <p data-bbox="1206 1547 1417 1697">With support, identifies ways in which technology helps people in everyday life.</p>

Co-constructing the learning experiences	Learning experiences	Links to <i>EYCG</i>
	<p>While we were at the post office, we observed the technology and systems associated with mail sorting and delivery. When we returned to the classroom, the children used blocks and large boxes to construct their own post office in the classroom. The children had a very large cardboard box that they decided to use for the door.</p> 	<p>Active learning processes— Investigating technology</p> <p><i>Monitoring and assessing</i></p> <p>With support, thinks about and creates own products and systems from their observations and use of technology.</p>
<p>Children identify the problem that needs to be solved and the important features of the problem.</p>	<p>Discussion took place about whether our post office should have one door or two. In the end, the children decided that two doors would be better because this would allow more people to fit through. Perhaps the children were predicting how popular the post office would be? Inside the post office the children used a long table as a stamping and sorting area. The children made individual post boxes and decorated them with names and numbers as they wished.</p>	

Co-constructing the learning experiences	Learning experiences	Links to <i>EYCG</i>
	 <p>The post boxes were placed under the long table. When designing their post boxes, the students had to make decisions such as:</p> <p><i>What sort of label should my post box have?</i></p> <p><i>What size should my post box be to be able to fit my mail inside?</i></p> <p><i>Where will I put my post box so that people will see it?</i></p> <p><i>How high should it be?</i></p> <p>The children played in the post office, writing and posting letters to their friends and stamping and sorting mail.</p>	<p>Early mathematical understandings— Early numeracy</p> <p><i>Monitoring and assessing</i></p> <p>Identifies and describes attributes of objects as long, short, empty, full, heavy, light.</p> <p>Sorts collections by single attributes such as shape, colour or size of objects.</p>
<p>Children experiment with using different ways to imaginatively represent experiences, ideas and designs.</p>	<p>At the same time that the post office was being developed, our school was updating its phone system. The old disconnected phones were offered to our class and we incorporated them into the post office. The children practised finding and dialling their phone numbers while playing in the post office.</p> <p>As they played in the post office, the children took on many roles. Jake used a bike and hat to carry a satchel around the classroom to deliver mail. He and many others had to match names to the post boxes. Other children took on the role of letter-writers, communicating to enhance friendships.</p>	<p>Active learning processes— Investigating technology</p> <p><i>Monitoring and assessing</i></p> <p>With support, thinks about and creates own products and systems from their observations and use of technology.</p>

Co-constructing the learning experiences	Learning experiences	Links to <i>EYCG</i>
	<p>After receiving a real postcard from a class member, the children decided they wanted to write their own postcards.</p> <p><i>What do postcards look like?</i></p> <p>We found some mini-pizza boxes that had a window-like hole in them. The children thought that would be a perfect place to write a person's name or address. The children folded and stapled them so that they resembled a postcard, then used have-a-go writing to write their postcards.</p>	<p>Language learning and communication— Early literacy</p> <p><i>Monitoring and assessing</i></p> <p>Uses writing approximations, drawing (or alternative augmented forms of communication) to share ideas and information seeking help when needed.</p>
<p>Children extend their writing skills and literacy concepts.</p>	<div data-bbox="536 900 1094 1503" data-label="Image"> </div> <p style="text-align: center;">A postcard for a friend</p> <p>To extend the interest in writing letters and posting mail, a writing bag was made and filled with various resources such as paper, envelopes, pens, a letter chart and alphabet books.</p>	<p>Language learning and communication— Early literacy</p> <p><i>Monitoring and assessing</i></p> <p>Understands that shaping and writing are useful and purposeful activities.</p> <p>Experiments with letters, words, symbols, drawings to write or shape simple texts.</p>

