

## The Project Approach to Learning at

**RisingOaks**  
Early Learning

# Saint John Paul II

**Project Name:** Board Games

**Age Group:** School Age 3 (8-12 years)

**Project Start Date:** January 2022

**Project End Date:** June 2022



**RisingOaks**  
Early Learning

**Growing minds through play**

## Background

The title of our project is Board Games - How Are They Made? We wanted to research board games, how they are made and what makes them successful. The ages of the children ranged from eight to twelve years old and there were 12 children in the group all together. We began our project in January of 2022 and wrapped it up in June of 2022. The educator involved in this project was Erin Wilhelm RECE, BA.

## Phase 1: Beginning the Project

This project came to be when the educator observed the children playing boards games day after day and when asked what they would like to add to the school age cart for Christmas, they answered board games. A list was compiled and Santa did his very best to bring a variety of different games to the classroom. The children really seemed to enjoy playing the type of game where you travel around the board to reach a designated finish line.

When beginning this project, the children were posed with three questions and these are their answers:

### 1. What do we know about board games?

- Hannah: There are winners and loser. There are different types of games.
- Jaidyn: There is a point to the game. They are colourful.
- Lily: They are fun.
- Emma R: There are different pieces and boards.
- Lucas: There are different ways to play the games.
- Lucy: Some games are good and some are boring.
- Alex: They are fun, some need strategy and some require luck.

### 2. What we want to know/learn about board games?

- Hannah: What happens with board games that do not work out?
- How do you get your ideas?
- How do you make the games?
- Jaidyn: How do you come up with the name for that game?
- Lucas: What materials do you use?
- Alex: Can you play board games however you want?

### 3. How can we find the information/answers to our questions?

- Google/internet/YouTube
- Books
- Board game creators
- Actual board games

The children were able to share their thoughts and ideas through group discussion and collaboration. As the educator began to plan and prepare for this project, there was hope that the children would be able to see all of the different steps that it takes to put into just one game. She wanted them to not

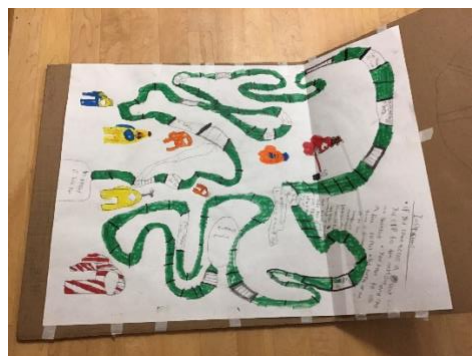
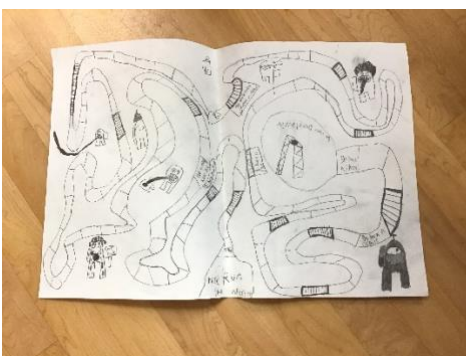
only enjoy the process, but also appreciate all of the hard work and effort it takes to make the games that they love to play.

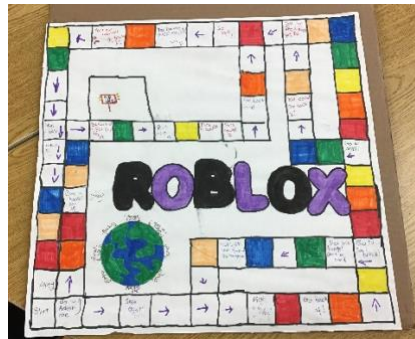
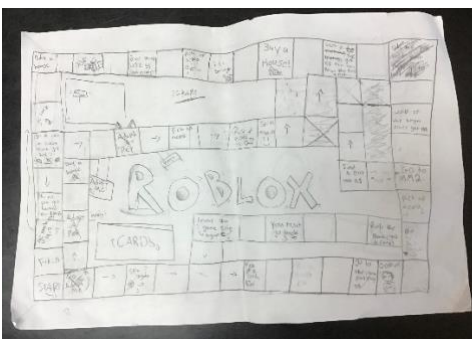
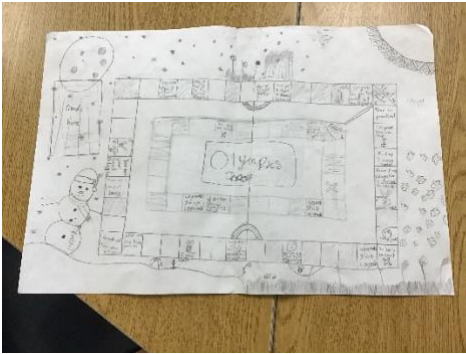
## Phase 2: Developing the Project

