

Curriculum Focus

A brief history of:
Panaga School's Nursery
Leader for Learning
Miss Vicki Psiahos



I started my career as a nurse (and continued working for 11 years) in the Accident and Emergency department of a hospital in Adelaide, Australia. Then, as a mature-age student, I studied a Bachelor of Teaching at the University of South Australia, Adelaide, as I have always wanted to work with young children. I enjoy working with and respect children; it is amazing to witness how they learn.

After completing my degree, I taught for two years in South Australia in a Reception/P1 class. I then moved to Kuala Lumpur and taught at Garden International School and was employed part time as the school nurse and part time as a P3 teacher for the first 6 months, before moving on to the Early Years to become the Lower Primary Coordinator.

Later, I moved to Singapore and was the Senior Teacher at Eatonhouse Preschool for six months. I then worked as a class teacher in the Kindergarten at the Overseas Family School. Later, I taught Year One for a further year.

From Singapore, I moved to Beijing to take up a position as the Principal of Lido Kindergarten. I remained in this role for one and a half years until the school unfortunately closed down due to the SARS epidemic. I then worked at the Western Academy of Beijing—a fantastic experience—for 3 years as a class teacher and the Mathematics Coordinator.

I began teaching at Panaga School in P2 in January, 2006. In September, I was appointed the EAL teacher and Nursery teacher. Since then I have taught in the Early Years, including some time in P1. I was appointed as the Nursery Leader for Learning in January 2009.

I work with 14 Key Workers including teachers and learning support assistants. There are currently 85 children on the Nursery role and this figure is potentially increasing to over 100 in January. Last year we had 124 children enrolled in the Nursery.

Working in the Early Years is a very rewarding experience. When you think about how young children start to think about the world around them and how much they become 'themselves' at this age, it is amazing.



This issue:
Early Years

Panaga School's Early Years Curriculum - fostering curious, confident learners

The Early Years Curriculum at Panaga School encompasses both Nursery and Primary 1 age children. The curriculum is designed to continue to develop children's knowledge, skills and understanding that started at home.

In the Early Years, by using both the classroom and outdoor environments, children deepen their understanding and knowledge. They do this primarily through play but also by talking, observing, planning, questioning, experimenting, testing, repeating, reflecting and responding to adults and to each other.

The Early Years follows curriculum guidelines set out by the International Primary Curriculum. Its principles can be summarised as:

- The overriding purpose of Early Years education is to help children develop the skills and attitudes they will need both at this level and throughout a lifetime of learning.
- Children need an holistic educational experience that does not create artificial boundaries between different aspects of their development.
- Play is an essential part of children's learning and general development.

The activities Early Years children engage in follow any one or more of the IPC learning strands. These are:

1. Independence and interdependence
2. Communicating
3. Exploring
4. Healthy Living

Parents are the prime educators of their children, therefore, parents and teachers need to work together in the best interests of the child. At Panaga School we value the contributions Early Years parents make and we enjoy working closely with them. We value their support in school by helping with school activities like cooking and being guest readers in the library.

Our aim is for Early Years children to feel happy, secure, confident and curious; embracing new experiences with interest and creativity. Each child is different and all progress at varying rates. It is important to remember that they will learn when they are ready and feel comfortable and confident to do so.

- The Early Years Team

Our core business is play...

By Craig Heaton, Head of the International Stream

The re-organisation of the Panaga School Early Years (Nursery and Primary 1) in 2008 was widely welcomed by all parents. It provided places for 120 children in Nursery instead of 40, and removed the anxiety caused by a 'waiting list' system. The Early Years is now a very distinctive phase of Panaga School.



The re-organisation incorporated high expectations for 3-4 year olds at Panaga School, but expectations that would be achievable by following the IPC Early Years Curriculum. Once established, the challenge was to meet these expectations for all the children in the Early Years phase. Two years on, it is very clear from internal and external reviews (see extracts of the February 2010 School Review in this curriculum focus) that Panaga School Early Years has certainly met those expectations and in some cases exceeded them.

I thought I would take this opportunity to explain the importance of play in meeting these expectations within our Early Years phase. This is often a concept that is difficult to understand for parents. It is play that underpins all learning and development at this stage of a child's educational journey.

Most children play spontaneously, although some may need adult support, and it is through play that they develop intellectually, creatively, physically, socially and emotionally. The balance between adult led learning time and the opportunity for children to explore their own ideas, use their imagination and be creative is the essential ingredient to high quality learning within the early years. To provide these high quality experiences for children we aim for a balance of one-third adult-directed activities (focused tasks) and one-third child initiated activities. The other third of the time should be taken up by child-initiated activities that are then picked up on and supported by an adult – facilitating opportunities for 'sustained shared thinking'.

The predominant learning style for children of this age is kinaesthetic; the vehicle for this style of learning is play.



Kinaesthetic learning involves children practising and consolidating learning, playing with ideas, experimenting, taking risks, solving problems and making decisions. Children are developing themselves as individuals and preparing themselves for the world in which they live..

At Panaga School we take the 'business of play' very seriously and this has enabled us to achieve the high standards of which we are proud.



The Early Years Curriculum - in practice

The following is a showcase of what the Early Years children have already been learning this year.

