

Australia (Victoria)

Bellaire Primary School. Meeting the needs of 21c learners

The Senior Learning Unit used by Bellaire Primary School personalizes student learning in Years 5 and 6 (age 10-13). Features are: Team teaching, student responsibility for own learning, and flexible movement between open learning spaces. Students formulate their individual learning goals and timetables, choose from subject-specific workshops and have weekly one-on-one conversations with their teacher (learning advisor) to evaluate their progress and support the learning process. The teachers themselves engage in regular coaching to develop their practice, and parents and community members are invited to support learning, for example, as guest speakers.

Main focus of innovation: TEACHERS, RESOURCES, ORGANISATION

Other keywords: learningspace

General Information

Name of the ILE: Bellaire Primary School. Meeting the needs of 21c learners

Location/Address: Larcombe Street PO Box Highton

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ILE submitted by: Department of Education & Early Childhood Development, Victoria, Australia

Rationale

Why do you suggest that it should be included in the project? How does it respond to 21st century learning challenges?

Bellaire Primary School has recently been heavily involved with the Victorian Innovations and Next Practice Branch. As part of our involvement, we developed our pedagogy and built an open learning space to meet the needs of 21st century learners. Our project has been enriched because we have been able to link with many other schools and learn from their Next Practice projects. We would like to be included in this project because we believe it will be another rich learning experience that will further develop our pedagogy and we also believe we have a lot to share with other schools.

Our learning environment responds to 21st century learning challenges because it personalises learning:

- our definition of personalising learning is that every student has individual learning goals that they are working towards which are supported by a negotiated curriculum;
- students then choose from a range of reading, writing, maths, integrated curriculum, sport, art, languages and ICT workshops to best meet their learning needs;
- therefore, each student has their own individual timetable that caters for their needs and interests;
- furthermore, individual conferencing time is set aside for each student, each week. This is one-on-one time between the teacher (learning advisor) and the student to celebrate, support and track learning progress.
- all of this happens with the support of a large range of technology and different learning spaces that the students use to meet their individual learning goals.

We believe this learning environment addresses 21st century learning because students are at the centre of their learning. They each know exactly what they need to do to become better learners and are able to take responsibility for their learning by choosing from a range of stimulating workshops. Student engagement data has shown great improvement since the beginning of our project.

Evidence

Is there any evidence or indications showing that this initiative achieves the outcomes that it is aiming at?

We have a team of 7 teachers (learning advisors) and two teacher aides who work with specific students.

The team is led by the unit leader who has the support of a curriculum coach (leading teacher). All teachers in the unit engage in team and individual coaching to further develop their teaching practice. All team members are active participants in the running of the unit and leadership development is nurtured.

All teachers are primary trained, with two having both primary and secondary qualifications.

All teachers are responsible for running stimulating workshops and conferencing one-on-one each week with the students in their home group. They also spend time having teaching conversations with independent workers. A strength of our learning community is that all teachers take responsibility for all students not just those they conference with.

Learning Aims / Intended Learning Outcomes of the ILE

What are the core learning aims and which knowledge, skills or attitudes are to be acquired? (These may include outcomes related to learners' social, interpersonal, or meta-cognitive development)

Through involvement in the project we hope to be able to learn more about meeting the needs of 21st century learners by engaging with a range of schools that are on a similar journey. One of our greatest challenges has been finding primary schools that are working within open learning communities that we can make links with for our teachers and for our students.

The knowledge, understanding and skills we would like to develop are:

- other ways of working within an open learning environment to engage students and impact learning outcomes;
- how to best support students achieving below expected levels to reach at and above expected levels;
- other ways to utilise ICT to engage and improve learning outcomes;
- how linking students at our school with students at other schools can improve learning outcomes; and
- different ways to staff open learning environments.

Learners

Which group(s) of learners is it aiming at? Who is eligible to take part? How many learners are there? What are their ages?

Our innovative learning environment is aimed at 140 grade 5 and 6 students aged between 10 and 13.

We have a strong focus on improving student data for all but also need to impact on a trend evident in our data that shows an increasing number of students achieving below expected levels as they move from prep to grade 6.

Facilitators

Who are the teachers/facilitators? Who are the leaders? What are their professional backgrounds? What are their roles?

We have a team of 7 teachers (learning advisors) and two teacher aides who work with specific students.

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Organization of the ILE

How is learning organised? How do learners and facilitators interact? What kind of pedagogy do they follow? What curriculum is used?

Each student is involved in a weekly one-on-one conference where learning goals are set for reading, writing and maths and learning is celebrated, supported and tracked. Teachers act as learning advisors, leading in depth discussions about the next steps that students need to take to become better readers, writers and mathematicians. Students bring evidence to their conferences that demonstrate progress they have made with the goals and tasks throughout the week.

Workshops are structured so that all students are part of weekly focus groups that explicitly teach the students the skills they need to develop to support their learning goals. The focus is on developing deep knowledge and deep understandings.

The objective of the curriculum is to support the individual needs of all students through engaging workshops in order to improve learning outcomes.

