

Participating system

Knox Gardens Primary School. Learning Modules

Knox Gardens Primary School employs a special learning module for students in Year 5 (age 10-11), which includes co-teaching, flexible working spaces, collaborative student learning in flexible groups, curriculum negotiation, and a special emphasis on the use of technology to make students competent digital learners, for example by creating eBooks and communicating via blogs. A wide range of performance assessments are used to inform teaching practice.

Main focus of innovation: TEACHERS, CONTENT, RESOURCES, ORGANISATION

Other keywords: learningspace, technology-rich

General Information

Name of the ILE: Knox Gardens Primary School. Learning Modules

Location/Address: Argyle Way Wantirna South,

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?

Unit 5 is a new initiative at Knox Gardens P.S. (KGPS) in 2009 where all 46 Year 5 students work divergently within authentic contexts to create an innovative classroom community within the broader school spectrum.

We believe the learning arrangements in Unit 5 meet the criteria of an Innovative Learning Environment. The teachers and school are keen to expand their knowledge and capabilities linking with ‘best practice’ throughout the state, country and the world.

Involvement in an international research study would provide invaluable learning opportunities for students, staff and parents.

Maximizing student learning is our primary focus with the E5 Instructional Model providing the framework for purposeful teaching. Metacognition is accelerated and enriched by the use of digital technology and the promotion of critical and creative thinking skills are a key priority.

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)

The core learning aims through involvement in the LIE project are; enhanced and improved student learning outcomes and opportunities; increased teacher knowledge and capacity; improved and strategic use of flexible working spaces; expanded curriculum provision; professional learning from colleagues – school, region, state, country and overseas; sharing of ‘best’ and ‘next’ practice in education.

A challenge for the teachers is to create an ICT rich learning environment planning lessons that are informative, fun, challenging and interactive. The VELS domains are interwoven in order to deliver a cohesive, balanced curriculum addressing high expectations of learning outcome achievements, core learning requirements and new learning opportunities.

ICT capabilities are integral to success in a connected, fast moving 21st Century. It is therefore imperative that the students don’t just learn about technology but are immersed in it. Within the Unit students utilize computers, digital cameras, interactive whiteboard, video camera, printers, scanners and MP3 players to maximize their learning. Students think, analyse, apply and design with learning experiences such as Digital Storytelling, creating eBooks, and communicating using Blogs and Wikis.

Thinking skills, strategic open-ended problem solving, flexible working groups, multi-cultural understandings and core curriculum knowledge are needed to be acquired in meaningful and purposeful contexts. The use of pre-tests, post-tests, rubrics, peer and self assessment, surveys (student, staff and parents) will assist to broaden the students’ and teachers’ learning and understanding and provide measureable data for the ILE project.

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?

The Innovative Learning Environment is focussed in Year 5 – Level 4. The learning and teaching arrangements and experiences are shared with all teaching staff in the school. Different aspects of the new arrangement have been taken up in other year levels – the use of digital learning tools, thinking activities, flexible working spaces for example.

Forty-six students work in Unit 5, with two teachers. The children are ten or eleven years of age. All levels of ability are represented in the group ranging from a student with an intellectual disability, students with identified learning needs, and highly able and gifted students.

Many students are also working at the expected level and targets are set to increase the numbers of students working at expected levels and to decrease the number of students working below the expected level.

Facilitators

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

Class teachers:

Cathy Hoich – Expert Teacher, Thinking Skills co-ordinator

Alan Harris – Assistant Principal, Daily operations and management

Principal: Penelope Daley

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?

Unit Five is “future oriented” when planning for the educational needs of students.

The aim is to prepare all students for life in our digital world through a technology rich school environment. Such an approach is conducive to developing a number of skills in high demand such as interpersonal development, thinking, creativity, innovation and communication.

We explicitly teach skills for independence, collaboration and cooperation. In this era of globalisation the ability of individuals to learn and function as part of a group, across cultures, languages, religious beliefs and diverse approaches to learning is an essential learning capacity we need to instil in our students.

Teachers work with individuals, small groups, the whole group depending on the activity and the students’ learning needs. Groupings are flexible and can be teacher directed or student selected.

We provide our students with opportunities to move beyond the lower order cognitive skills of recall and comprehension to the development of higher order processes required for creative problem solving, decision making and conceptualising. They are encouraged to reflect on and direct their own learning as well as manage their own thinking; developing the capacity for metacognition.

