Exploring Time

A Play and Project Based Approach at

Croydon West Primary School

Alan Baker, Heather Glover & Joyanne Paspa

2008
Contents:

• Learning Theories
• Rationale
• Our Journey
• Holistic Curriculum
• Data
Consider your classroom...

• How does it look?

• How does it sound?

• How does it feel?
How you would prefer it to…

• Look?

• Sound?

• Feel?
Learning to learn... playing to learn

From the very start we learn through our senses and by interacting with objects and the environment.

Play is underrated as a tool of learning; it appears to be pleasurable leisure [if it feels good, don’t do it], it is contradictory to the mental model we have of ‘real learning’.
‘Real Learning’ – the past paradigm:

• ‘Real learning’ is book-based and involves the memorisation of facts.

• ‘Real learning’ involves formulas and rules, never thinking and imagination.

• ‘Real learning’ requires correct answers rather than considered questions.

• ‘Real learning’ produced automatons ready to work without questions in factories, banks and schools!

‘Real Learning’ – the now paradigm

• This is a very different time and we need to allow children time to think, to inquire and question, and to explore.
The Two-hour Literacy Block

We know that many teachers did learn how to teach reading as a result of the training provided under the Early Years regime…

BUT…

• We also know that children learnt that they didn’t need to finish work tasks [because time was up and the next activity beckoned].

• And that many children, but particularly boys, were disengaged from the paper-bound learnings offered during the 2-hour block.

• We also, in many instances, saw the demise of sandpits, easels and finger-paint…. and intellectual intrigue.
In came the 10.25 blues
It was that inevitable knock on the door at 10.25 when the disengaged and the active arrived to tell the Principal:

“I’ve been naughty’ and ‘I can’t read; I’m just a yellow dot”.

Demoralised and incompetent, they were neither naughty nor ‘dumb’; just bored with colouring sheets, pasting someone else’s pictures, and endless listening posts.
Learning theories and ideas supporting our ‘Exploring Time’ approach:
Sophocles

In the fifth century B.C. the Greek philosopher Sophocles wrote,

“One must learn by doing the thing, for though you think you know it, you have no certainty until you try.”
Confucius says

“I hear and forget, see and remember; do and understand”

This Inquiry-based process is the teaching philosophy for all of our Level One and Two children and also guides the work being done in our Level Three and Four classrooms.
Jean Piaget

“Children have real understanding only of that which they invent themselves and each time we teach them something too quickly, we keep them from reinventing it themselves.”

“Children are not empty vessels to be filled with knowledge but active builders of knowledge—little scientists who are constantly creating and testing their own theories of the world.”
Piaget: What makes the wind?
Julia: The trees.
P: How do you know?
J: I saw them waving their arms.
P: How does that make the wind?
J (waving her hand in front of his face): Like this. Only they are bigger. And there are lots of trees.
P: What makes the wind on the ocean?
J: It blows there from the land. No. It's the waves
Cognitive development does not proceed through innate, age-based developmental thresholds, but is the product of social and cultural interaction around the development and use of cognitive, linguistic, electronic and physical tools.

Teachers acting as mentors initiate and lead students as novices into the use of technologies. This structured introduction into using tools is called ‘scaffolding’.
Paulo Freire

Authentic pedagogy focuses on the identification, analysis and resolution of immediate problems.

Pedagogy must be of demonstrable relevance to the immediate world of students and enable them to analyse, theorise and intellectually engage with those worlds.
Ted Sizer

Intellectually rich activities are at the centre of ‘mindful schools’

Completed products provide stronger evidence of learning.
“We imagine a school in which students and teachers excitedly and joyfully stretch themselves to their limits in pursuit of projects built on their own visions, not one that merely succeeds in making apathetic students satisfy minimal standards”

Caperton and Papert
“We ought to be asking why our children aren't spending more time thinking about ideas and playing a more active role in the process of learning. In such an environment, they're not only more likely to be engaged with what they're doing but also to do it better.”

The School Our Children Deserve: Moving Beyond Traditional Classrooms and "Tougher Standards" by Alfie Kohn
Play is the cornerstone of intellectual development.

Van Hoorn et al [1993]
“For children, play is work. Mountains of research over past decades have all concluded that play is important for the development in young children. Van Hoorn et al [1993] see play as the cornerstone of intellectual development. Play assists the development of language, literacy, problem-solving, logico-mathematical thinking, symbolic thought, imagination, creativity, and moral development. ‘Play represents our potential for the future.’”

Sue Wilson ‘Keys to Life’ Conference, Melbourne, 1998
In play, children voluntarily elaborate and complicate the activity.

