



Early years curriculum materials

Following play

This case study outlines how children in one preparatory class explore curriculum through event-based play



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Background

There were 22 Prep Year children in this class, which is part of a school campus. We used an event-based play program to explore the curriculum, so the children were engaged in experiences that encouraged them to recall and represent past events or experiences. Children expressed their ideas, and were involved in planning, decision making and supporting one another.

Because their games were left up at the end of play each day, when children arrived in the mornings, the large room was ready for them. Children were encouraged to move materials and equipment around the room and to create spaces for their games; both spaces and games were mutually decided on and negotiated.

The teacher encouraged the children to develop early literacy and numeracy understandings through purposeful interactions. She also encouraged them to explore ideas through active play. The children constructed representations of their ideas throughout the program.

The group began each day with a discussion. During the discussion, children clarified ideas for learning and listened to each other's perspectives. This helped the group to form a common understanding about what learning was occurring in the room. Oral language was vital to forming and articulating these understandings. The teacher used open-ended questioning to encourage the children to share their ideas. We often sat in a circle so that everyone could maintain eye contact when we were sharing ideas. This was also a strategy for encouraging all of the children to feel valued.

This case study shows how the Action learning cycle of Plan–Do–Reflect looks in a prep classroom.

Links to Early Years Curriculum Guidelines		Monitoring and assessing – Notes for children’s folios
Monday		
<p>Language learning & communication: Early literacy</p> <p>Writing & shaping</p> <p>Interacting</p> <p>Use teachable moments to respond to and extend children’s understandings of written language</p> <p>Active learning processes: Investigating environments</p> <p>Interacting</p> <p>Draw children’s attention to, and describing, similarities and differences between aspects of environments as they relate to children’s everyday lives</p>	<p>The children had just returned from the September holidays and were eager to share their experiences. Their familiarity with their learning environment and routines was obvious through their interactions with materials and other children.</p> <p>During the planning discussion at the beginning of the day, Ben told the group that he had been to the Big Pineapple during the holidays. He discussed the train ride there and the signs nearby that said, “Keep hands and feet in.” We discussed in detail what the sign looked like and I made a sign with the group according to Ben’s description. I asked, “How big was the Big Pineapple?” Ben replied, “Enormous.”</p> <p>Bianca told the group that she had been to Steve Irwin’s zoo. She explained that she was a bit sad because Steve Irwin wasn’t there. She was able to discuss and describe the animals that she saw there. <i>A big spotty snake wrapped itself around me, and there were lots of crocodiles.</i> I asked Bianca, “How did you get to the zoo? What does it look like? How much does it cost to get in? What jobs were the workers doing?” My questions prompted the children to ask Bianca other questions.</p> <p>Madeline had been to the museum during the holidays and explained that she couldn’t touch some of the objects at the museum because they were <i>so precious</i>. During the discussion some of the children asked, “What’s a museum?” Together we recorded some ideas about what a museum is on butcher’s paper.</p>	<p><i>Bn willingly shares information and ideas with others in informal and group settings.</i></p>