To begin the project the children experimented with the variety of board games available to them, playing them during free time in the afternoon. At Christmas time, the children had added some new games to their list and received a few of them. Over the month of January, the children rotated through the games; figuring out which board games, they liked the best and which style of game was their favourite. As pictured below, the group engaged in games such as Battleship, Apples to Apples and many others.



After playing a variety of different games, the children decided that they want to create their own board games with the knowledge that they gained throughout this experience. They put themselves into groups and began their first drafts of their games (first drawings). The group started the rough copies before reaching out to anyone with the questions that they had. The children came up with their concepts, discussing it for many days within their groups before sketching anything out on paper. Three of the groups decided to base their games on video games that they enjoy playing and the other group decided to take some inspiration from the Olympics that were currently taking place. Pictured below are the first and second drawing of each group's board games.





After working on their games for a few days, the children were ready to email their questions to some local game manufactures in order to move on with their game making process.

**The questions that the children chose to ask the manufactures were:**

1. How do you come up with ideas and names for the games you create?
2. How are board games made and what materials do you use?
3. What do you do with board games that don't work out or are not successful?
4. Can you play a board game however you want or does it need to have instructions?

We emailed these questions to a number of game manufactures within Ontario and two companies took the time to reply with their answers: Mercury Games and Family Pastimes Co-operative Games.

Mercury Games was the first company to respond to our email and they sent us an abundance of information that was very helpful. Here are some of the highlights from their response and the information that was most helpful.

**1. How do you come up with ideas and names for the games you create?**

- "Ideas come from many places. We are a publisher, so our main role is to go out and find designers who have good ideas for games. It just so happens that I am also personally a designer, so every once in a while, we publish one of my own designs. For naming games, this is up to the publisher to decide, although sometimes we really like the name the designer chose."



**2. How are board games made and what materials do you use?**

- “The major components in board games are cardboard, paper and wood. Sometimes plastic is also used, especially when we need a lot of one type of item such as a cube for marking places on the board. Board games that are made professionally (for sale in stores) are made in factories. Most of those factories are in China because the printers that make the game cost more than one million dollars! Those factories work with the publisher to establish what the game will look like and how large to make all the pieces. Once they receive the order from the publisher, a single copy of the game called a "proof copy" is mailed to the publisher. Once the publisher agrees that this is how they would like the game to look, the printer can make as many as the publisher wants.”

**3. What do you do with board games that don't work out or are not successful?**

- “Because there are so many new board games every year, the majority are not successful in selling all their copies. If a game is having trouble being sold we first increase the amount of advertising we do for that game. If that doesn't work we offer a sale for that game. If it still doesn't work there are companies that purchase games from publishers. Those companies are called "liquidators" and they pay the publisher less than the manufacturing price for the game, so it is not a very good deal for the publisher. If even the liquidator doesn't want to purchase a game then we will donate them to a charity that can give them away to people that want them (usually at Christmas time). But if we still have many games left over after that they will be destroyed.”

**4. Can you play a board game however, you want or does it need to have instructions?**

- “For our audience, it is very important to have a good rulebook and to ask that all players follow the rules. Otherwise, the spirit of competition will be ruined and people will not enjoy the game. The goal with writing rules is to keep them as simple as possible but to still have those rules challenge the players to do something interesting. When we write the rulebook for the game we want to make sure that, each rule is carefully explained so that players do not make mistakes because mistakes can ruin a game. Writing the rulebook can be the hardest part of making a board game and, in fact, we see even publishing companies make big mistakes in rulebooks. So once you are done writing your rulebook, you want to have someone else read through it and see if they understand the rules or even play the game (this is called "playtesting"). This is an important step because you don't want to print 2000 rulebooks if they all have mistakes in them!”

