

The Education of CM

*Identifying names and photographs have been removed
Two years registration was granted.*

This year, C will turn 7 in August. She has been looking forward to this birthday for a long time and has recently changed her request from a hot air balloon ride to a pair of roller skates and maybe having her ears pierced. She is an energetic, sensible, thoughtful, amazing little girl who we are proud to call our own. She has high self-esteem, outstanding negotiation and social skills, an incredible imagination and vocabulary, confidence in not only her abilities but also in the fact that she is able to learn, research and invent, and she has the treasured ability to think outside the square.

Our **style** of home schooling is not 'school at home' style. We allow the children to follow their own interests, at their own pace and go with the natural ebb and flow of curiosity and motivation. C's abilities and interests vary in where they line up with the stage outcomes, and I cater for her individual needs rather than requiring her to work through at the standard pace. I would like her registered for 'Primary School' rather than a particular stage for this reason.

I guess, if you had to use a label, we could be called Opportunistic Learners. Any spark of interest in any topic is fanned with immediate gusto (even if this means 'learning' at 6am). We have started using Skype in the Classroom, where a lot of the speakers are from overseas. To make the most of this fabulous resource we need to be flexible with our available times, getting up early or 'working' on weekends.

As a result of allowing them to be excited about their own learning, my children wake up eager to live the day to the fullest and go to bed still asking questions. There is no need for a time table or setting paper work, as they still possess their innate need to question and investigate. They live in the real world, learn with their whole bodies through experience as opposed to worksheets, and are active participants of their community and environment.

I will say that C's time for learning is from the time she wakes up in the morning, until the time she goes to bed at night, and then it is a struggle to get her to stop reading and actually sleep, to address the BOSTES requirement of recording **'time allocated to student learning'**

"Any syllabus developed or endorsed by the Board for a particular course of study may indicate generally the period of time that should be allocated to the teaching of the course, but is not to make a specific period of time mandatory"(S 14 Education Act 1990)

The educational program that we use to address the BOSTES syllabuses is good old, life!

We provide her with interesting resources and equipment at home. This is regularly changed and modified, used for different reasons and often the children find ways to use them 'outside the box'.

We surround her with life, both plants and animals. She sees life cycles happening constantly, she knows how plant and animal fertilisation occurs, has witnessed not only birds hatching, but also human birth (twice!). She is interested in what happens to bodies once the plant or animal dies. She knows how we depend on plants and animals for food. She knows the importance of eating good food and protecting the environment from toxins. She sponsors Tasmanian devils at taronga zoo and helps me with my WIRES work. She knows much more than many adults on these topics. She fights for what she believes in. She informs people often about the problems with palm oil production, battery hen farming, poisons in our food and their effects on our bodies as well as the environment,

tassie devil facial tumour disease, proper netting of fruit trees to avoid injury to wildlife and her pet hate, food being sold in 'rubbish'. I mention all this because it ticks a lot of the boxes for the outcomes to do with PD/H/PE and Science.

She is an active child, always using her body for something. She might be climbing a tree, skate boarding, dancing, putting on a play, swimming, playing soccer, riding her bike, walking to the shop, carrying her brother. She is fit and healthy and loves being active.

She is taking piano lessons with a local teacher using the book 'John Thompson's Easiest Piano Course'. She misses her old French class and so I have found Bonjour Tontononline and am in the process of arranging class time for her. We are also hoping a Canadian home schooling family decide to move in soon as the mum speaks French and is keen to help the kids learn.

We go on exciting trips and use them to our educational advantage. An example of this is the recent camping trip to the Far South Coast of NSW. C is extremely interested in sea life. Her knowledge is astounding. While there we took them to the Sapphire Coast Discovery Centre, which is run by volunteers with an interest in the ocean. The first visit we were there for 4 hours and volunteers conversed non-stop with the children about an enormous variety of information. One man spoke to them about the artificial womb he had created for a shark egg so that the development of the pup could be seen through the glass womb. Another spent a lot of time showing them the microscope and talked to them about the patterns on their own skin and what that means in regards to their ancestry, another about the plight of the Hooded Plover, there was a long discussion about shark teeth and also, the midnight zone. They classified shells, ordered them according to their toxin levels, learnt about the angles that human female arm bones develop and how information such as this is good for investigating the past. They were asked to stay after closing time as the Governor General of NSW was taking a tour through and they wanted some interesting kids there while he was. They were in the Eden newspaper that week. The second visit took another 4 hours where they were taken upstairs and shown fossils and specially preserved fish skeletons, they had their questions answered, such as "since bluebottles are multi cellular organisms, are they related to siphonophores?" That is how I want my children's questions addressed, by people passionate about the topic, it was perfect!