Links to Early Years Curriculum Guidelines		Monitoring and assessing – Notes for children’s folios
<p>Partnerships with children</p> <p>Collaboratively plan learning contexts to ensure that learning is meaningful to children</p>	<p>After this initial discussion, I asked the children what games they wanted to make that day. I recorded the children’s suggestions as headings on a clean sheet of butcher’s paper.</p> <p>The children suggested that we could make a Big Pineapple, a museum and a crocodile zoo. Aiden suggested he could make an army boat – a game that he had been very interested in before the holidays. (The children here are really interested in army events because of their knowledge of the army barracks located nearby.)</p> <p>If you are going to make a big pineapple, a museum, a crocodile zoo and an army boat, what will you need?</p>	
<p>Language learning & communication: Early literacy Writing & shaping</p> <p>Planning</p> <p>Construct and co-construct different types of texts for a range of personal and group purposes</p>	<p>Under the heading Big Pineapple the children helped me write: a big pineapple and a train. For museum we wrote displays and signs, for zoo, crocodile enclosure and crocodiles. Under the heading Army we wrote boat.</p> <p>After discussing what would be needed in each game, each child decided which game they would help set up. They recorded their names on a sheet, alongside the game they had chosen. After the children had recorded their names I asked, “What role will you play in the zoo, Clinton? How many workers will the museum need? If there are four people in the army group, how big will the boat need to be? Can girls join the army group? Who will make the train at the Big Pineapple?”</p>	
<p>Active learning processes: Imagining & responding</p> <p>Planning</p> <p>Co-create new indoor and outdoor environments</p> <p>Social & personal learning: Social learning</p> <p>Interacting</p> <p>Adopt a socially just approach when planning for and conversing with children</p>	<p>The groups then identified the areas where they would like to set up their games. To identify their area, the children selected a combination of blocks, screens and furniture. A great deal of discussion and negotiation was required amongst the children to determine what was needed, where things should go, and what roles they would take on.</p> <p>During the year, I made explicit the listening processes and strategies that the children can use to be good listeners. For example, taking turns to talk and looking at the person you are speaking to. The children reinforced each other’s positive listening strategies during their interactions. This helped us to negotiate our curriculum effectively.</p> <p>Seven children decided that they would work together in the museum. This was a large group, yet they organised themselves quickly, setting up tables to display items and screens to divide off the area.</p>	<p><i>C, O and K worked collaboratively to plan and create new classroom environments, processes or systems.</i></p>

Links to Early Years Curriculum Guidelines		Monitoring and assessing – Notes for children’s folios
<p>Active learning processes: Imagining & responding</p> <p>Planning</p> <p>work collaboratively on a project or real-life problem as they generate, act upon and evaluate ideas, designs and actions</p>	<p>Aiden went to his bag and got out the army book he had mentioned earlier and said: <i>We’re going to make this one.</i> He proudly displayed it to everyone, but was reluctant for anyone to touch it. I suggested that they might like to draw a plan of their boat before they made it. The group did this, referring to the book and, with support, they labelled specific items and parts on the boat.</p> <p>The Big Pineapple group began to set up their area with tables, but Ben said, “There are no tables in the big pineapple.” So, I asked the group, “How could you build the big pineapple?” Ben suggested that we needed <i>a lot of blocks.</i></p>	<p><i>A enjoyed generating different possibilities and trying different ways to achieve a goal, solve a problem, use information or display representations.</i></p>
<p>Social & personal learning: Personal learning</p> <p>Interacting</p> <p>Work with children and provide suggestions to help them organise their task into smaller, more manageable steps</p>	<p><i>Gee what a good idea, but that is a problem as the boat and museum games have the big blocks. Does anyone else have another idea? What else could you try?</i></p> <p>Olivia suggested that the group put the tables in a square and Keearna added: Then we’ll get that big flat box from the storeroom and put it around the tables.</p>	

<p>Links to Early Years Curriculum Guidelines</p>		<p>Monitoring and assessing – Notes for children’s folios</p>
	<div data-bbox="523 394 1182 1256" data-label="Image"> </div> <p data-bbox="571 1283 1136 1346">Museum sign – members setting it up are listed underneath the heading “The museum”</p> <p data-bbox="504 1370 1189 1494">The crocodile zoo group needed a lot of reassurance and step-by-step guidance. They made a crocodile enclosure by putting four poles on bases to form a square and connecting them with a piece of rope.</p>	

<p>Active learning processes: Thinking</p> <p>Interacting</p> <p>Question children about their strategies</p>	<p>I scaffolded the children’s decision-making by asking open ended questions. “Crocodiles can be quite dangerous, what sort of enclosure do you think they would need if they were in a zoo? Steve Irwin would want everyone to be safe at the zoo, wouldn’t he?”</p>	
	<p>Chantelle suggested that the group could put more rope at the bottom of the enclosure, to stop the crocodiles from getting out and harming anyone. Bianca told everyone in the group that she would make a sign saying: <i>Don’t touch the crocodiles.</i></p> <p>As usual, after the children had set up their learning areas and made some artefacts to use in them, we concluded the play and gathered together for discussion. The children tidied up their games by making them smaller and neater. We follow this routine regularly.</p>	<p><i>Sh and B suggested ideas about possible ways to solve a problem.</i></p>
	<div data-bbox="533 869 1171 1350" data-label="Image"> </div> <p>Making a crocodile for the zoo</p>	
<p>Reflecting on learning</p>		
	<p><i>What do we need to keep our games going tomorrow? Were there any problems during those games? What could we do tomorrow to fix any problems that we had today?</i></p> <p>Together we recorded the plan for tomorrow’s learning on a sheet of butcher’s paper and made the transition to morning tea.</p>	

