

Bear Facts

Dear Parents,

In this issue of Bear Facts, I have chosen to take a closer look at the 'project' style of learning. I wish to share with you the reasons behind this style of learning and why it has been universally greeted in educational circles as a breakthrough in teaching preschool children.

Projects or Investigations

When asked *why projects?* I feel that it is important to firstly explain what we mean by a project –“

“We use the term project work to refer to in depth studies, of particular topics, undertaken by groups of young children and teachers. Project work is designed to help young children make a deeper and fuller sense/understanding of events and phenomena in their own environment and experiences that are worthy of their attention. Projects provide the part of the curriculum in which children are encouraged to make their own decisions and choices – usually in co-operation with their peers and in consultation with their teachers – about the work to be undertaken. We assume that such work increases children’s confidence in their own intellectual powers and strengthens their dispositions to continue learning”.

- Katz & Chard, *Engaging Children’s Minds*. 1989.

These projects or in-depth investigations are completed over a longer duration of time and allow for the child’s development and extension of their own understanding of the topic or focus of interest.

How does a project start?

A project or in-depth investigation can start in many ways and can be instigated by the children or the teachers. Some of the ways it can occur are:

- # It can emerge from a child’s idea or interest and this may occur and become evident at morning meeting time or during the course of the day.
- # It can emerge from a provocation by one of the teachers.
- # It can be introduced by the teachers revisiting a previous day’s documentation which rekindles the children’s interest in e.g. puddles, worm, ants.
- # It can emerge from a problem posed by one or more of the children e.g. how to attract the birds back to the playground?
- # It can emerge from the revisiting of another project that has already been studied.
- # It can emerge from an experience initiated by the teachers e.g. giving the children a box with compartments in it to take home and fill with things that depict what they experienced through the holidays.

Project Format

Once the teachers have identified a group of children that show an interesting a particular topic, they allow the children and support them in their learning activities that provoke the children further in their exploration. They assist them to focus and be exposed to new ideas, ensuring at all times that they, the teacher, are being partners in learning alongside the child and never, never giving the answer. E.g. the Keas have been fascinated in dinosaurs and one of the teachers heard a child talking about them as if she could really see them – so instead of telling her that actually dinosaurs lived along time ago and are now extinct, the teacher would perhaps say “that’s really interesting tell me what they look like?” or perhaps “you are so lucky I cant see them, can you tell me why I cant?” The children’s ideas are documented through their drawings, their constructions, our photographs and transcripts. Through reflection, collaboration, discussion and revisiting the children are supported into deeper experiences and understandings of their particular focus of interest. Throughout the project the children’s solutions, answers and responses to activities are shared among the group and are noted by the teachers. The children’s current ideas are compared and contrasted to their initial ideas and also those of the teachers. Each day's activities build onto the previous days events and will assist the children consolidate their thoughts and theories. Finally at the completion of a project, a culminating event takes place. This is a type of celebration: a symbolic way of acknowledging what has been accomplished and learned by the group

during the course of the project. Often the culmination can be a springboard for new project studies and ideas and the teachers evaluate with the children what they have discovered, extended and learnt.

Benefits of Project Studies.

We have observed many changes in the children since the move towards project and in depth studies – some of these have been:-

- # Children recognizing that others can have different points of view and ideas.
- # Children are becoming more confident in their own ideas.
- # Children are willing to take risks in their search for a clearer/deeper understanding.
- # Children are starting to listen in more depth.
- # Children’s self esteem is increasing as they realize their work, thoughts and theories are valued.
- # Children are feeling confident to question things as to why they are the way they appear.
- # Children are developing and extending their research skills as well as establishing a good sense of reasoning.
- # Children are becoming active protagonists in their learning

Where to find evidence of these at your Bear Park?

Look on the walls in the classrooms, in the hallways and actually right throughout the Centre, as you will find evidence of the learning processes and experiences that your child has been part of. Do ask your teachers for clarification on this documentation ask questions and give suggestions to assist with the development of this interest further.

Our teachers have become very apt with digital cameras and are able to capture the magical moments of intrigue and learning well. Their written transcripts validate the learning story portrayed in the photos and put these into context. Take the time to look; to ask your child to tell you about the photos of the learning experiences; to see where their ideas/ theories have led them; talk to their teachers and become an active participant of their learning.