# Aligning curriculum, pedagogies and assessment - An example of practice in Prep/Year 1

# Play-based learning - English

# ‘Developing oral language through play’

## Our Students - Working together to ensure that every day, in every classroom, every student is learning and achieving

## This is an example of how one teacher incorporated play-based learning to support young learners’ oral language development in a Prep/Year 1 classroom.

## In response to Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) data related to the Communication skills and General knowledge domain, and anecdotal evidence of the young learners’ oral language development across Prep and Year 1, the teacher provided a space within the classroom to allow engagement in oral language through play. This oral language through play was based on the seven functions of oral language opportunities as outlined in Learning How to Mean: explorations in the development of language (Halliday 1975). Halliday explains that young learners are motivated to acquire language because it serves certain purposes or functions for them.

## The instrumental, regulatory, interactional and personal functions help to satisfy physical, emotional and social needs. The heuristic, imaginative and representational functions help the young learner to come to terms with his or her environment.

## The space for this oral language play took up one area of the room and was changed in response current event, a project or inquiry. Props and costumes were carefully chosen to prompt and scaffold specific oral language outcomes (e.g. safety goggles, lab coats, digital microscope, magnifying glasses, tweezers, live silkworms, clipboards, camera, desktop computer showing video clips of silk worm development, small cardboard boxes – to support play in the Silkworm laboratory).

## Throughout the year the play space included the Obstacle course engineer’s workshop (focusing on regulatory language - ‘I can use language to tell others what to do’), the Commemorative museum (focusing on representational language - ‘I can use language to convey facts and information’), the Silkworm laboratory (focusing on heuristic language - ‘I can use language to gain knowledge about the environment’) and the Fairy tale castle (focusing on imaginative language - ‘I can use language to create an imaginary environment’). The teacher scaffolded this oral language learning through the use of pre and post play discussions and modelling, and monitored learning through the use of anecdotal notes, audio recordings and observations.

## Curriculum intent - What do my students need to learn?

## Australian Curriculum – English

### The English curriculum is built around the three interrelated strands of language, literature and literacy. Teaching and learning programs should balance and integrate all three strands. Together, the three strands focus on developing students’ knowledge, understanding and skills in listening, reading, viewing, speaking, writing and creating. Students apply knowledge they have developed to create with clarity, authority and novelty a range of spoken, written and multimodal texts that entertain, inform and persuade audiences.

### Foundation (Prep) Year Content Descriptions (as applicable to this play-based learning)

### Literacy

### Listen to and respond orally to texts and to the communication of others in informal and structured classroom situations (ACELY1646)

### Use interaction skills including listening while others speak, using appropriate voice levels, articulation and body language, gestures and eye contact (ACELY 1784)

### Deliver short oral presentations to peers (ACELY 1647)

### Foundation (Prep) Year Achievement Standard (as applicable to this play-based learning)

Productive modes (speaking, writing and creating)

By the end of the Foundation year, students use appropriate interaction skills to listen and respond to others in a familiar environment. In informal group and whole class settings, students communicate clearly.

**Year 1 Content Descriptions (as applicable to this play-based learning)**

Literacy

* Engage in conversations and discussions, using active listening behaviours, showing interest, and contributing ideas, information and questions (ACELY 1656)
* Use interaction skills including turn-taking, recognising the contributions of others, speaking clearly and using appropriate volume and pace (ACELY 1788)
* Make short presentations using some introduced text structures and language, for example opening statements (ACELY 1657)

**Year 1 Achievement Standard (as applicable to this play-based learning)**

## Productive modes (speaking, writing and creating)

## By the end of Year 1, students listen to others when taking part in conversations, using appropriate language features and interaction skills. They interact in pair, group and class discussions, taking turns when responding.

## Sequencing teaching and learning - How do I teach it?

## Achieving range and balance

The teacher’s role in guiding and facilitating learning experiences is critical and needs careful consideration. It involves deliberate, purposeful and thoughtful decision making and actions on the part of the teacher to promote young learners’ innate drive for independent learning. Learning in the early years needs to have range and balance. Periods of classroom activity should be spent with a balanced approach of planned and spontaneous, as well as adult-guided and child-initiated learning experiences to provide young learners with the necessary pedagogical support they require. It is the teacher’s responsibility to teach young learners about their roles in different pedagogies in order to co-construct learning and scaffold their involvement in a range and balanced approach of planned and spontaneous, adult-guided and child-initiated learning experiences.

## Approach

### Play-based learning

## Practices\*

### Socio-dramatic play

In response to Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) data related to the Communication skills and general knowledge domain, and anecdotal evidence of the young learners’ oral language development across Prep and Year 1, the teacher made the decision to support oral language development through the use of socio-dramatic play. Sociodramatic play became a regular part of indoor learning time and was also used in the outdoors.

\*These are examples of a repertoire of practices implemented, and not intended as a finite list.

