Discovery Discussion Paper 2016

By Deb Vietri

What is Discovery? Purposeful play that is strategically shaped by teachers to enable students to learn more about; themselves; how to live and work with others; and the world they live in. Discovery also encourages the development of; oral language; social and personal management skills; a variety of domain specific skill sets; and learning dispositions.

Discovery is a time when students make choices about what learning opportunities they want to engage in, who they do this with, and where they do it. Teachers provide opportunities by creating stations or areas that encourage children to play, create, discover and explore in different ways. They do this by providing a learning environment, materials and provocations that support student learning through play.

Teachers strategically shape Discovery through:

● Explicit teaching and modelling during the introductions

● Making thinking and learning visible, especially during share time and through learning conversations

● Thoughtful and purposeful design of stations/areas considering developmentally appropriate environment, materials and provocations

● Identifying and responding to students interests, needs and passions through watching, listening and engaging in learning conversations

● Supporting students to make connections to their own lives and learning across the curriculum

What learning happens through Discovery?

● Discovery is a time when students can explore ideas and concepts in developmentally appropriate ways. It is also a time when they can practise skills in a safe and authentic environment. Teachers can use Discovery to make strategic connections to other areas of the curriculum by thoughtful design of stations and provocations. (For example, some stations will be specifically designed to give students further opportunity to explore concepts and skills being explicitly focussed in through the Inquiry Investigation.)

● As well as drawing upon what is happening in other curriculum areas when planning Discovery, teachers can use what happens in Discovery to connect back to learning in other curriculum areas. (For example, money transactions that happen whilst students are playing shop can be used in a Maths session to give a real life context)

● Teachers make the learning in Discovery visible to the students (and parents) by using action verbs instead of ‘playing’. Eg. I was constructing, using my imagination, creating, testing, researching, inventing, making, investigating, exploring, dramatizing/role-playing, composing, wondering, discovering, problem-solving, co-operating, collaborating, etc.

1

What learning might have been happening during Discovery?

Learning about myself

Learning to do (skills)

Learning about the world (conceptual knowledge/understanding ) I can be persistent I can solve problems I can work cooperatively with others I can ask for help when I need it I can take responsible risks I can try things a different way

Creating Designing Testing Dramatising/role-playing

I discovered ... (examples) Cars travel faster going down a slope The moon is bright because the sun shines on it

Effective use of the Introduction

● Introductions at the beginning of the Discovery session usually last for 10 minutes.

● Introductions are strategic and planned.

● The focus of the introduction can include:

o Explicit teaching of a learning intention (oral language, social skills,

language of learning, personal management or subject specific) o Modelling of desired behaviours o Modelling of ways to engage with particular materials and stations (ie

what is possible here) o Introduction to new stations or provocations o Problem solving something that happened during Discovery last time o A mini-lesson related to a ‘subject area’ eg. Inquiry, RE, Maths o Learning conversations with focus children and/or reporters and

photographers

● Introductions should be relaxed and conversational. (Talking ‘with’ the students not talking ‘at’ them)

Effective use of the Share time

● Share time and introductions usually work as ‘book-ends’. Whatever the focus has been in the introduction is revisited during the share time and reinforced.

● Students should be doing most of the talking during share time. It is a great opportunity for students to practise speaking in front of an audience.

● Teachers ask questions or prompt students who are sharing to depth their sharing beyond who they played with and what they did. It is an opportunity to make the learning explicit and name it and to make the student’s thinking visible.

2

● Strategies such as turn and talk give all students the opportunity to share and speak and listen every session. It also acts as a rehearsal for what they might write if a writing session follows.

● All students should have the opportunity to speak during share time on regular basis

Role of adults during the session Teachers should be fully engaged with the students at all times during the session. Teachers and other adults can take on a variety of roles depending on the needs of the students. These include:

● Assisting with problem-solving

● Questioning, especially posing open-ended questions

● Redirecting undesired behaviours

● Co-playing to either model play or entice children into play scenarios

● Facilitating social interactions

● Helping students to make connections either to their own experiences or to other curriculum areas

● Observing students at play, and listening to their conversation, in order to identify specific needs and achievements of individual students (assessing)

● Stepping in and teaching a specific skill or concept when the opportunity presents itself (just-in-time-teaching)

Most importantly teachers need to be watching for those ‘teachable moments’ when an opportunity presents itself to teach or reinforce a skill or concept either to individuals or the whole group.

What makes a good station/area

● First and foremost you should be able to look at a station or area and envisage multiple ways in which the students could engage with the materials there.

● They should be open-ended (not a task, not outcomes based)

● They should provide the students with the opportunity to be creative or imaginative or collaborative, to take responsible risks or problem solve.

● Wherever possible materials should be natural products or materials (not plastic imitations or toys)

● Consider the whole environment and where stations are placed making use of both indoor and outdoor spaces

● Stations should look engaging and entice students to want to interact with them.

FAQs How long should a Discovery session last?

● At least one hour (including: 10 mins introduction and 10 minutes Share time.) Although as students get older and they take on more complex activities and have a longer concentration span they often need longer.

How often should we do Discovery?

● This varies from school to school but ideally 3-4 times per week.

3

Can I step in if the play is unruly or not productive?

● Absolutely! You need to have high expectations of the students and their behaviour during Discovery and make these very clear. Students who are not following these guidelines should be redirected.

What can I do if a student always visits the same station?

● Allow the student to continue starting the discovery session at this station. A few strategies could then be employed; engage the student in a conversation relating to their play. Through scaffolded discussion, try to guide the student into new directions or scenarios within their play.

● Add other materials to the station to further extend the play scenario (e.g. if the student is playing with the cars on the mat everyday, you could try adding blocks and ramps to open up further design and construction experiences based around the cars – such as building a workshop out of the blocks to repair the cars, or experimenting with different ramps to find out how far the cars travel when launched off the ramp)

● Another strategy could be to move the cars into a different area (e.g. place the cars into the sandpit). When trying any of the above strategies it may be helpful for the teacher to place themselves at that particular station and play alongside the student for a short time as a way of modelling how they might engage with and use the new materials being introduced if you are concerned the student may simply choose to continue with their original play

How should I be assessing Discovery?

● Discovery is a really good opportunity to observe and make judgements about student progress in areas such as social skills, personal management skills, problem solving skills and other areas in the General Capabilities. These observations could be recorded but it’s advised you don’t try to record everything all of the time. It is more effective to start small and be specific with what you are looking for when observing or involved in a learning conversation with a student. The purpose of assessment is to inform future learning; therefore what you are observing in Discovery should be used to help design further discovery stations and opportunities (e.g. if you observe a student continually playing solo you would then look at designing stations that require some interactions between students to encourage them to move to the next stage of play)

4