



Hansel and Gretel: retold the LEGO® way by students at John Purchase Public School



In 2014, Kate McKenzie, formerly Kate Keily, was the teacher librarian at John Purchase Public School in Sydney's north-west. This article outlines how an exciting technology project using LEGO® kept Year 6 engaged with learning during their last term of primary school. Kate is now teacher librarian at Putney Public School. Principal, Rhonda Russom, and the parent body have committed funds and support for modernising their library and bringing in a 21st century learning program.

Building student engagement: Brick by brick

Teacher librarians make a difference

Teacher librarians can have an enormous impact when supporting student learning within a school. The library is a unique classroom within the school. The physical space is often less constrained than a standard classroom and this gives teacher librarians more flexibility in their approach to learning tasks.

Quality learning occurs when children are engaged in an authentic task. Students of

the 21st century live in an exciting, and technological world and teachers often have to work hard to hold their attention and excite their imagination. This challenge is magnified for teachers of Year 6 in Term 4 of the school year. Students are at the end of their primary school life, and many are very ready for the new challenges of high school. Extra patience and innovation is badly needed.

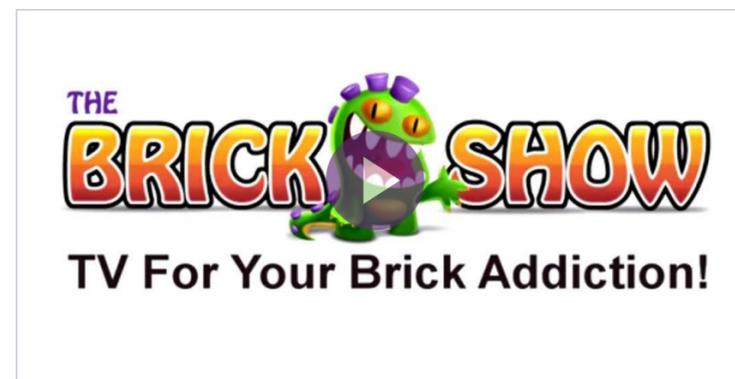
With these challenges in mind, the planning for Term 4 began. A meaningful project was required that met curriculum outcomes and provided some challenges. It also needed to be project-based and have a modern, technology focus. Settling for anything less demanding would be simply keeping these restless students busy.

Brick fairy tales

A recently published book called *Brick fairy tales* by John McCann and Monica Sweeney (ISBN 9781628737325) provided inspiration. It retells classic fairy tales with all the images made in LEGO®. It is formatted as a simple graphic novel and students at John Purchase thought it was so cool.

They had been shown similar titles like, like [Brick Shakespeare](#) and the [Brick Bible](#). The release of The LEGO® movie had been huge. This was the opening – LEGO® was topical, current and popular.

The students could now produce their own brick fairy tale.



[Brick Shakespeare book review](#)



[The Brick Bible official trailer](#)

The brief

The brief was delivered to the students. They were required to make their own brick fairy tale.

Each group had available to them a selection of LEGO®, and an iPad. There

were no specific instructions; it was up to each group to make their own decisions. The students were told that they could bring in some of their own specialty LEGO® to use but they would be responsible for it. They would need to bring it to their library each week, and it would stay in their care at all times.

Part of the brief was about group work, and every member of the group was to have a role. This idea of distinct roles was explicitly discussed before starting. It was observed that not all roles were the same, but all played a vital part in creating the final product. Each group would look at the strengths and weaknesses of the individuals in their group and divide the responsibilities accordingly to make the best use of their skills and talents.

Project-based learning in groups is a great way for students to develop important skills for the future. Modern work practice often entails being given a brief of what a client wants, and it is the job of the employee to work with others to provide a product that meets the client's needs. These skills include the ability to work as a team, define roles within a group, work to a time line and show initiative. This project facilitated learning opportunities for these important [general capabilities](#), more particularly described as *Work and enterprise skills* and *Personal*

and *social capabilities*. It was also imaginative and innovative, allowing students to show flair and originality.

This analogy of the modern workplace was used - this could be them in the future, working on a project team for a large corporation. The students needed to be mature and fair in the distribution of tasks, in order to achieve their objectives. Students responded well to this approach as it anchored the task in the real world and gave it relevance.

The task fulfils aspects of learning outcomes ([EN3-7C](#)), *a student thinks imaginatively, creatively, interpretively and critically about information and ideas and identifies connections between texts when responding to and composing texts* and ([EN3-8D](#)), *a student identifies and considers how different viewpoints of their world, including aspects of culture, are represented in texts*.

The project

This project required:

- one iPad per group (average of 6 students)
- Book Creator app, iMovie (or any similar program)
- LEGO® or similar plastic building blocks.

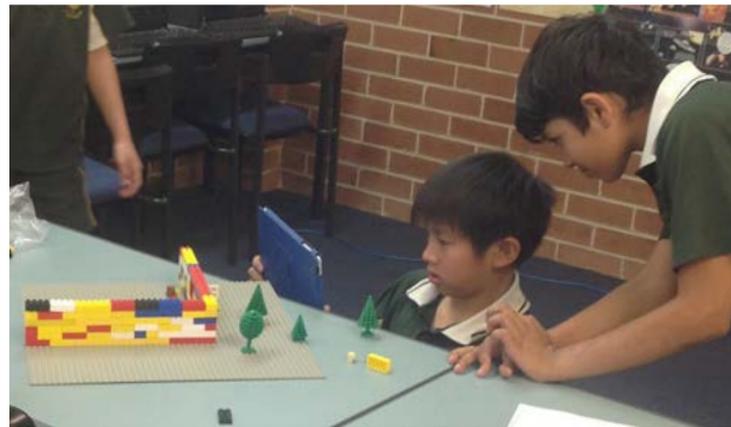
Students were broken up into groups

of between five and seven, depending on class size and available iPads. In this instance, groups were deliberately mixed, with a broad cross section of ability, gender and friendship groups.

