

# Principal Sabbatical Report

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## Acknowledgements

*I wish to acknowledge the board, staff and school community of Marist School, Mt Albert for supporting my application and time on sabbatical. My thanks to the educators who willingly took the time to share their practice and experiences with me.*

## Purpose

*To investigate pedagogical shifts to a play-based approach in early primary years that reflect Te Whāriki the early childhood curriculum.*

*To use the opportunity for professional reading and reflection to strengthen transition from early childhood education and develop early years learning programmes at Marist School more closely aligned with Te Whāriki.*

## Background

In the 12 months between applying for sabbatical in 2017 and carrying out this investigation, 2018, there has emerged a growing number of schools and resources investigating play-based learning. Therefore rather than re-state what has been well-written and recorded elsewhere this report gives information which I hope anyone reading finds helpful for their own exploration into learning through play.

## Definition of play

In the article Playification of the Curriculum the author Keryn Davis shares the following definition of play:

*'The definition of play that follows is a good example of an attempt to capture this 'slippery thing' and the many ways play is enacted:*

*Play is freely chosen, personally directed, intrinsically motivated behavior that actively engages the child...play can be fun or serious. Through play children explore social, material and imaginary worlds and their relationships with them, elaborating all the while a flexible range of responses to the challenges they encounter. By*

*playing, the children learn and develop as individuals, and as members of the community.'* (National Playing Fields Association 2000 p.6.)  
(Playification of the Curriculum, Keryn Davis)

### **What is learning through play?**

*Learning through play is a pedagogical approach where play is the valued mode of learning – where children can explore, experiment, discover, and solve problems in imaginative playful ways. Learning through play is also called play based learning.'*  
(<https://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/Curriculum-resources/NZC-Online-blog/Learning-through-play-What-s-it-all-about>)

### **Schools exploring learning through play**

Schools I engaged with who are exploring a pedagogical shift to learning through play were mostly at the 'play' stage. There were many reasons given for adapting their pedagogy including (in no particular order):

- Children's emotional wellbeing
- Children's social wellbeing
- Growth of the whole child
- Growing diversity in children coming to school
- Changing needs of children coming to school
- Transition from early childhood to school
- Development of skills, dispositions and attributes for learning within authentic / real-life contexts
- Opportunities to practise skills and learning in a range of contexts and situations
- Authentically promoting student agency
- Personalised learning – collaborating with the children in the learning
- Focus on oracy / language development
- Communication skills
- Valuing curiosity and creativity
- Finding the 'joy' in learning (and teaching)
- Fine and gross motor skills development
- Broadening/enriching the curriculum post National Standards

Other notes of interest through the schools learning through play journey were:

- Importance of time for teachers to research, inquire, and 'play' were essential
- Trust and support of Senior Leadership critical
- Also important for Senior Leadership to have knowledge and understanding of learning through play
- All schools noted a more active engagement and communication with the Early Childhood centres the children transition from

- Increased knowledge and understanding of the links between the New Zealand Curriculum and Te Whāriki
- Some schools were actively looking to employ ECE trained teachers in the early years of school
- Understanding about how they would share / show learning and progress over time was a concern for some
- In several schools teachers were beginning to explore ways the pedagogy could be extended as children moved through the years

### **Learning through Play – Around the World**

The following are some international links to learning through play from around the world.

#### **Walker Learning - Australia**

*'Walker Learning is a holistic approach to teaching to the whole of a child and committed to developing children who can think for themselves and for others, can create and imagine, who are strong in their literacy and numeracy, and who can navigate the challenges of the world with intrinsic motivation and a strength of character made of a strong sense of self and resilience.'*

*'Walker Learning is a pedagogy NOT a program, NOT a tool - it is a teaching and learning approach that personalises learning (Babies to Year 8) and is developmentally and culturally appropriate.'*

(<https://www.earlylife.com.au/walker-learning>)

There are a number of schools in New Zealand implementing Walker Learning including Lytton School, Fielding.

#### **School 21 – United Kingdom**

School 21 is a school in Stratford, East London for students 4 to 18 years. The school has a strong emphasis on oracy. Voice21 was founded by the School 21 Foundation and a wealth of valuable resources can be found on their website. They also host oracy events across England.

<https://www.school21.org.uk/>

<https://www.voice21.org/>

#### **Longworth Education – New Zealand**

Longworth Education provides professional learning and support for schools and parents in the implementation of learning through play in the primary classroom.

<https://www.longwortheeducation.co.nz/>

## **Aistear Curriculum – Ireland**

*'The Aistear Curriculum was developed in 2009 by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).*

*More recently, many primary school teachers have chosen to use elements of the Aistear Curriculum to support the Infant Curriculum (typically for children aged 4-7 years) in primary schools. The biggest difference between the Aistear Curriculum and the Junior/Senior Infant Curriculum is the emphasis on play (NCCA, 2015). The Aistear Curriculum highlights the importance of play for young children's early learning and development, and offers many suggestions for different types of play, as well as advice on how to integrate play into classroom learning.'* (Evaluating the Benefits of the Aistear Curriculum on the Social Interactions of Junior Infant Children, Louise Murphy)

[https://esource.dbs.ie/bitstream/handle/10788/3141/hdip\\_murphy\\_l\\_2016.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://esource.dbs.ie/bitstream/handle/10788/3141/hdip_murphy_l_2016.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)

## **Helpful readings and resources**

### **Learning through play - What's it all about?**

<https://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/Curriculum-resources/NZC-Online-blog/Learning-through-play-What-s-it-all-about>

This is a helpful online resource that provides links to school examples, research and readings including exploring the connection between Te Whāriki and The New Zealand Curriculum:

<https://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/Curriculum-resources/NZC-Online-blog/NZC-and-Te-Whariki-Part-1>

<https://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/Curriculum-resources/NZC-Online-blog/NZC-and-Te-Whariki-Part-2>

### **SET Special Issue Learning through Play and Games No 3, 2018 NZCER Press**

This special issue of SET provides articles from a range of perspectives. It aims to *'contribute a research-informed perspective on pedagogies associated with play and/or games by sharing findings and reflections from research projects and practitioner inquiries across a range of settings and focuses.'* (Editorial SET 3, 2018)

## **References**

Davis, Keryn. Playification of the curriculum Learnings from collaborative classroom research Set: Research Information for Teachers, No 3, 2018 NZCER Press

## **Internet References**

Murphy, Louise. Evaluating the Benefits of the Aistear Curriculum on the Social Interactions of Junior Infant Children  
[https://esource.dbs.ie/bitstream/handle/10788/3141/hdip\\_murphy\\_l\\_2016.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://esource.dbs.ie/bitstream/handle/10788/3141/hdip_murphy_l_2016.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)

The New Zealand Curriculum Online <https://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/Curriculum-resources/NZC-Online-blog/Learning-through-play-What-s-it-all-about>

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The New Zealand Curriculum Online <https://nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz/Curriculum-resources/NZC-Online-blog/Learning-through-play-What-s-it-all-about>

Walker Learning <https://www.earlylife.com.au/walker-learning>