Tuesday		
	<p>We began discussion in a circle with consideration of what we had learned the previous day.</p> <p>What games did we begin yesterday? Let's read our plan. What did we decide to do yesterday to fix some of the problems that we had in our games?</p> <p>After re-visiting the information on the butcher's paper and clarifying any understandings and actions to be taken, I passed around a pineapple that I had brought in from home.</p>	
<p>Language learning & communication: Oral language</p> <p>Planning</p> <p>Learn new vocabulary and extend language structures in a range of contexts</p>	<p><i>What does it feel like? Look like? What fruits are similar to a pineapple? How long do you think it would take to grow?</i></p> <p>I wrote down the words that the children used to describe the pineapple and we looked at them again after touching and feeling the pineapple.</p> <p>Caleb and Olivia suggested that they would have to make the Big Pineapple prickly.</p>	<p><i>C and O used language to support their thinking.</i></p>
<p>Active learning processes: Investigating the natural world</p> <p>Interacting</p> <p>Using explicit scientific language to describe features of natural environments, forces, living things and materials</p>	<p>I also showed the children some shells and bones that could go on display in the museum. We discussed their features together, and the children described what they "looked like". I explained that we could find out what the artefacts 'felt like' when we made a visit to the museum.</p> <p>The children went to their areas to continue shaping and developing their games.</p>	

<p>Early mathematical understandings: Early numeracy</p> <p>Interacting</p> <p>Acknowledge effort, interest, learning and experimentation with mathematical ideas</p>	<p>The children in the Big Pineapple group laid a large piece of cardboard out on the floor. Tamika asked, "What could I use to make the pineapple prickly?" She independently decided to go to the making area where she found a bucket of corks. She excitedly told the others about what she had found and they all worked together gluing and sticky-taping the corks to the cardboard. The children spent a considerable amount of time on this part of their game. Caleb and Keearna counted how many prickles they had on the pineapple. When they skipped a number Olivia corrected them and began to count with them. I praised their efforts at counting such a large number of corks!</p> <p>I explained to the museum group that I was going to deliver some artefacts to them. I also explained that the artefacts were very valuable and needed to be kept safe. <i>How could we do that? What could the museum staff do to make sure that the artefacts are kept safe?</i></p>	<p><i>T is willing to use and experiment with different ways to represent ideas, experiences and designs.</i></p> <p><i>C and K used counting to identify 'how many'.</i></p>
<p>Language learning & communication: Early literacy</p> <p>Writing & shaping</p> <p>Planning</p> <p>Construct and co-construct different types of texts for a range of personal and group purposes</p>	<p>Matthew suggested that he could make a sign that said: <i>Don't touch</i>. Max added that the museum group could make signs that said: <i>Be careful</i>. The whole group went to the making area and began to make the signs. They added symbols to the writing by tracing around each of their hands and drawing a line through it to represent "don't touch". Other children made items to display in the museum. One child made a clock to represent the times that the museum would be open. A small group decided that the museum staff would get hungry and needed somewhere to have their lunch break, so they used furniture and props to make a coffee shop.</p>  <p>"Do not touch" – a sign near some of the precious museum exhibits</p>	<p><i>M and Ma connected their understandings of the conventions of books, print and electronic texts with their own writing and shaping experience.</i></p> <p><i>D copied this text from one that was modelled by me.</i></p>