The school was scoured for any available LEGO®, which consisted of basic building blocks and a few odds and ends of specialist collections. Most schools will generally be able to gather basic blocks from throughout the school and by asking around.

[Specialist LEGO® kits](#) were purchased (from Moore Education Pty Ltd) that contained character figures, trees and a variety of hats, objects and props. There are quite a few LEGO® story writing kits available but only the character piece kits were bought as this kept cost down.

In total, about \$450 was spent on LEGO®.



Students creating their own LEGO® fairy tale

This resource is now within the school and can be borrowed and used by the whole school.

The process was quite simple. Students were provided with a list of tasks to complete, and as outlined previously, they had to plan their own workflows. The list was:

1. Decide
2. Build
3. Shoot
4. Edit
5. Narrate
6. Finish.

Of course, students needed support to get organised and the process of

facilitation was very intense. The role of the teacher here was not to teach; but to facilitate learning and empower students to direct their own learning. It was very rewarding to see how well the students met the challenges that arose and many gained self-confidence during the process.

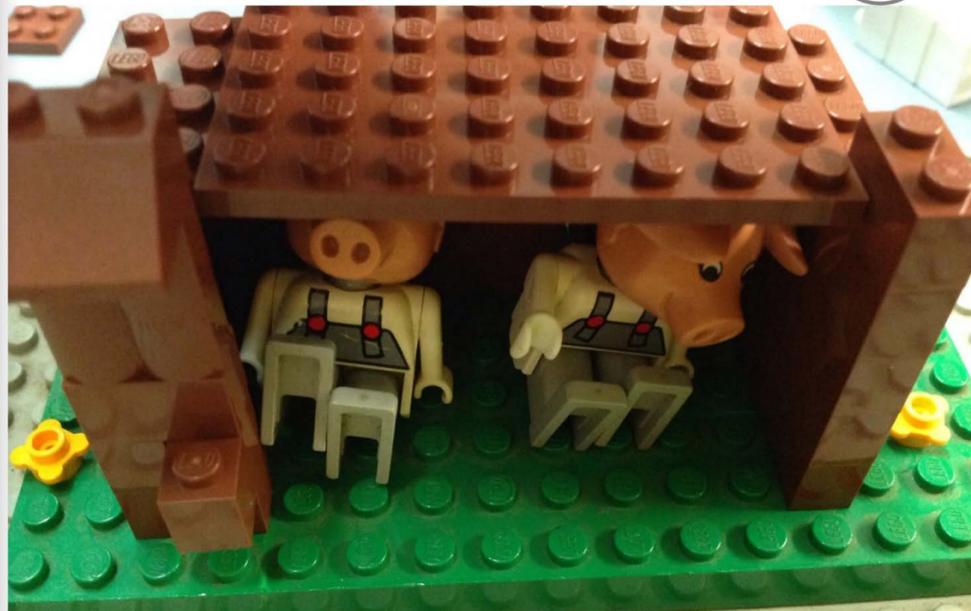
Key factors in successful project delivery

The key factors of the project are:

- a 10 week time frame – of 1 hour per week
- every class had a group labelled 1,2,3,4,5 etc.
- the LEGO® needed to be divided, boxed and labelled with a group number; prior to distribution, so pieces were not missing when they filmed different scenes over a number of weeks
- students were not allowed to take pieces from another group's box. This was imperative with multiple classes using the boxes. The same pieces need to be there for Group 1 on Monday and Group 1 on Friday
- each group had: (a) A box of basic LEGO® and: (b) A box of specialty pieces like characters and props (flowers or trees).



They hid together from the Big Bad Wolf. After the Big Bad Wolf arrived at the pigs house he yelled " Little pigs, Little pigs let me in or I will huff and I will puff and I will blow your house down". Then the pigs replied " We will never, ever let you in" shouted the two little pigs.



The two little pigs? Where is number three?

Evaluation

Like all projects, there were varying degrees of success. Some groups thrived on the freedom to make their own choices, while others needed a bit of a push to agree and collaborate. Some student groups produced simple interpretations of familiar stories. Others were able to explore the concept of appropriation and used their story to provide extra insights and explore cultural assumptions in the original tale.

The amazing thing was that every single group produced a digital book that retold a classic fairy tale and achieved the brief that they had been given. Every student was part of a successful team.



They dropped marshmallows on the way to the well so they wouldn't get lost.



Hansel and Gretel: no boring breadcrumbs in this forest!

The most rewarding aspect was seeing some of the students who often struggle with traditional academic tasks, show their true potential. One particular student shone. While usually hard to engage, and disruptive in his behaviour, he was outstanding. He was a leader within his group, inclusive of his classmates and driven to complete the project. He came in at lunchtimes to complete difficult scenes and took great pride in his accomplishments. The project had appealed to him and provided an opportunity for him to show his unique skill set and achieve.

20 minutes later Hanzel & Gretel finally came back with the wood and gave it to their father.



Another LEGO® happy ending

Conclusion

Embarking on a project like this always has its challenges. It requires a great deal of planning, careful consideration of educational value and a budget.

Fortunately, Principal Leonie Black and the school community, were very supportive of the idea. They saw first-hand the eagerness of students to work on projects in the library, and the engagement of students at John Purchase Public School when they are faced with a challenge. There had been other ambitious ideas before this that had all resulted in positive learning experiences for the students.

The success of this project in terms of student engagement highlights the importance of programs designed by teacher librarians and implemented in the library for creating a positive attitude to learning.