Children are by nature playful. Challenges intrigue them. They can concentrate for long periods of time to perfect a skill.

Play is intrinsically motivating.

Cosby S. Rogers  Janet K. Sawyers [1988]
Classroom design can help to develop skills for life and work beyond the classroom. Self-directed learning and collaborative problem solving are essential skills for success

Herman Miller “Rethinking the Classroom”, 2006
This provided the rationale for us to change.

We decided to start each day with a developmental play program.
So our journey started...
We began in 2005 with…

- 2 x Prep / 1 classes and 2 staff
- 1 double room & 1 single room
- Specific areas were set up
- Operating times: Tuesday - Friday 9 -10.40am
- Limited resources and budgets
- Parent assistance
Our Beginnings…

Big room

Reading Recovery Room

Toilet block and breezeway

Little room

Grade 2

Store
Professional Development

In the beginning we:
• Visited Lady Gowrie and other kindergartens and schools
• Investigated Kathy Walker’s Developmental Curriculum approach
• Participated in many professional learning sessions
• Completed a great deal of research and professional reading

Then Teacher Professional Leave in 2007 enabled Heather and Joyanne:
• To further refine and validate our approach
• Plan and further improve our program
In 2007……

• A Learning Studio replaced teaching classrooms
• 4 classrooms were combined into one ‘learning spaces’
• New furniture – student bag boxes
• 3 staff ‘team teach’ (approximately 66 students)
• Class structure - 3 x level 1 & 2 multiage classes
• Outdoor ‘Exploring Time’ component included
• Curriculum budgets changed to level budgets
Good design transforms teaching spaces into learning spaces

Herman Miller “Rethinking the Classroom”, 2006
This is how we did it …

the walls came tumbling down and four classrooms became one large learning space
The furniture moved in..
and the kitchen...
• ...to create our large learning studio.
The physical environment .... is often referred to as the child's "third teacher."

Emelio Reggio
The Learning Studio concept incorporates flexibility in use of physical space and a design that promotes engagement and the advancement of teaching and learning.
Why did we call our program ‘Exploring Time’?

When we first started our version of a developmental play and project based program one of our students, Chelsea, coined the name…

Heather (teacher): “So Chelsea, what do you think you are doing?”

Chelsea: “I think I’m exploring.”
Why is ‘Exploring Time’ Successful?

• ‘Exploring Time’ is structured, planned and rigorously evaluated learning.
• ‘Exploring Time’ is play-based but not unguided-play.
• Project planning and Self-reflection underpin ‘Exploring Time’
• Hands-on, inquiry-based activities exploit children’s natural inquisitiveness and their need for concrete learning situations.
Holistic Curriculum

‘Exploring Time’ encompasses all VELS Strands and Domains of Learning:

**Physical, Personal and Social Learning**
Knowledge, skills and behaviours in
Health and Physical Education; Personal Learning; Interpersonal Development; Civics and Citizenship

**Discipline-based Learning**
Knowledge, skills and behaviours in
The Arts; English and Languages Other Than English; The Humanities; Mathematics; Science

**Interdisciplinary Learning**
Knowledge, skills and behaviours in
Communication; Design, Creativity and Technology; Information and Communications Technology; Thinking
VELS - Victorian Essential Learning Standards

• The focus on inquiry-based learning encourages us to allow children, in the first three years of schooling, time to explore.

• In subsequent years we make time for children to form understandings through inquiring.

• These explorations cross the perimeters of formal ‘disciplines’ and ‘subjects’, and operate in the integrated manner of the real world.
Performing Arts area..

- students write scripts
- perform using puppets, costumes and musical instruments
Design and Create Imaginative worlds of...

- dinosaurs
- insects
- water
- ice
- sand
- moonsand
- play dough
- clay
- trains
- jungles
- farms
- space
- cities, communities
Maths area..

- opportunities to further investigate concepts
- practicing skills
- measuring for a purpose


Maths & VELS

- VELS ‘Stages of Learning P – 4’ focus is on the Development of Foundation Skills.
- Explicit numeracy knowledge, skills and behaviours are taught in focused teaching sessions which follow ‘Exploring Time’.
- Materials for student investigations are provided to encourage further student investigation of focus concepts / understandings.
- Use of Not Negotiable Exploring Time Tasks allows for explicit concepts to be explored, applied and elaborated on by students and readily assessed by teachers.
Visual Arts area..

- collage
- printing
- papier maché
- paper making
- painting
- sewing
- drawing
- felt making
- modelling
Construction area..

