## About this case study
Located just out of Wellington, Churton Park School has almost 400 Year 1 to 6 students. In this case study, teacher and creator of the school's innovative Year 6 camp and pre-camp programme, Leanne Stubbing, shares with us the importance of pre-camp learning and how developing a 'gamified' pre-camp unit has led to better learning outcomes for her students.

'Routine' camp experiences
Historically, the Year 6 camp took place at the start of the year to prepare students for their final year of primary school. The camp was run following a similar timetable over several years and many of the activities were 'cut and paste'. Students were given a book for their camp-related learning, however this was mainly used for surface level activities, such as filling in the camp programme, cabin groups and for making journal entries during camp. These activities were designed to make students feel like they had some involvement in planning, although in reality they had limited authentic involvement or leadership.

When we decided to change camp venues, we also felt it was important to revisit the purpose of camp and the learning programme associated with it. The camp now takes place mid-Term 4 and is run over 4 days/3 nights. The focus of the camp now reflects the transition students make as they move from primary school to intermediate, which can be a challenging time for many. During camp, students develop and practise self-management and interpersonal skills, which aim to support them through this schooling transition, as well as later in life.
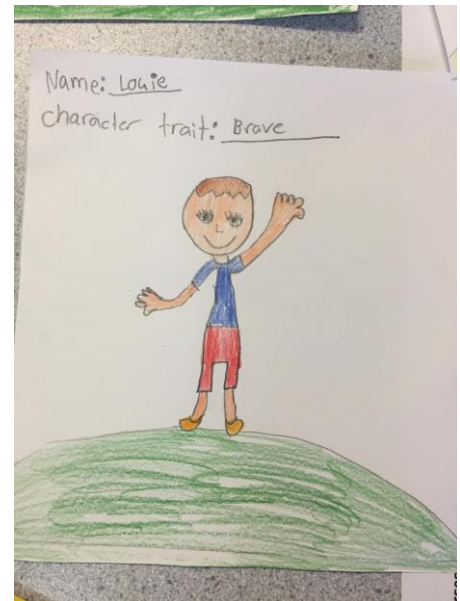
Inspiration to change
Before the implementation of the pre-camp unit, there was little connection between camp preparation and what happened on camp, except for discussing the camp programme with the students. This meant there were few surprises on camp and students knew what to expect. However, despite having a very full camp programme and limited down-time, a lot of students became home sick because they weren't properly prepared for being away from home. After camp, student completed some pre-prepared activities to reflect on their experience of camp but again this was minimal and lacked depth.

After attending a 'game storming' workshop with ULearn, I (Leanne) started to experiment with games-based learning with my students. Seeing the positive impact it had on their learning and engagement, specifically around viewing learning as a process rather than outcome, encouraged me to further explore this pedagogy. Following my participation in the NZCER 'Games for Learning' conference I came to ask "what if camp was a game?!" and so decided to apply these same principles to prepare my students for camp. This led to the development of a 'gamified' pre-camp unit.

The 'pre-camp' unit explained
This unit takes place in the 5 weeks prior to camp, although students are introduced to some game-design/design thinking concepts earlier in the year. The unit is also paired with Puberty (as part of a Hauora unit).

In designing the unit, I considered the things that would be important for my students to know and have skills in to encourage their full participation at camp, as well as support them in their transition to Intermediate. I decided that using a role-play game to build this knowledge would be a fantastic way to do this. In small groups, students created their own role-play-based games, which centred around camp. The focus of the unit was on the learning that

occurred <u>through</u> the game design process, rather than focusing on the final game product. During the unit my team and I never explicitly told the students "we're doing this so you're ready for camp", instead the learning was anchored in a camp context and unpacked the skills they needed.