NURSERY

What's being said about the Panaga School Early Years

"Children make a very good start to their learning in the early years."

"Engagement and concentration levels are very good for children of this age."

"All children...are progressing exceptionally well in their self-esteem, confidence, personal and social skills and communication."

"The teachers are committed to facilitating children's learning."



The Review of Shell Schools
February 2010



"Things in the Early Years have definitely improved since last year. Now there's more teachers and I am happy about the changes."

- Joanna Onugha, mother of Gioia, 3 years.



Darren Small, father of Daisy, 3 years.

"The Nursery's atmosphere and the feel of the place is really nice. From what I see all the children enjoy their time here. The interaction with the teachers and the assistants seems very good."



"I love the computer. I like learning about lions and colouring." - Megan

"I like the toys and playdough. I can climb up really high." - Ellis



Aini Abd Rahman
IPIL Learning Support Assistant

"Some of the children are independent and some others need more support which gives them more confidence in their work. The work they do is engaging and interesting to them."



"I like learning about all the letters and the words that begin with them." - Kate and Esme

"I like to cut things out accurately. I like playing with everybody." - Bryan

"I like making things. Sometimes I make cards, for example, 'Welcome Back' cards from holidays." - Anders



The focus of this activity is to create a "Mind Map." We start by asking the children, "What do we know about food?" The learning involved in this activity gives children an opportunity to communicate what they already know. To learn about different foods which are available locally and to find out where some foods come from. The children are able to share with their peers what foods their families consume on special occasions. Through this, we are able to learn about the similarities and differences in our community.

Sharing Books in Nursery is an everyday event. It gives the children practice in all their language skills. They listen and talk about what they liked and what might happen next. In the book "Handa's Surprise" the children are exposed to a different culture. Learning to be part of a group and taking turns. The children can take this opportunity to have some quiet time in their very active day. Learning the fundamental functions of a book is very important at this stage.



Learning to make patterns and designs using various fruits. This activity enable the children to develop an awareness of what makes a pattern. They also could practice their fine motor skills and were introduced to some local fruits. Given an opportunity to make decisions and choices.



What a fun time we had making fruit kebabs. The children were able to choose their fruits and some children decided to try a new food. This was good practice for hand-eye coordination skills and to follow instructions. Some children used various adjective to describe how the fruit felt in their fingers. But the best part was taking them home to show mum and dad how clever they are!

Here the children are setting up our own "Supersave" supermarket.

This is an exciting task for the children as they are all very familiar with going shopping. The learning involves children using verbal and non-verbal skills to act out their role.

It is also a wonderful opportunity for the children to use their imagination.

By Vicki Psiahos

...and PRIMARY ONE

The Early Years Curriculum - in practice, continued



Strand 1: Independence & Interdependence
Learning Target: To learn about -
1.7: respecting and interacting with others
1.9: their ability to learn new interests and skills
1.10: their own particular strengths
1.11: interpersonal skills



Strand 4: Healthy Living
Learning Target: To learn about -
4.4: expressing emotions and needs. 4.5: concentrating
4.6: coping with change
The Entry Point was about settling in to our new Primary One classes, making new friends and adapting to changes in routine.



Strand 2: Communicating
Learning Target: To learn about -
2.18: materials used in creative arts. 2.19: using the processes of art & craft.
Strand 3: Exploring
Learning Target: To learn about -
3.1: making decisions & choosing their own materials.
The children chose paints and materials to make their own face on



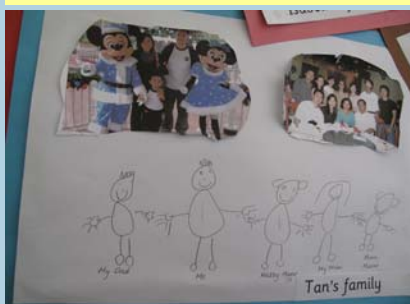
Strand 1: Independence & Interdependence
Learning Target: To learn about -
1.7: respecting and interacting with others
1.9: their ability to learn new interests and skills
1.11: interpersonal skills
Strand 3: Healthy Living
Learning Target: To learn about -
3.2: taking responsibility for their learning
3.4: taking part in symbolic and pretend play
The children have the opportunity to play imaginatively and cooperatively in the role play area.



Strand 2: Communicating
Learning Target: To learn about -
2.18: materials used in creative arts
2.19: using the processes of art and craft



Strand 3: Exploring
Learning Target: To learn about -
3.1: making decisions and choosing their own materials
The children painted a friend through and on a pane of glass.



Strand 1: Independence & Interdependence
Learning Target: To learn about -
1.6: their family background
1.8: their relationships with others
The children shared and discussed their family photos with the children and the teachers and



Strand 2: Communication
Learning Target: To learn about -
2.18: materials used in creative arts
2.19: using the processes of art and craft
The children painted themselves or a friend to make up our class family. **By Liza Davison**



Strand 1: Independence & Interdependence
Learning Target: To learn about -
1.7: respecting and interacting with others
1.8: their relationships with others
1.11: interpersonal skills

The children have the opportunity to choose activities independently, both inside and outside the classroom. To build the tower the girls were focused on their task and cooperated well together.