<p>Co-constructing the learning experiences</p>	<p>Learning experiences</p>	<p>Links to EYCG</p>
<p>Children develop systems for communicating events.</p>	<p>The writing bag was sent home each Friday on a roster system. The children were able to use anything in the bag and wrote to others, posting the notes in our post box.</p> <p>A letter written to them from another student in the room pleasantly surprised many students.</p>	<p>Social and personal learning— Social learning</p> <p><i>Planning</i></p> <p>Participating in experiences that raise awareness of their identities.</p>
	<div data-bbox="596 775 1059 1368" data-label="Image"> <p>A black and white photograph of a young child with long hair, wearing a dark vest over a light-colored shirt and dark shoes. The child is holding a large, dark-colored bag with a diamond-shaped logo on the front. The child is standing in a classroom, with a large board behind them that has a 'Jumbo Number 1000s Puzzle' displayed on it. The room is decorated with various items hanging from the ceiling and on the walls.</p> </div> <p data-bbox="692 1391 963 1424">Holding the writing bag</p>	<p>Early mathematical understandings— Early numeracy</p> <p>Investigating and communicating about quantities and their representations and attributes of objects or collections.</p>

Co-constructing the learning experiences	Learning experiences	Links to EYCG
<p>Teacher and children build real-life relationships, incorporating concrete learning experiences.</p>	<p>We commissioned our Friendly Street sign with the help of the Manual Arts students and their teacher. The children had to make decisions about what materials they wanted the sign to be made out of, what size it would be, where it would be positioned, what colour and shape it should be, and what lettering should be on it.</p> <p>During their interactions with the older students, the children handled a variety of tools and materials and discussed measurements and lettering. This acted as a stimulus for their dramatic play in the classroom. Some children made their own signs from cardboard and painted them with the Friendly Street name. These signs were then positioned around the classroom. One child commented that we were going to need a ladder because “You need a ladder when you are doing anything up high.”</p> <p>Skills such as measuring, painting, cutting, designing and positioning were used to make the signs. The children also used the carpentry table at the “Friendly St” classroom to try out the skills they had seen the older Manual Arts students using in the workshop.</p>	<p>Active learning processes— Imagining and responding</p> <p>Monitoring and assessing</p> <p>With some prompts, experiments with using different ways to imaginatively represent experiences, ideas and designs, usually with enjoyment.</p>

Co-constructing the learning experiences	Learning experiences	Links to EYCG
	<p>The change of our class name to "Friendly Street" created a caring atmosphere among the students that we reinforce. Some investigations relating to "Friendly Street" still occur from time to time as we await the delivery of our sign. The children are now known throughout the school and community as "Friendly Street" and this has helped us with many communication processes. The children of Friendly Street continue to live up to their name.</p> <p>Conclusion</p> <p>In the case of Friendly Street, the teacher built curriculum decision-making and learning experiences from the children's question:</p> <p><i>Why do you always say Preschool, Prep and Year 1?</i></p> <p>The teacher's willingness to follow the interests of the children acted as a catalyst to stimulate a number of opportunities to discuss, think, create, draw diagrams, explore numbers and investigate problems.</p> <p>The learning environment was filled with an interesting and appealing range of concrete materials that allowed children to express their understandings and develop ideas. The teacher involved children in learning across a range of contexts — real-life experiences, play, investigations and focused learning and teaching.</p> <p><i>Investigations in a Preparatory classroom provide opportunities to explore ways to communicate, investigate social, natural and built environments, and experiment with artistic, scientific, technological and mathematical ideas and processes. (Early Years Curriculum Guidelines)</i></p> <p>Monitoring and planning</p> <p>During the Friendly Street investigations, photographs of children's involvement were taken and included in their folios for assessment and reflection. Notes from observations of the children's learning were added to the teacher's short-term planning. At times, learning experiences pre-planned by the teacher were adapted and changed according to the children's suggestions. The interests of the children were used to extend their understandings, capabilities and dispositions.</p>	

Further reading

Draft Early Years Curriculum Guidelines, 2003, Queensland Studies Authority, Brisbane.

Harris Helm, Judy & Katz, Lilian. 2001, *Young Investigators — The Project Approach in the Early Years*, Teachers College Press, New York.

<http://www.project-approach.com> (contains some examples of projects by other schools)

Special thanks to the Prep teacher Mrs Kellie Egan, teacher aide Mrs Helen Aspinall and children of “Friendly Street” at Blackall State School.