To begin the unit, students were taught how role-play games work and they explored this by playing Hero Kids (an e-adventure game). During this exploration phase, we taught the students about game concepts while they directed their own learning through the game. When they had developed some knowledge about game design, they systematically went through the process to design their own games. Each phase of the game design was used to explore skills and concepts that related to our camp learning intentions. For example, we considered:
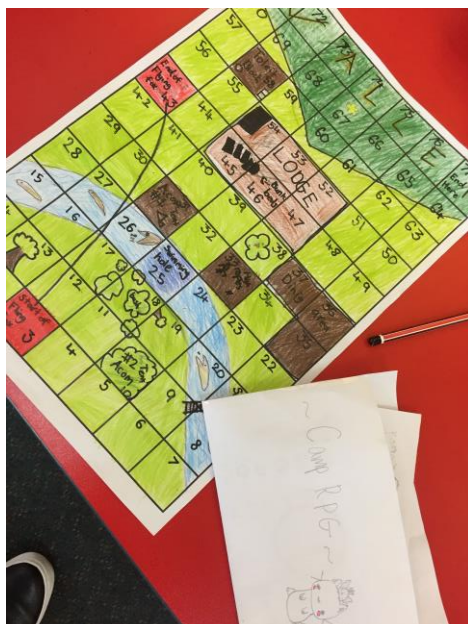
- The camp environment/location: Students created a map of the camp using the information we gave them. This is what they used as their game board.
- Safety management: The students then came up with scenarios of what could happen while we were on camp and placed them on their board relating to where they might occur in the camp environment. As a class we then went through each scenario looking at best case/worse case outcomes. This was really helpful in addressing student concerns about what might occur during camp and identifying how the students and staff could manage it together.
- Individual strengths and weaknesses: Students created characters for their games based on their own strengths and weaknesses. This provided an excellent opportunity for students to think about their own behaviours, what they could offer the wider group and how they could support others.
- Students then applied these 'character cards' to some of the scenarios to see how their individual and group skills could be used to manage particular situations. There were some powerful moments that occurred during camp where students applied these skills in-situ.

A lot of this learning has supported students to become more familiar with their capabilities and develop skills to negotiate new situations more easily, such as using mindfulness to manage anxiety. The camp timetable and disclosure of the camp activities was also removed from the traditional camp preparation, and instead we used the students' own games to work through these concepts and issues.

After implemented this unit we noticed that the students no longer experienced the typical pre-camp anxiety or became home sick because they were <u>ready</u> for camp and felt equipped for the experience. This unit was highly integrated and included many learning areas, key competencies and skills. However, we also included specific activities relating to the Health and Physical Education curriculum for teamwork and movement development, as well through art, literacy and numeracy. 'Gamifing' education is an excellent way to break down learning silos.

After camp, the students continued to use the skills they had gained during the pre-camp unit and camp itself by designing reflection activities that highlighted what they learnt about themselves. They had choice about how their learning reflection was presented; some created diorama, wrote poems or made films. This reflection activity also helped to build on other skills the students had learnt throughout the year. The staff involved also reflect on the camp each year, to make adaptions and bring on board other staff members so the planning of it doesn't become one person's responsibility.

Teacher reflection
The pre-camp unit has really helped our students to step into the camp experience with greater confidence and skills. We noticed that the students were engaged in their learning straight away. Students love the gamification but don't realise the impact it has on their learning. Having this pre-camp unit also means camp is more inclusive, as it enables students to progressively build their skills and improve their self-management and teamwork capabilities. Students are more empathic towards each other and this means camp is more successful and enjoyable for

everyone. The unit has been modified and adapted at times to include those with special needs, including two ORS students. This helped them prepare for the challenges ahead and experience success.

The first year we ran the new camp (and pre-camp unit) we noticed that parents were more anxious because they felt it presented greater risk (although we knew the opposite to be true). When they collected their children from camp, most parents were amazed at what their child had achieved during camp and noticed how happy and comfortable they were.

Top tips for success
- Start with your camp purpose. Think about the skills your students need to have (or develop) to enable them to maximise their engagement and learning at camp. Great learning does take place at camp, but we need to consider how much more successful and enjoyable these experiences could be if we prepared students properly.
- If you view your 'pre-camp preparation' as a process and not an outcome, you can design a range of activities, whether they build on each other and are part of a longer process, or they sit independently. Viewing camp as a whole learning 'unit' rather than focusing on the camp as the ultimate experience, means you are more likely to think critically about the learning opportunities that occur before, during and after camp and consider how this learning can blend into and build on other learning your students are doing.
- Get students working and collaborating together. We use random groups throughout pre-camp and camp, so student became very comfortable working with a range of people. Having students work together in order to achieve something is a really great starting point.
- Expand your thinking about what a pre-camp unit might or should look like. It is a fantastic opportunity to create integrated and authentic student-centred learning.
- If you're not familiar with the game design process here are some excellent resources and websites that can help:
  - www.gamefulpraxis.com
  - http://playfullearning.com/gdtk/
  - https://www.nzcer.org.nz/blogs/games-for-learning