After the representative from Mercury Games finished answering all of our questions, they included one more important piece of information that did not occur to us at all.

“Here is one challenge that you did not ask about but it's important to the current board game design world. If you are making a game, try to NOT design a "roll-and-move" game. A "roll and move" game is one where the player rolls a dice or spins a spinner and then moves on spaces around a board. Some games that are roll and moves include Monopoly, Sorry, or Game of Life. This type of design is not considered good game design and if you want to make a game that people will enjoy, see if you can

think of other ways to play a game.” They also gave a list of game ideas that are not considered “roll-and-move” and encouraged the children to create their games based on this idea.

The second company to respond was Family Pastimes Co-operative Games. Their answers were not as detailed, but they provided their website ([www.familypastimes.com](http://www.familypastimes.com)) for us to refer to if more information was needed. They also attach some information of the benefits of cooperative play, because they too encouraged the children not to make competitive games, but ones where they had to work together to achieve the end goal. Below are the answers Family Pastimes Co-operative Games provided for our questions.

1. How do you come up with ideas and names for the games you create?
  - "I dream up the ideas and keep a notebook by my bedside. The names derive from the game concept. My rule of thumb is don't have the players against each other and don't have them against the game either. For a complete discussions of how, See the About Us articles on my site, [www.familypastimes.com](http://www.familypastimes.com)."
2. How are board games made and what materials do you use?
  - "I make everything here. Look for the photos, on my website"
3. What do you do with board games that don't work out or are not successful?
  - "I work at them until they are good for publishing."
4. Can you play a board game however you want or does it need to have instructions?
  - "Writing up the rules is the hardest part. Words and phrases you are used to, such as deal out a hand, make no sense to someone who doesn't play games and needs a lot more explanation."

Once the group reviewed the responses, we looked at the Family Pastimes Co-operative games website together. We learned a little more about the design process as well as what types of games they have created. The children thought some of the games seemed interesting and thought that it could be fun to play a few of them

To get a variety of opinions on board games, we created a survey to be taken by a different group of children. A few of the children were in the same class at school, so Alex and Lucas decided to take the survey to their class, asking their peers various questions.

#### **Survey questions and answers:**

1. Does your family like board games?
  - Seven children responded yes and three responded no.
2. Do you prefer spin and move games or cooperative?
  - Eight children responded spin and move and five responded cooperative.

### 3. What is your favourite board game?

- Eight children said The Game of Life, two children said Monopoly and three children said Snake and Ladders.

Taking all of the new information gained, the children got back to work with new thoughts and ideas to apply to their games. All of the children really enjoyed playing the "roll-and-move" style of games and these are the type they had all started creating. They did seem a little conflicted with the advice from both emails about creating co-operative games. However, since they were happy with and enjoyed this style, the educator mentioned it was ok to keep their games the way they were, reminding them of their survey results, which showed more children liking roll and move type games. Emma R. and Lily took what they had learned about original ideas, changed the whole concept of their game and related it to shopping. They took their knowledge of shopping and built their game around those ideas. They also were the first ones to have a peer proof read their instructions, before continuing with the writing.



*Figure 1 Emma R. Working on the first draft of her board game.*



*Figure 2 Lily re-designing her board game after receiving advice from a local manufacturer*



*Figure 3 Emma R. asking Jaidyn to proof read the instructions that she had written.*

Lucas and Alex were in a group together and they wanted to make their game about an existing video game called Among Us. They began to plan their game by sketching a rough draft of how they wanted their board to look. Taking into consideration the shape of the pathway and what was going to be put

into the squares. They also created their game pieces using Lego blocks and forming them into the Among Us characters. They were able to complete their board game before any of the other teams; giving them a chance to test-play it before anyone else tried it. Lucas was very impressed with how everything turned out and he was heard saying, “That was even better than I thought it would be!”



