**Discussion**

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<tr>
<th>Kathy Walker</th>
<th>Consultant Kathy Walker gave parents an insight into the learning and teaching with Educational Research Projects in Year 3-6 and the transition from Year 2 to 3.</th>
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Most western schools group teaching and learning into three distinct groups, the first two are universally known as literacy, numeracy but the third comes under many different names depending on the schools themselves. It could be problem based, enquiry, integrated or project based learning to name just a few. At Beaumaris Primary School we use the term ERP – Educational Research Projects.

ERPs start in Year 3 and continue until the end of primary school and are the way we approach teaching for a range of subjects dictated by the Australian National Curriculum under AusVELS which covers formal subject requirements such as Economics, History and Geography.

Our teaching staff assesses the AusVELS requirements and “contextualise the outcomes” for our school, based on our students, our community and our student’s previous experiences; what they may already know, what they don’t know and what they need to know. This same assessment happens all over Australia and means that the way a particular topic is taught to a group of students in a rural area of the Northern Territory may be very different to the way we teach it in metropolitan Melbourne because the experiences of the students varies so much.

At the start of each term our teaching staff look at the learning intentions and outcomes listed for each term’s topic, these are related uniquely to each cohort of children and then activities are planned, teaching and instruction sessions confirmed and incursion/excursions booked for the whole term. At this stage they also plan assessment formats – small tests across the term, rubrix etc.; students have to show they how they have worked towards, how they understand and that they have met measurements against particular goals and outcomes.

Time spent on ERPs each week: two 50 minute sessions and a 100 minute session.

The key to ERPs is that they are student led, the children take ownership of their project, and they self-initiate and bring something of their own thinking to the topic. Rather than a whole class of children reproducing the same poster under the direction of the teacher – for example about the Gold Rush; each student chooses selects something that really interests them e.g. soccer or surfing or ballet and they apply their interest to the subject matter chosen. This is how we “hook” the student into this particular learning process by bringing them to the table through their own special area of interest.

Self-initiating is not easy for all students and these are the children that need ERPs the most; they must not get used to just being fed information by the teacher; successful learning is all about learning HOW to learn, how to self-initiate, how to fail, how to be disappointed, how to pick up and start again. It is also about being able to present yourself at the end of term Expo, learning to self-reflect, learning the limitations of how to learn. What it is NOT about is how perfect the end result looks like when the Expo takes place. Parents – please do not save and rescue your children from everything – but let them learn how to learn. Ask your children “how did you go?”, “did you try hard?”, “did you stick to your timelines?”

Society puts a lot of pressure on everyone, including children, for perfection, something that looks good at the end of the project to reflect that the process went well – this is the automatic assumption, but deeply flawed. This pressure placed on children causes anxiety, a fear of failure and fear to have a go.

At the end of primary school we want children to be literate, numerate and have an understanding of the AusVELS subjects, but most importantly have the ability to learn. We draw your attention to the saying “to be schooled does not mean to be educated”.

ERPs are not introduced in year 2. Until students enter into year 3 they need to learn through constructing,
investigating, returning to “true” play. The play-based learning that we use in Prep to year 2, extends thought processes laterally and broadly, it helps children learn to think in different ways. Investigations make a difference to learning when they are scaffolded, tuned in and reflected by the teacher. It is a holistic approach – not unorganised play. Research shows that when you have allowed children to have as much time for high order thinking within investigations they are more able to self-initiate, to create and to self-extend. This is the learning background of the formality that lies ahead of them from the start of Year 3.

Questions from the audience

1. **Does it matter that children always choose the same interest/leaping off point?**
   As long as children are engaged it does not matter if they repeat the same interest across different topics, and as long as outcomes are met. A couple of terms each year with the same interest are OK, but obviously not for every subject for every term from years 3-6. Teachers in different year levels will not be aware of all the interests of each child that have been used in previous years, so if you are concerned that your student is repeating too much then please talk to your current teacher about this issue. Teachers can then encourage students to look at their second interests. Directions and parameters have to be set, but we do want to honour their interests.

2. **How does an ERP project discussion start in the classroom?**
   The first interaction between teachers and students at the start of each term is to sit down as a group and discuss what everyone’s interests currently are. All these interests are combined, mind mapped, listed, brainstormed within the group etc.; then the subject matter for the term is introduced and together teachers and students see how the interests can be linked to the subject.

3. **Who sets the topics for each term?**
   AusVELS set the topics that need to be covered over each year, it is up to teaching staff at each school to decide in which term they will target which topic – as long as all the topics are covered within the time set by AusVELS.