## Strategies\*

### Use of props

### Props were carefully selected to be both open-ended (including realistic, symbolic and unstructured props), and supportive of the specific oral language intention that underpinned the play. In the Fairy tale castle, for example, where imaginative language was the focus, props included commercially produced crowns, bolts of fabric, blocks, collage and box construction materials. Realistic props were useful as tools to introduce children to the play, but symbolic and unstructured props added to the richness of the play.

### Use of costumes

As with the use of props, the costumes were chosen carefully as an invitation to play. These costumes supported the young learners in taking on roles within the play. Many members of the class chose to bring props and costumes from home.

**Pre and post play discussions**

Pre play discussions encouraged the young learners to practise using learning area specific language to discuss the play scenario, and to make the roles, props, and actions clear to all players. During this time, the teacher prompted the use of new vocabulary and encouraged the young learners to use the curriculum specific elements that were available in the play area. Post play discussions allowed time for feedback and future play planning.

**Documentation of play**

The play was documented through the use of anecdotal notes, voice recordings and observational checklists related to specific oral language goals and curriculum specific content descriptions.

\*These are examples of the strategies implemented, and not intended as a finite list.

## Characteristics of age-appropriate pedagogies evident in this example of practice

The possibilities for innovative teachers to create learning experiences informed by their understanding of pedagogies are almost endless. What is needed, however, is a set of characteristics to guide the selection and development of these learning experiences. These characteristics do not relate to every learner, learning context or desired outcome, nor do they all need to be present within any given learning experience. Instead, they represent a set of desirable qualities that educators can consider when attempting to work with children and colleagues to be responsive to the individual child, context and purpose of learning.

Active:Requiring physical and embodied engagement across all areas of learning. Whether this is indoors or outdoors, activity is essential in order to activate children’s full potential. Their focus, concentration, motivation and self-regulation are enhanced through moving, doing and interacting within a range of learning environments.

Collaborative:Being social and co-constructed. Children and educators work together to identify ways of learning and understanding through sustained shared thinking and action.

Creative: Inviting children to consider “What if?” They encourage investigation, inquiry and artistry to explore new possibilities and ways of thinking.

Language rich and dialogic:Ensuring that learning occurs in environments where rich language is modelled and employed by both children and educators. Meaningful dialogues between children, as well as between children and educators, are created to support thinking, learning, engagement and imagination.

Narrative:Acknowledging the important role that personal, written, oral and digital stories play in all our lives. They support both the production and comprehension of narratives through active processes, especially play.

**Playful:** Encouraging children to make connections through imagination and creativity to explore alternate worlds and ways of thinking. These worlds, not bounded by reality, offer the freedom children need to innovate and enact new possibilities.

## The young learners’ focus, concentration and motivation were enhanced through their active, physical engagement with the play space. Their oral language learning was social and co-constructed as they engaged with their peers in the oral language play. The young learners were invited to investigate, inquire and create through their engagement with props and costumes. Oral language was modelled and employed by both young learners and adults in the play space, allowing for meaningful dialogue, imaginative curriculum learning and purposeful play. The production and comprehension of oral narratives were supported through the play, in a space where the young learners felt free to take risks. The young learners were able to make connections through imagination and creativity, exploring alternate worlds, ways of thinking and curriculum knowledge. They were able to innovate and enact new possibilities in a playful way.

Although only six of the characteristics of age-appropriate pedagogies have been highlighted here, there were opportunities to embed each of the eleven characteristics.

## Assessment - What do my students already know? How well do they know it?

Assessment for learning: anecdotal notes, audio recordings and observational checklists

Assessment as learning: pre and post play discussions, peer feedback, teacher feedback

Assessment of learning: there was no summative assessment task attached to this play-based learning.

## Making judgments - How will I know how well my students have demonstrated the Achievement Standard?

Although there was no summative assessment task attached to this inquiry learning, by monitoring learning through the use of assessment for and as learning, and providing feedback to the young learners, decisions could be made by the teacher relating to what:

* the young learners knew and understood
* strengths, misconceptions and misunderstandings were evident
* were the next steps for learning.

## Feedback - What do my students already know? What do my students need to learn?

## The teacher used anecdotal notes, audio recordings and observations to inform feedback.

## The feedback provided the young learners with progress on their learning to date (Keaton, I noticed that you spoke to Abi using a clear voice when you were explaining why some of the silkworm eggs haven’t hatched), and gave specific information about what to do next (Remember to make eye contact when you are speaking to someone).

## Ongoing, informal verbal feedback was given throughout the oral language play, as appropriate to this play-based learning.

## Questions for reflection

### Questions for teacher-based reflection

* How is an array of effective pedagogies ensured?
* How are holistic development and academic goals balanced?
* How is a balance between child-initiated and adult-initiated learning experiences fostered?
* How are positive personal relationships with children nurtured?
* How is playfulness in learning and teaching interactions embedded?
* How are high-quality, verbal interactions encouraged?
* How are interactions to scaffold cognitive challenge and develop higher order thinking incorporated?
* How are real-life, imaginary, spontaneous and planned experiences integrated?

### Questions for teacher-based reflection

* How is the provision of training, resources and support considered?
* How are the professional demands on teachers, and the lead-in time required to establish new approaches, recognised and supported?