- joining methods
- designing
- problem solving
Science area..

- observe
- make predictions
- experiment
- investigate further
e-learning..

• interactive whiteboard
• pods of computers
• digital cameras
• digital story making
• claymation
Reading area..

• comfy cushions to sit on and read a book
• writing and sharing students’ handmade books
• listening posts to hear stories
Writing area..

Writing for a purpose

- paper - various sizes, textures & shapes
- drawing materials, pens
- envelopes and stamps
- letter box

Writing on the sharing board

peer modelling
Literacy & VELS

• Exploring Time engages students socially, emotionally and cognitively.
• It provides purposeful, relevant daily application of speaking, listening, reading and writing skills.
• Explicit literacy skills are also taught, at point of need, in guided reading and writer’s workshop sessions which follow ‘Exploring Time’.
• Interdisciplinary learning is heavily supported: Communication, Thinking, Design, Creativity and Technology and ICT are implicit in the program, further supporting and promoting student literacy.
Cooking..

- reading recipes
- measuring
- learning new skills
- experiencing new taste sensations
- harvesting from the ‘veggie patch’
Outside Exploring Time..

One dedicated session per week:

- gross motor experiences
- obstacle courses
- cubby making
- water play
- breakfast
- performances
- sensory experiences
- experiments
- woodwork
New Learnscapes & Experiences

Our recently completed Discovery Garden includes:

- Hand pump
- Creek
- Deck
- Grassy Knoll
- Dry Creek Bed (Rill)
- Sand
- Water Tank

All of which are utilised during Outside Exploring Time.
Ongoing classroom pet care…

• 3 green tree frogs

• 2 guinea pigs
What our day typically looks like..

9.00 - 10.40 Exploring Time (‘Show and Tell’ included) with Sharing Time at 10:20

RECESS

11.10 - 12.00 Writing

12.00 - 12.50 Reading

LUNCH

1.50 - 2.40 Maths

2.40 - 3.30 Specialists

N.B. Inquiry unit is expanded upon in Exploring Time
On Mondays ..

Students create individual written plans

Planning folder Level 2
Planning:

Planning Folder Level 1

Term 1 plan

Term 2 plans
Friday Reflection..

Students complete an evaluation / reflection each week. They revisit their plans, think about why their plans were / weren’t achieved and record reasons.

I am O with what I achieved.
Statement of Intent for a two week period

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Other Relevant Information
Staff/School
Community/Culture
School Programs / Key Events
# Statement of Intent

**Level 1/2 HBJ**  
**Term: 2**  
**Weeks: 7 & 8**  
**Dates: 19.5 - 30.5**

## Developmental Domain Objectives
**VELS Domain:** Physical, Personal and Social Learning, Creative & Critical Thinking Learning

### Emotional (Pre-vocational)
- Refine Level 2 planning - encourage students to monitor different learning experiences on the new planning sheet.  
  *Jammed on Tuesdays.  
  *Jammed on book.

### Social (Caring/Participating/Citizenship)
- 5 star working with teams.  
- The Vermont chart for attentive listening - discuss.

### Language (Communication/Interpersonal)
- Calendar in Japan

### Cognitive (Thinking, The Arts, Mathematics, Science Information and Communication Technology, History, Society & Culture)
- Thinking hats
- Share & record suggestions
- When presented with a simple problem students worked together to suggest a range of solutions

### Physical (Health/PE)
- Lacrosse - running, co-ordinate arms, legs
- Various throwing skills - frisbee, football skills - kicking, marking, handheld

## Learning Objectives

### English
**Writing**
- Alphabet - Ff, Br
- Sharing sheets
- Exploring Time writing
- Writers' notebook: see, feel, wonder & think - Heather
- Model: Writers' notebook process
- Spelling: vowel sounds, 100 most used words
- Sight words with L1
- Write own version of Dark, dark.

**Reading**
- Alphabet - Ff, Br
- Hidden forest - Jeanie Baker
- Guided Reading - Wm/PM/Mini-merc
- Poetry - modelled on Dark, dark.
- Read a variety of poems, prose, has a beat, creates a picture or feeling - created their own based on the Dark, dark.
- Read Big Book - 'Earth In Danger'

**Library**
- Eric Carle
  - 'The Hungry Caterpillar'
  - 'Today is Monday'
- Days of the week
  - Look at illustrations, overlapping tissue paper, colours of nature, various greens and browns
- Reading Challenge: checklist
  - Book browses and borrow
  - Speaking & Listening
- PP - 0.5 - 1.75
- Read 'tell daily'
- Sharing Time: answering questions, explaining processes