While working on Australian History Mysteries, C learnt about Ghost Towns. We are planning our next trip to visit a ghost town and look for clues and signs as to what might have happened to it. This will involve reading, investigation skills, scientific evidence, dates and numbers, economics and business, history - both of that particular town and also of the differences between white settlement and aboriginal life, storytelling, record keeping and discriminating between relevant and irrelevant information, speaking to people and asking appropriate questions, looking at the graveyard, the way the roads are made, what sort of climate is there and why people may have decided to settle a town in that particular place (which will probably lead on to geology).

We are also planning a trip to outback Queensland next year to follow 'The Dinosaur Trail' as there is a strong interest in evolution and paleontology.

Lately the interest has been old buildings. Our town is perfect for this kind of interest and so we have been and made connections with The Great Heritage Centre, walked the streets numerous times taking notes of the dates that buildings were erected and then arranging them in chronological order. It helps that we live in the oldest building in town! We have also looked at local history. We go to the cemetery every few months and C selects a headstone. We research that person and donate findings to the local genealogy group. The last man we studied died in a heat wave in 1896 where

people all over the world were dropping dead from the heat. This sparked interest in heat stroke, how people must have survived without tap water, what sacrifices they must have made, how little medical knowledge and expertise was available to them and the differences today. It's a really interesting way of learning about the past.

Our local home school friends are joining us in a monthly country study, where we all spend the month immersing ourselves in a particular country and then come together to share what we have all learnt. This month was C's choice, and she chose Sweden. We are reading Astrid Lindgren (Pippi Longstocking, Lotta Says No, Children of Noisy Village and The Tomten), exploring culture (Tomten, St Lucias Crown, dressing as witches at Easter), Aurora Borealis, polar bears translucent fur, ice hotels and Vikings. I wanted to Skype with some home schoolers from over there, but we were all very surprised to find that home schooling is basically banned there. Mum has a friend living there though who we are able to contact via email to answer any questions we have. For the presentation at the end of May we plan to put on a play of The Tomten and write an acrostic poem to read to the others, as well as relaying any topics they find particularly exciting.

Mathematics is covered in day to day life. Cooking, gardening, building, problem solving, shopping, craft, weighing her chickens, measuring food for the animals, her insatiable appetite for Chemistry experiments, playing Monopoly, Mouse Trap Maths, Catan Junior, Pop to the Shops...it's endless really. I dislike separating maths from life as it is a big part of normal life, but she has Targeting Maths Year 2 to work through when she's interested so that she will learn to respond to the conventional formatting used in workbooks, as well as Teddy Bear Maths books with counters, Cuisenaire rods, Bee-Bot, Khan Academy online. Greg has just started a new activity with them where he creates clues to lead them around town using a compass. He also gets locals involved by firstly delivering clues to the shops that they are orienteering to, the girls have to go in and ask for the clue, then read it, figure it out and then direct themselves to the next clue. They love it, of course. We also enjoy Vi Hart's YouTube videos of maths. It has sparked interest in Fibonacci spirals (also thanks to a love of shells) so far and I am positive will become a staple part of our mathematics investigation as they get older.

Using ropes and pulleys in the tree, having big planks of wood, bricks and stones in the yard for creating fulcrums, experimenting with gravity and weights, real life Angry Birds games... they are all examples of the way that C is learning about physics/maths in her daily life, and it is so much fun, she absolutely loves physics! (It's not like I remember it in high school!) C also loves electronics and motors. We have a bee bot, mechanized Mechano, a snap together electronics kit, and I'm buying her a Goldieblox set for her birthday. She loves Lego and whenever we go to a show, she is drawn to motors and engines. I see it becoming a bit of a passion of hers in the future.

She has access to a number of computer based programs such as Reading Eggs (almost finished and on to Reading Eggspress), Khan Maths, Australian History Mysteries, DIY.org (love that one!) Splash, The Night Zoo Keeper, Skype in the Classroom (booked in for Arctic! Live tomorrow morning), Bonjour Tonton, Teach Your Monster to Read and BBC Typing lessons. We will also be following Expedition.com this spring to join in The Search for the Shy Albatross. That looks very exciting.

ANZAC day provided lots of learning opportunities. She marched in the parade with Girl Guides in full uniform, carrying the flag. She listened during the ceremony and saw all the uniforms. We read picture books and she heard stories of her ancestors that died in WW1. We discussed advertising, futility and traditions. Her grandmother (who loves history) was visiting the week before ANZAC day and spent a lot of time imparting her knowledge to the girls.

The local Show (8-9th May) has kept us very busy lately. She entered a pet photography competition (which she researched ways to take great photos, set up a shoot and used her duckling as a model- don't mention it though please, it got eaten by a fox last week!), a sculpture, still life paintings, drawing, best deCted old boot, pet rock, fruit and vegetable face on a plate, and 3 deCted cupcakes. She won a first and 3 second places plus a lot of highly commended.

We spent the night of the show with friends. We spend a lot of time with friends with children in town, and I have no concerns whatsoever about her 'socialisation'.