When planning curriculum content in Unit Five, we aim to:

- take into account the needs, interests and preferred learning styles of students;
- effectively differentiate the curriculum;
- incorporate a variety of stimulating, challenging and open ended tasks;
- provide learning experiences that are structured, varied, flexible, hands on, purposeful and student centred;
- engage, focus and tune into children’s thinking and encourage them to make thinking visible.

An example of new successful learning activities for students is Digital Story Telling.

Currently Digital Story Telling is a popular learning activity within the Unit. It involves students in a highly engaging process. It inspires deep, relevant, interactive learning for all students and their needs, backgrounds, perspectives and interests are reflected. It gives students opportunities to enhance the expression of their own stories, thoughts and ideas in creative and engaging ways, connecting learning across a broad range of learning situations.

Learning materials and equipment are readily available in the room, for students to select and use, as required.

The organisation, planning and management of Unit 5 addresses the research question posed by the CERI/OECD project - *How can today's educational settings for ages 3-19 be transformed so as to become environments of teaching and learning that makes individuals lifelong learners and prepare them for the 21st Century?*

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 Unit recognises the importance of learning spaces. The underlying principles of Unit 5 are dependent on creating a learning environment that is structured, organised, flexible, positive, collaborative, aesthetically pleasing, and stimulating.

The arrangement of the Unit's learning space provides an open and accessible environment to the students. The Unit 5 community operates within an open double classroom with an attached "quiet learning" room. A pod of computers has been set up within one of the rooms. Teachers' resources and work spaces are within a separate office area.

In preparing the learning environment, consideration was given for whole group, small group and independent learning spaces. These flexible learning spaces within the class enable students to make choices on a daily basis as to where they base themselves. This daily arrangement encourages choice, independence and collaboration.

The Unit creates and transmits a sense of wonder, curiosity, expectation and welcoming to parents and children.

In line with Principle 6 of Principles of Teaching and Learning (PoLT), where learning connects strongly with communities and practice beyond the classroom, Unit 5 recognises that connecting more closely with communities enriches learning. Therefore, an important consideration in the creation of the Unit is providing students with an "audience" to showcase their learning experiences, share the knowledge gained, celebrate their successes and learn from the experiences of peers.

Parental support has been exceptional during and following a presentation regarding the set up of Unit 5 for the 2009 school year. As the unit evolves there are plans for greater parental involvement within the context of student learning.

History of ILE

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

The class teachers – Cathy Hoich and Alan Harris have planned and instigated a co-teaching arrangement and are passionate about developing a contemporary, creative and active learning environment. The students are a diverse group of digital learners who work collaboratively within the 21st Century classroom.

The project was inspired by the work and philosophy of Dr Loretta Giorcelli and the key influences of worldwide education trends and practices. Flexible working spaces, collaborative learning and negotiated curriculum are some aspects of the co-teacher and learning arrangements. Strong emphasis is on a 'Culture of Visible Thinking', the Multiple Intelligences and the social-emotional development of each student is apparent in planning, practice and learning contexts.

The skills the students acquire are heavily influenced by the effective use of ICT across the VELs domains. As a classroom of the 21st Century, strategic emphasis and expectations are placed on the students to become competent digital learners. Students make use of communication technology knowledge and resources as a natural choice for the attainment of their learning goals.

Funding of the ILE*How is it funded?*

The innovative learning environment is funded through the government funding arrangements provided to each school. Some locally raised funds are used to support program budgets across the school. The Principal is responsible to ensure the Student Resource Package is correctly and properly utilised across all learning areas and budgets in the school. Program budgets and year level resourcing is the responsibility of the teacher/s in charge of the particular budget.

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

Multiple data sources are used to measure student progress and satisfaction with the innovative learning environment.

Student learning is assessed in a number of ways:

Pre and post testing; surveys – student, staff, parent; rubrics; self and peer evaluation; standardised testing such as NAPLAN, on-demand testing (linear and adaptive). Anecdotal data and student responses through forums and class conversations also form an important source of information and data to drive effective, appropriate and relevant learning opportunities.

The data is gathered across the course of the year and recorded and stored in files, reports, portfolios, on disc, and in teacher records.

Teacher surveys, PoLT component mapping, professional observations and classroom visits, professional dialogue and performance reviews identify and scaffold the teachers' current capacity and expectations for the future.