### Mathematics
**Number**
- Dice games - count on, count back
- 20 game

### Science
**Time**
- What do we know about calendars? - L2 workbook
- What are calendars used for? - Brainstorm ideas/name
- What do calendars look like?
- Aspects that are common in all calendars - samples to look at
- Draw a calendar
- Emily: Today is... Tomorrow will be...
- Days of the week
- Looking at the different range of calendars, some/different Assessment
- L1 orally order days of the week P.P.1.0
- L2 Maths tracks - calendar

### Working Mathematically
- Choose a month & frame questions for others to answer

## Interests/Focus Points

### Children's Interests
**Cooking**
- Salty crackers
- Truffles balls - open night
- Eggs on toast-breaky
- Hot chocolate-breaky
- Waffles
- Pancakes
- Time-calendars to explore clocks, timers

### Other Interests
- Learning Experience
  - ELC about days of the week
  - Alphabet revise table
  - Moon and sun needs more structure now after initial play - use Pebbles, glass stones
  - Firefighters - drama roleplay, fireman firefighters
  - Tune in experiences for ESL
  - Photos from visit
  - Letterboxes: number
  - Eric Carle style paper painting, dying, collage
  - 8 pointed star
  - Paper making
  - Choir
- Recite obstacle course process
- Rebound net, bowling more gross motor and physical activity in the cooler months

## Related Learning Experiences

### Alphabet
- Learning tasks
  - Ff - Cued artic & signing
  - Br - Cued artic & signing

### Processes to be refined and published
- Coming inside from line lunch tables
- Good listening chart - Vermont Special

## Modifications
- To help students realise resources can diminish completely if not managed properly
- Use Global Classroom CD game on recycling and reforestation/plantations
- Our Problem: We have run out of construction cardboard
- What can we do?
- Students write/draw ideas, 6 thinking hats
- Share & record suggestions

### Firefighter visits:
- Emily letter boxes at the meeting place
- Photos of firefighters, sequence crowd low, 000
- Alarms, escape routes, STOP, DROP, ROLL
- Read Big 6: Community Helpers

### Other Relevant Information

#### Staff/School
- 21 visitors from Thornbury cluster oral language project 20/5
- Benalla - 22/5
- Upper Yarra cluster 23/5
- Visitore Parkhill PS 21/5

#### Community/Culture
- Firefighters - Croppy
- Visit 22/5, 29/5
- 11:15am

#### School Programs/Key Events
- Open night - 20/5 set up with "Exploring Time"
- Minkids 30/5
Data to inform our practice
Data and multiple sources of feedback

• Data should inform our learning strategies and content, not label learners. It leads us to understand what children understand and how we can scaffold further learning.

• It is not clear to us that the ‘assessment of reading’ tool is in fact an assessment of literacy.
Since the 1950’s we have seen an evolution from Recitation Literacy to a literacy which involves inference, ideas, questions and the comprehension of the ideas conveyed by words.

Barking at words is not literacy!
Assessment of Reading

Between 2005 and 2007, our least able readers in Prep, when Exploring Time started, have improved their reading markedly.
$ invested improving literacy standards in all government schools:

• Our analysis of this data over a 7-year period to 2002, showed that there has been little average improvement in the reading proficiency of all students at Years 3, 5 and 7.

**RESULT:** little average improvement at Years 3, 5 and 7.

• a small improvement for the lowest performing students due to Reading Recovery

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In our learning program, we want children to develop the following ‘habits of mind’:

After Art Costa
Learning to Persist

Finding tasks and problems that hold their interest and coming back after ‘a mistake’ to try again.
Learning to put off ‘getting the reward’

Young children find this delay of gratification difficult, but it’s a necessary part of managing impulsive behaviour and they are helped by an adult reminding them that the goal is in sight and will be achieved.
Thinking Flexibly

Young children have the advantage of not being locked into structured ways of thinking, and they tend to take readily to considering and trying unusual solutions.
Setting their own Questions and Problems

Rather than the adults posing all the challenges. Gathering data through all of the senses. Taking responsibilities and ‘reasonable risks’. Taking care of each other.
Playing with Humour and Imagination

Understanding humour seems strongly connected to language acquisition and develops at different times for different children. As is becoming aware of perceptions, testing them and building theories about how things work.
What did you do at school today?

“I believe that a great school is one where parents rarely need to ask their children what they did at school today. Their children’s excitement about learning means they won’t be able to stop talking about what they did, what they learnt, what they made, and who they helped, or helped them. I think this is the evidence of engaged learners.”

Alan Baker – Principal, Croydon West Primary School