All students sign up for reading, writing, maths, integrated curriculum, sport, P.E., French, music, drama, ICT and art workshops. At any time during the day some students are involved in workshops, others are working independently on their learning goals and some are involved in one-on-one conferences with their learning advisor.

The curriculum is resourced by a wide range of technology (Mac laptops, Flip cameras, iPods', digital cameras, PCs, Netbooks, Smart Boards etc). There are also a range of different learning spaces to support students including a science area, art area, a theatre and outdoor learning spaces.

Learning Context

In which context does learning take place? What does the physical learning environment look like? Are community resources used to facilitate learning and how?

The students learn in an open community with 7 learning advisors. There are many different learning areas including an art area, a science area, a theatre and an outdoor learning space. The students have access to a wide range of technology and software to support their learning.

At any stage of the day, students can be seen learning in one of 3 ways:

1. They attend a weekly conference to celebrate, support and track learning.
2. They are involved in workshops each week where teachers use the Early Years whole/small/whole structure to explicitly teach the students.
3. They have independent sessions that are focused on achieving their learning goals where teachers challenge and support their learning.

Community members are asked to support learning by running workshops (for example, dance workshops), attending workshops as guest speakers (for example journalists, local council member, state MP and federal MP) and judging competitions (for example the local librarian judging writing competitions). Some students are also completing the Junior Rotary Award.

Parents are formally invited into the senior learning unit twice a year to participate in a student conference. However, they are able to come in as often as they would like as conferences take place each week. Some parents are unable to make it into conferences due to work commitments so we have recently started to video conferences and email them to parents. Parents are also invited in as parent helpers during workshops.

History of ILE

Who initiated it? For what reasons was it started and with what purpose? Have these changed since?

The project was initiated by the leadership team after concern was raised about student engagement. We are very aware that if the students are not engaged, they will not learn. The whole staff engaged in a discussion about the best starting point for the project and it was decided to begin by focusing on the Senior Learning Unit. This meant we would develop an open learning community for our grade 5 and 6 students.

The leadership team and teachers in the senior learning unit have driven the changes. We have a very clear vision and that is to engage all learners to meet individual learning needs while ensuring academic rigour.

Many changes have been made since the beginning of the project and will continue to be made. We have further developed our goal setting procedures and also now offer a greater range of workshops for the students to choose from. We are constantly introducing new technology and new ways to include technology in our teaching and learning. We are currently designing a unit of work that will be completed entirely through the use of ICT.

Funding of the ILE

How is it funded?

The funding for the building project was through the Commonwealth Investing In Schools fund and school council reserve. As a Next Practice project we also accessed a broad range of relevant professional learning, networking and experts.

Through our workforce plan, which has flexibility due to a younger workforce, enables the employment of an additional teacher 0.8 to cover student conferencing within the learning community. A leading teacher is also employed as a curriculum coach to support teacher development.

Learning Outcomes

What are the learning outcomes achieved by the ILE, including academic, social, interpersonal and meta-cognitive outcomes? How is learning assessed?

We have used many forms of data to track the effectiveness of our learning environment.

All student learning is tracked using an excel document during weekly conferences. This document tracks each student's learning goals and task progress. It also tracks how the students are feeling at school each week both academically and socially.

Workshop teachers take weekly notes about the progress of students in their workshops. The team have agreed upon the types of notes that are required and then these notes are swapped at regular intervals to inform reporting to parents.

VELS data is provided to teachers in many forms. At the beginning of each semester, teachers are provided with the VELS data for their home group. Data is presented in the form of a bar graph which clearly shows students who are achieving above and below expected levels in all areas of literacy and mathematics. Teachers then discuss this data during individual coaching sessions.

Coaching involves teachers setting a coaching goal that focuses on improving teaching. Teachers must decide on a goal that they think will impact data. Coaches then observe lessons and provide warm and cool feedback. At the end of a coaching cycle, teachers reflect on the sustainable changes they have made to their teaching as a direct result of the coaching process.

The team are also provided with data for all grades 5 and 6 students which they are required to reflect on, identify strengths and pinpoint areas for improvement. These areas are then discussed as part of coaching goals where the team develop an action plan to address areas of concern. Data is then tracked throughout the year.

NAPLAN data is used as another form of assessment. This is analysed by the team and compared to teacher based VELS assessments. Discussions then revolve around points for celebrations and areas that need further consideration due to differences in the data.

Teachers collect data throughout the year including PROBE, Torch, PAT maths, S.A. Spelling and some On Demand Tests. All forms of data are considered when reporting to parents.

The student attitude to school survey is closely tracked each year with dramatic improvements since the beginning of our project. The unit leader and curriculum coach talk to the students about the data to gain a deeper understanding of student opinions. Outcomes of these discussions are then shared with the team and action is put into place to address any areas of concern.

Parents are also invited to provide feedback about the learning environment. They are asked to respond to survey monkeys. Data is then analysed and action is put in place to ensure the continuing success of the learning community.