*Figure 4 Alex and Lucas adding to the game board design*



*Figure 5 Alex and Lucas sketching a rough draft*

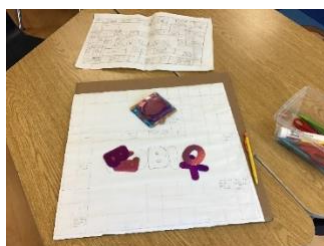


*Figure 6 Lucas and Alex in the test-play phase of the board game*



*Figure 7 Lucas and Alex creating game pieces from Lego blocks*

Hannah and Jaidyn also chose to create a video game based board game, Roblox. This group created their own game board along with their own spinner. They found some play money on the class cart and used it to make purchases throughout the game. This group also created a rough draft of their game, before refining it and copying it onto white paper and cardboard. There were a few times that this group had to rethink some of the actions in their game to make it work. With some brainstorming and teamwork, everything worked out in the end. Below are picture outlining the process of their game making.



The final group consisted of Millie, Lucy and Emma G. When this project first started the Winter Olympics were taking place, so they based their game on both the winter and summer events. This group made a very detailed first draft and had some very specific ideas that they wanted to implement into their game. As they proceeded with the creation of their game, they realized how much work and effort had to be put into each element. When recognizing this, they changed some aspects of what they had wanted to do, but nothing too serious that it affected the game play. The group created



medals using gold, silver and bronze paper, tying each on with a string so they could be worn throughout the game. They also created game pieces out of Lego that represented the different colours in various country's flags. Below are pictures that outline their game making process.



### Vocabulary list of words we learned about during the project:

- Manufactures
- Liquidators
- Concise
- Play-testing
- Proof-copy
- Roll and move

### Phase 3: Concluding the Project

The children all finished their board games at different times. Some groups were more eager to work on them, some of the games were very detailed, taking a little longer to complete, while some of the groups lost interest in completing their final game. However, each group completed their games fully and on the final day in program, before summer vacation started, the group had the opportunity to shares their games with everyone. Each group presented their games to each other, explaining how they worked and then the game play began. As the children played the games, questions arose about rules and the creators gave support. You could see the pride and self-confidence on everyone's face as they explained the rules and heard the positive compliments that everyone was giving. After the first round of games, the group had snack and during this time, everyone was able to give feedback about the games. Some gave suggestions on how something could be improved or shared their favourite part of a particular game. There were no hard feelings during this discussion and everyone was very welcoming with each suggestion. It seemed as if everyone had fun as there were smiles and laughter heard throughout the afternoon. Below are some pictures of the children engaged in our Board Game Day.





The children had to decide who was going to keep the game after the board game day was over. Some children just wanted the opportunity to take it home for the night to have a game night with their family and then bring it back for someone else to have. Others needed to have a discussion on how to decide fairly, which was done successfully.

There were so many lessons learned during this project. The first being the importance of hard work and perseverance. The children were very excited to create their own board games at the beginning of this project, not having a clear understanding of all of the steps that had to go into the process. Some of them started to lose interest part of the way through, but they were reminded of all the hard work they had already put into their project, which gave them the motivation to see it through to completion. The children were also able to build upon their teamwork and problem-solving skills. Each group encountered hiccups along the way, but together as a team, they worked through these problems and were able to come up with solutions that did not ruin the integrity of their games. Creativity and self-confidence were expressed when coming up with thoughts and ideas for their games, being allowed to express themselves without the fear of being judged. The children were able to build upon their research skills, learn how to find answers to specific questions and not being afraid to ask the questions that they had.

## Teacher Reflections

As this project was introduced I, as an educator became excited as well, as I have love for board games. At the beginning of the project, my hopes for the children were to create a game that they were proud of and could work on together as a team. I wanted them to be able to express themselves creatively and come up with a game that they would want to play themselves. It was fun to watch the process of them learning all of the steps involved with creating a game from scratch and seeing it through to the end when they could share it with their peers. I do not think they realized what a long process it would be and it was difficult to see some of them want to give up on what they were making. However, by lending them support and encouragement everyone was able to stand proudly by their board game and display the confidence they felt in their product when sharing it with the whole class.

Erin Wilhelm RECE, BA