4. **Any advice for parents of children going from Year 2 to Year 3 on how to prepare them for ERPs?**
   Parents don’t need to do anything; just let students keep investigating throughout Year 2 and in the Step Up sessions arranged at the end of the year teachers will discuss what lies ahead of them in Year 3 and how the ERP process works. Many students in Year 3 miss investigations – but please stress to them that now they are more grown up they need to do more grown up things.

5. **Any advice on how family members can be involved in ERPs?**
   - The “Statement of Intent” for each class is displayed every fortnight – this outlines the activities that are happening over the following two weeks in relation to the ERP. Read this and have open ended conversations with your child when they describe to you what is happening in these activities.
   - Don’t burden yourself that it is all about the end artefact, be aware of the process that teachers are taking your child through.
   - Be reassuring: ask your child what they learnt about during the day, ask them if they tried their best.
   - Help expand your child’s basic knowledge about their ERP topic – visit the library and look at related books, look for other resources you may have at home, visit the city, the State Library, explore your local community e.g. for an economics topic take them to the bank and show them how to deposit money.

6. **Parent input into displays – can you comment on the impact this has.**
   How do we help parents feel that there is not the need to help out and ‘rescue’ their child. It is not about the parent making it look good, but about the student doing the learning along the way – learning is a process; it is never about the beautiful end product. Failure is a result in itself, not everything in life can work perfectly.

7. **What is a key message to give to your child about ERPs?**
   You must own your own learning; try to do your personal best. Get the child to ask themselves how organised they were – what could they have done better?

8. **How can children learn to manage their self-esteem when they think that someone else’s ERPs looks ‘better’ than theirs?**
   Sadly “That’s life”, students may feel jealous that their finished project does not look as good as others, but they will be taught in class that this is not how their ERP is judged. Teachers give individual and group feedback on projects, also through the use of Rubrix. Students need to learn how to deal with this issue in their formative years, as an adult jealously can lead to many serious issues.

**Sarah Bracey Louise Neave**
Year 3-6 classroom programs for English and Mathematics, ways in which we track student achievement and how we differentiate learning for our students.
A copy of the Year 3/4 timetable and the Year 5/6 timetable was handed out to illustrate subject focus time throughout the week.
On the timetable: BTN = Behind the News: this is an ABC current affairs program aimed at Years 3-6, which addresses current key global issues. FMS = Fundamental Motor Skills: fine and gross motor skills. All elements are integrated and purposeful, so skills can be transferred into work on their own areas of interest.

### Questions from the audience

1. **What are the homework expectations for each year level?**
   
   Please refer to our homework policy on the school website; this policy is based on DEECD guidelines.
   
   In summary:
   - **Years 3/4:** Spelling words will come home each week on a Monday, to be practised at home during the week. Words are chosen based on the students spelling ability group. 15 mins light reading each evening. One homework task each week – issued Monday, due back Friday – approx. 40mins
   - **Years 5/6:** Spelling words come home each Monday and are to be applied to the Spelling matrix (words are chosen based on the students spelling ability group). 20 mins reading each evening. One homework task each week – issued Monday, due back Friday – approx. 45mins
   
   Your child can also practise Mathletics and Literacy Planet if you wish them to, but this is not prescribed.

2. **Do you welcome parent helpers in Years 3-6?**
   
   Yes – at the start of each term teachers will send home a request (via a letter or via Stop Press) asking for parents who have a particular expertise in the area that is being taught that term, to contact them and see if they are able to come into school and hold a clinic group.

### Terms used

- **Scaffolding/immersion.** This is an important part of every term. Whole class and clinic groups as well as individual discussions take place during the ERP sessions. It is during this phase children are exposed to the key concepts and learning intentions of the subject focus through excursions, incursions, resources and class activities.

- **Statement of Intent:** Is a key part of the planning process. It provides a formal set of learning intentions in all areas of development and learning, including literacy and numeracy that are the primary focus for the coming fortnight.

- **EXPO:** An opportunity for students to share with others, aspects of their learning, particularly their ERPs. The emphasis is on skills they are developing and their interests not a ‘show & tell’ of the final product.

- **Proposal form:** Is a planning tool used by students to plan, identify key areas and interests of the project and how it links to the learning intentions of the subject focus and literacy and numeracy.

- **Rubrix:** Assessment tool providing criteria for a piece of work.

- **Spelling Matrix:** A table of varied spelling activities students can choose from.