<p>Active learning processes: Thinking</p> <p>Interacting</p> <p>Collaborate with children to investigate, consider what might happen and evaluate what did happen</p>	<p>The army group had spent considerable time on their design and plans the previous day, so they needed to begin building their boat. Susan — my co-worker — asked the group where everyone in the army game would sit in the boat, because it looked quite small.</p> <p>This presented a problem to the group and they were motivated to solve it so that everyone could be a part of the game and sit in the army boat.</p> <p>Liam suggested that the group use chairs and counted everyone in the group. They turned the large prop box that they had used for the boat over and Aiden said, “No don’t get four chairs, get two ’cause two can fit in here” (pointing inside the big prop box). Susan praised Aiden. “Great suggestion Aiden!”</p>	<p><i>L persevered to investigate and solve a problem.</i></p>
	 <p style="text-align: center;">The army boat</p>	
<p>Active learning processes: Thinking</p> <p>Interacting</p> <p>Question children about their strategies: “How do you know?” “How did you work out that problem?” and “Why did you do it that way?”</p>	<p>The children set up a counter at the front of the zoo, with a phone, money till and some pens. I rang the crocodile zoo to let them know that I would be making a delivery of some new crocodiles (crocodile puppets). When I got to the crocodile zoo, Clinton said, “Oh Crikey!” He had taken on the role of Steve Irwin and was wondering where he could put all the crocodiles!</p> <p>After putting the crocodiles down, I asked, “How are you getting the crocodiles to the enclosure?”</p> <p>Clinton explained we have to get on their backs and drag them. He grabbed Daniel and both of them pretended to jump on the crocodile puppet and drag it to the enclosure. Susan (my co-worker) asked if she could touch one of the crocodiles. Clinton replied, “Oh No! Crikey! We need a sign ‘No patting’.” He pointed to Chantelle who went to the making area and made a No patting sign using her knowledge of letters and sounds.</p>	<p><i>C is beginning to enjoy exploring roles and experimenting with ways to build dramatic action.</i></p>

		
<p>Feeding the crocodiles at the zoo</p>		
<p>Reflecting on learning</p>		
<p>Challenging children to develop deep understandings</p> <p>Help children to evaluate and reflect</p>	<p>After the games were tidied, the group gathered together and reflected on their learning. What signs did we make today? What makes them easy to read? How much would it cost me if I wanted to visit the crocodile zoo? How will the army know where they are going in their boat?</p>	
<p>Wednesday</p>		
<p>Language learning & communication: Early literacy</p> <p>Reading & viewing</p> <p>Interacting</p> <p>Use a range of text types as part of researching and following instructions</p>	<p>During group planning and discussion the children revisited their games from the previous day. <i>What do the Big Pineapple people need? What do the museum people need?</i> Any additions that the children suggested were recorded on pieces of paper with an icon or picture cue beside them. The pieces of paper were later placed in the games areas to remind the children about what they needed to make and add to their game.</p>	
<p>Active learning processes: Investigating technology</p> <p>Planning</p> <p>Identify technology as products or ways of doing things</p>	<p>Before the children began their investigations and play, I showed them a special delivery that had arrived from the Queensland Museum. It consisted of some old coins and medals in a display case. I explained that the Queensland Museum gave us gloves to use with the exhibits. <i>Why do you think the museum sent us gloves? What do you think about the exhibits? How do you think they were made? What could they be made from? Why are the gloves white?</i> I suggested to the museum group that I deliver the exhibits once everyone had started their games.</p>	

<p>Active learning processes: Investigating the natural world</p> <p>Planning</p> <p>Conduct simple experiments and observations, with assistance</p> <p>Health & physical learning: Making healthy choices</p> <p>Interacting</p> <p>Support children to make choices that maintain their own and others' safety in a range of situations</p>	<p>Additionally, our gardener had suggested that if you cut the top off a pineapple and plant it, it would grow. The children were very motivated to try this experiment and they inspected an area just outside the classroom door where they could plant it. The Big Pineapple group suggested that they could prepare the area and plant the pineapple head that I had cut off the pineapple we looked at and touched the previous day. I explained to them that they would need to wear gardening gloves and carry the small digging forks very carefully.</p> <p>The children in the Big Pineapple encountered a problem when they tried to stand the large cardboard "shell" of the pineapple upright. <i>What could we do? The corks are falling off, what can we use to make them stay on? How will we get the box to stand up? It's so heavy.</i></p>	
<p>Language learning & communication: Early literacy</p> <p>Writing & shaping</p> <p>Interacting</p> <p>Work alongside children as they experiment with writing and shaping experiences</p>	<p>The museum children carefully pulled on their white gloves and completed the set-up of the delivered museum artefacts (old coins, medals and bones) The artefacts were examined very closely by the museum staff. Elizabeth made a double-sided <i>open/closed</i> sign. Jessica and Matthew made a sign that said <i>Entry this way</i> with an arrow pointing to the right. Madeline drew a dozen arrows and stuck them up for people to follow when they arrived at the museum, so <i>they would know which way to go</i>.</p>	<p><i>E asked about the sounds in "open".</i></p> <p><i>M understands early directional language.</i></p>
		<p><i>Using an eyepiece at the museum.</i></p> <p><i>Staff at the museum made name tags for themselves and stuck them on their chests so that visitors to the museum would know who to ask for help.</i></p>



