



Play
School

Story Time

PlayWorld

Ideas for Educators

In this episode of Play School Story Time, Tony Armstrong shares 'Finding Our Heart' by Thomas Mayor & Blak Douglas.



Pedagogical characteristics

Selecting a story for the *Conceptual PlayWorld*

Story: Finding Our Heart

Written by Thomas Mayor and illustrated by Blak Douglas

Publisher: Hardie Grant Explore, 2020.

Pedagogical practices

- Select a story that is enjoyable for children and adults.
- Build drama for the characters in the story.
- Build empathy for the characters in the story.
- Choose a plot that lends itself to introducing a problem situation.
- Be clear about the concept(s) and its relation to the story and play plot to be developed.
- Choose adventures or or journeys that spring from the plot.

Conceptual PlayWorld in action

- **Story summary:** This story tells an important message about Australia's past and the Uluru Statement, bringing forward ideas about protecting the biodiversity of the local areas.
- Use the story to inspire an investigation about ways to protect the local Indigenous plants and animals. Encourage children to act and find the 'heart of the nation' and develop empathy for the land.
- **Problem situation:** The land needs your help to protect the local plants and animals, for a sustainable future.
- **Concepts:** Biodiversity in local areas and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.
- **Possible plot extension:** Introduce native animals, (e.g. Bandicoot, Bilby, Numbat, Gouldian Finch, Mountain Pygmy Possum) to the shared play and go on journeys together, meeting and solving problems along the way.
- Introduce endangered species such as the Helmeted Honeyeater or Leadbeater's Possum.

A partnership between



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Pedagogical characteristics

Designing a *Conceptual PlayWorld* space

Pedagogical practices

- Find a space in the classroom or outdoor area suitable for an imaginary *Conceptual PlayWorld* of the story.
- Design opportunities for child-initiated play in ways that develop the play plot further or explore concepts and make them more meaningful.
- Plan ways for children to represent their ideas and express their understandings.

Conceptual PlayWorld in action

- Turn the outdoor space into an imaginary 'heart of Australia'. Use illustrations from the book to help children imagine our "big beautiful country".
- Support children to develop the shared imaginary situation by asking - What can you see when you are in nature? What can you touch? What can you hear, smell and taste when on the land? Are there trees, animals, rivers, or grass?
- Meet characters during the imaginary play (e.g. Bunjil or the Rainbow Serpent) and invite discussions about respecting the land.
- Spend time in nature and with local community gardening groups by helping to care for Indigenous plants.
- Use natural materials (pods, leaves, bark, flowers, seeds) to represent the local landscape through collage or by making a diorama.
- Take action by organising a native planting day at your service.

Entering and exiting the *Conceptual PlayWorld* space

- Plan a routine for the whole group to enter and exit the *Conceptual PlayWorld* of the story where all the children are in the same imaginary situation.
- Children choose characters as they enter into the imaginary situation.
- Educator is always a character in the story.

- To signify entering the imaginary situation together (heart of Australia), sing an [Acknowledgement of Country](#).
- Children and educators choose to be characters from the story e.g. Bandicoot, Bilby or Numbat.
- Educators can pretend to be native trees e.g. Eucalyptus, Banksia or Wattle. What are the Indigenous names of these trees? Are the trees home to any native animals?
- Pretend to be an environmental scientist and investigate indigenous plants in relation to the local ecosystem.
- Meet experts in Australia's unique and diverse native flora to find out more about their adventures, or visit a local national park.
- Reach out to local Aboriginal Elders, facilitating opportunities to share their knowledge about Country.



Pedagogical characteristics

Planning the play inquiry or problem scenario

Planning educator interactions to build conceptual learning in role

Pedagogical practices

- Problem scenario is not scripted, but a general idea of the problem is planned.
- Problem scenario is dramatic and engaging.
- The problem invites children to investigate solutions to help the play in the *Conceptual PlayWorld*.
- Be clear about the concepts that will be learned from solving the problem situation, through children's play.

- Educators are not always the same character. Roles are not scripted.
- Plan who will have more knowledge and who will be present with the children to model solving the problem. Educators can take on different roles for the *Conceptual PlayWorld*. Plan your role to be either **equally present** with the children, or to **model practices** in a role, or to be **needing help** from the children. Your role can also **be together with** the child leading, where educators support children to act out the role or solution together.

Conceptual PlayWorld in action

- Receive a letter from the land such as: *"Dear children, I need your help to protect all of the different plants and animals that I am home to. Please help replant native plants or become wildlife rescuers and care for me. We all need each other, with your help we can all look after each other... Love the Land"*.
 - While in the imaginary 'heart of Australia', invite children to work together as they care for the land, plants and animals. What can the land teach us? The land could continue to send letters to the children to develop the play and problem scenario.
 - Invite children to investigate some of the threats to Indigenous plants and animals? For example, grazing and agriculture, urbanisation and industrial development, mining and quarrying, bush fires. Thinking about a sustainable future.
- Plan for your role in the *PlayWorld* by choosing one of the following:
 1. **Be equally present with children** - e.g. *"Let's use our senses to explore the local land together"*.
 2. **Model practices in a role** - e.g. *"I'm a Helmeted Honeyeater. I'm an endangered bird. I eat nectar and sap from the Eucalyptus tree"*.
 3. **Seek help from the children** - e.g. *"Can you show me how we can help the land? What plants should we grow? What wildlife will it attract?"*.
 4. **Act out the role together with the child leading** - e.g. *"Let's pretend to be a Eucalyptus tree. We're going to grow into some of the tallest trees in the world. We'll be home to lots of native birds"*.

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