We read lots of books, every day. Picture books a couple of times a day and again at bed time and there is always a novel being read to C. She is interested in fractured fairy tale type books at the moment, we just finished Terry Pratchett 'The Wee Free Men' and now she wants me to read Gregory Maguire's 'Wicked' – not yet, but Harry Potter is on the 'read soon' list. She adores books written with old fashioned language, Brothers Grimm, Edward Lear poems, Jabberwocky etc. We are currently reading Pippi Longstocking and then will start on Kate Forsyth novels which have been recommended to us.

We were given a mountain of readers at Christmas time that were ex-school ones and so have already been marked according to school levels. She started in January at about level 6, level 13 in April and now prefers regular picture books from the library, but if readers then level 18. She particular likes Mo Willems and Andy Griffiths 'readers'.

She writes letters to her friends and family, both on paper and with email. She writes stories, poems, clues, directions, puzzles and articles often.

She wanted to compare as many versions of Sleeping Beauty that we could find last month. We read Disney, 3 copycat types from the library, another which was written from the fairy godmothers perspective, Brothers Grimm and watched 2 different video versions. She pointed out holes in the stories that she found and then made her own version, covering all the problems she found in the other versions. Her main concern was that no one had informed Sleeping Beauty of the prophecy looming over her, so she didn't know not to touch the spinning wheel. Her own version fixed this problem right up but still allowed the story to tell its usual tale.

Beauty and The Beast is the current fairy tale under scrutiny. We've read Disney, library picture book versions, Alex Flinn's 'Beastly' (recommendation from librarian but too mature for my kids, we read it anyway and they loved it), watched La Belle Et La Bête (with my reading subtitles). A friend told us about a TV series, Once Upon a Time, that is also mixed up fairy tales. The girls (and us) are loving it and they talk about the differences in character, stories, attitudes of other characters and similarities and familiarities as we watch. They need to 'pay' for these episodes, and they do this with points that they earn by completing specific activities (eg. A Reading Eggs level is 100 points, learning a new recipe can be worth up to 1000 depending on if they research, practice, serve and then add it to their menu. An episode of Once Upon a Time costs 700 points). The girls need to add up their own points to work out if they can afford something, need to pool their points together or need to complete another activity, another example of how we use maths in daily life.

Drama is covered spontaneously as a result of having friends around/being at friends places regularly. At least once a month we are treated to a 'show' of some sort. It might be a dance, a puppet show, a rehearsed play or a musical concert. Sometimes it is just C and her sibling, but often it is when there are friends here for the day or visitors here for a week or so. It's natural and free, and I believe gave her the confidence to volunteer while we were away for a part in a street show. She had to walk around the audience pretending the ball she was holding was very heavy. She also

enjoys being read rhymes such as Julia Donaldson’s ‘Wriggle and Roar’, where she gets to act the poems out.

While at the park recently, C discovered a missing slippery dip. She went to the council and asked if they knew it was gone and the lady was surprised and told her it ‘must have been nicked’ (that word was added to her vocabulary then!). So, she collected some children and spent 2 hours searching for clues, asking people in the park if they had seen anyone stealing the slide, trying to determine exactly when it might have been stolen. She went to the police station and informed the police of the problem, then interviewed and took ‘statements’ from people she thought had good information. She wrote a newspaper article with a plea to the thief to bring the slide back. The next day we went back to the council (before the newspaper) to double check it had actually been ‘nicked’. It turned out the maintenance man had taken it but because of our ‘opportunistic learning’, C learnt to write a large range of non-fiction formats, as well as speaking to people about important topics including her persuasive suggestion of how dangerous the park was without the slide or any barrier to prevent small people falling off in the meanwhile.

C is involved in the following ‘outsourced’ activities throughout the year:

Girl Guides – weekly meetings with badge work, sports games, community service planning, worksheets. Community service and formal occasion attendance on a regular basis. Sleep overs/camps a couple of times a year.

Story Time, craft classes, drawing classes at the library. The librarians are going to be working with her over winter so she can start reading a story at story time each week too.

Piano lessons, horse riding/care lessons, swimming lessons, soccer, netball, little athletics and playgroups.

My **record keeping method** is electronic. I have a ‘secret’ facebook page that I use as a journal and a place to store ideas and new resources that I come across. I have both C’s grandmothers as members of this group so that they can have input into her ‘schooling’. I upload photos and files and write interesting things that happen there. It is good because I can upload from anywhere I have my phone (including the edge of Blowering Dam in the Snowy Mountains as pictured), and search by date or for a specific word. I find it works really well for me, as I can see progress and achievements in different areas and also see if there is a pattern developing of a new interest. I also use it as a reminder system to follow up on any interests that might have got lost in a busy day.

I plan to continue in this **method of ‘teaching’ my daughter for the next period of registration**, but will alter some or all of this if and when I see fit. Our **resources** include books, games, computers, the community, the environment, family and friends, the garden, the pets, our holidays, the library, the shop keepers, local community groups, sporting groups, and any other exciting opportunity that arises.

Thank you for taking the time to come out and visit us.

May 2015