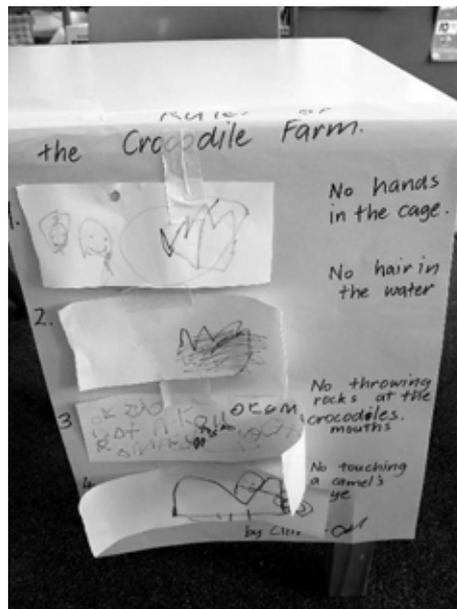
Feeding the tortoise

Clinton suggested that the zoo should have more rules because it was a *very dangerous place*.

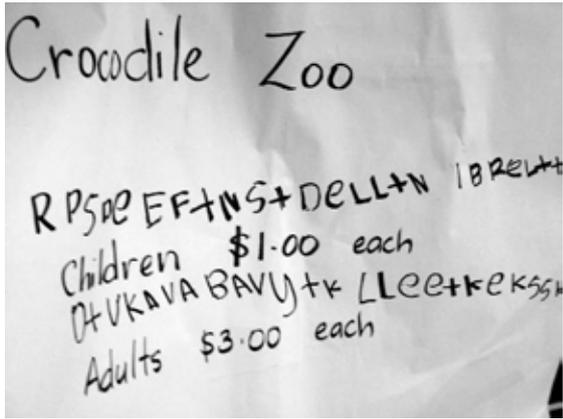
I sat down with Clinton at the writing table and scribed a sign with him. *What should the sign say? What letter makes that sound?* Clinton drew pictures on the sign after we had finished.

C shared his ideas about ways to solve a problem at the zoo.

C experimented with symbols and drawings to write and shape a simple text with support.



Clinton's sign

<p>Language learning & communication: Early literacy</p> <p>Writing & shaping</p> <p>Interacting</p> <p>Accept and encourage children's personal efforts to represent and symbolise experiences</p>	 <p>How much does it cost to get in to the zoo?</p> <p>Aiden made a sign for the army boat using his book to copy the word army. He then wrote "bot" for boat. He took the sign to Susan and asked <i>is this right?</i> Susan praised him and referred him back to the word "boat" in the book. He then copied down "boat".</p> <p>I delivered some army clothes to the group. We discussed the colour of the clothes. Daniel said, "They are like that because it's for camouflage."</p> <p><i>What does that mean?</i></p> <p><i>So you can't see anybody, like hide and seek.</i></p> <p><i>But I can see your boat, how can you fix that problem?</i></p> <p>Liam said, "Let's paint it."</p>	<p><i>A experimented with letters to write a simple text.</i></p>
<p>Social & personal learning: Social learning</p> <p>Interacting</p> <p>Establish a problem-solving climate in which all children's ideas and feelings about ways to sustain relationships are acknowledged</p>	<p>That's a great idea. But we can't paint on these boxes, what else could we do?</p> <p>Aiden made a suggestion: What about we stick paper to the sides? We could paint the paper.</p> <p>Everyone agreed that this sounded like a good idea. The children mixed paint colours to look like army camouflage and painted large sheets of paper to tape to the boat.</p> <p>Once the children had camouflaged their boat, they piled in and visited the museum. They used maps to find their way, along with small paper cylinders they had made into binoculars. One of the army personnel fell overboard and the children rescued him using some cable that was wrapped around a cable wheel. This was a wonderful re-enactment of a rescue.</p>	<p><i>A enjoys generating alternatives and testing ideas.</i></p>



Choosing resources needed to make representations and artefacts for the games.

Reflecting on learning

The children reflected on the problems they had encountered during their indoor learning session and talked about what they needed to do tomorrow. One of the children had made a pig for the zoo. The children thought this could be a problem, as crocodiles like to eat pigs. "I think we'd better put the pig away tonight, until we've made an enclosure for it," said Chantelle.

Ch suggested a possible way to solve a problem.

<p>Thursday</p>		
<p>Social & personal learning: Social learning</p> <p>Planning</p> <p>Use and explore social skills including turn-taking, sharing and listening when interacting, collaborating and resolving conflicts with others</p>	<p>The children spent the session entering into each other's games. Some of the children remained in character when they entered the other children's play. At times the museum became very crowded so the staff had to explain that if it was too crowded some of the <i>exhibits might get broken</i>.</p>	
	<div data-bbox="571 775 1129 1193" data-label="Image"> </div> <p data-bbox="528 1218 1177 1283">Be careful with the precious artefacts. H experimented with sounds to write this sign.</p> <p data-bbox="504 1308 1185 1429">The army group visited the museum to explore the coins, bones, shells, and kaleidoscopes. After they had finished feeling and observing the exhibits, they had a drink and a snack at the nearby coffee shop.</p> <div data-bbox="571 1453 1129 1872" data-label="Image"> </div> <p data-bbox="627 1897 1082 1930">Kaleidoscopic colours at the museum!</p>	

A crocodile escaped from the zoo. The zoo manager had to call the army to help recapture it because Steve Irwin was away.

At the end of indoor learning time we came together as a group and visited the museum as a preparatory class. This allowed for a great deal of focused questioning, and the museum group were able to answer questions that some of the children asked. Across the week they had gained many insights into the materials they were displaying. Because they answered questions from their friends, they felt very empowered.

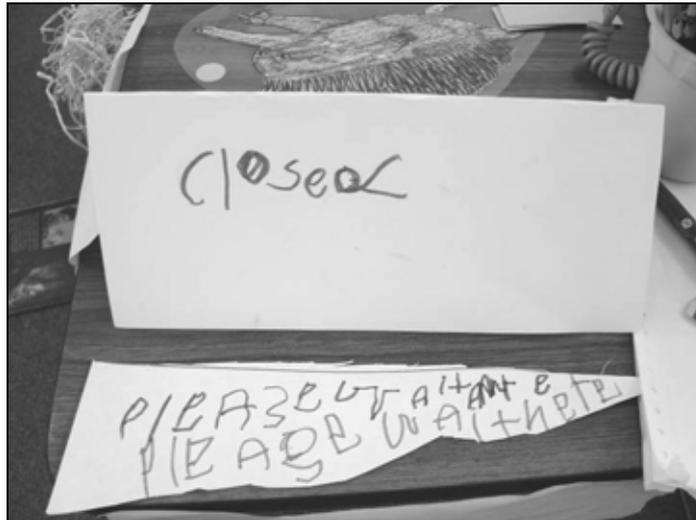


The museum

Following play

On Thursday we had a big pack-up day. Jennifer was really helpful reminding other children to make sure all of the things were put back where they belonged. The games were completely put away. Children who wanted to continue their game the following week placed items in the "carry over" basket. We have used this strategy across the year and it has been very successful. Some children placed items in the "carry over" basket. Others were happy to pack their games away. I think this was because the children had been so involved and able to pursue their games fully during the week.

J demonstrated peaceable and considerate ways of interacting with others.



The museum is "closed – please wait here" until opening time

Summary

The teacher in this setting encourages positive dispositions towards learning by involving children in planning and decision making, and by following their interests. While negotiating with others, the children are developing social and emotional competence that will enhance their learning now and in the future.

Special thanks to the Preparatory Year teacher Vaunessa Parker, teacher aide Susan White and the children of the Preparatory Year class at Mitchelton State School.

Further reading

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