

Australia (Victoria)

Grovedale West Primary School

Grovedale West Primary School (students aged 5-12 include deaf and autistic children) transformed its existing classrooms into spacious learning areas in order to use team teaching approaches with flexible groups of learners. Prep year students move between subject-specific areas (e.g. writing and math), with activities being integrated in overarching real-life themes. Older students work in "Inquiry Pods", which allow flexible grouping of students based on learning focus. Resources include a netbook computer and storage case for all senior students, to allow smooth movement between learning spaces and electronic communication with the teacher. Teachers cooperate in teams that share resources, and meet weekly to receive instructional coaching, track student progress and plan future teaching activities.

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

Other keywords: equity, learningspace

General Information

Name of the ILE: Differentiated Learning – Opening the opportunities!

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ILE submitted by: Grovedale West Primary School

Rationale

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

Our Assistant Regional Director suggested that we should apply as a result of the work that we have been doing in this area and the new learning environments that we have established. We have been doing much of this work independently and it would be great to further develop our knowledge by interacting with others and observing and learning about other quality innovative learning environments. We enjoy being challenged to drive new thinking and practice

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 aim of establishing our innovative learning environments has fundamentally been to differentiate curriculum to meet the learning needs of all students.

With a broad range of students including deaf and autistic children, it was important to create a learning environment that allowed them to access learning in a more purposeful way.

With a growing understanding of the need for a differentiated curriculum, teachers were also required to build their knowledge and capacity to work this way.

Student engagement, safety and connectedness to peers needed to be addressed and hence the skills of technology, sharing, team work, creativity and problem solving needed to become a key part of the curriculum. The traditional layout of the classrooms did not maximise these opportunities.

The capacity of the classroom teacher is the largest indicator of student success and the value adding to this of innovative learning spaces is the icing on the cake!

In some schools the facilities come before the knowledge of how to use them. We had built an understanding of what could be done and then went about creating spaces to allow it to happen. Of course like any school, there is still further work to be done as our knowledge base and opportunity for new resources continue grow.

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 focus is on whole school improvement resources have enabled us at this stage to focus on making structural changes to the Junior and Senior areas of the school. Along with the structural changes, all staff within the school have undertaken programs to build their capacity to work in 21st Century learning spaces.

Although teachers across the school have begun to utilise their classroom learning spaces in more innovative ways, the focus of this work has been on our Prep students and or senior students. Both areas have had their learning spaces redesigned to provide the students with more flexible opportunities, greater natural light and where possible future outdoor learning spaces.

The Prep space has been done with the use of minimal funding resources and within the older school layout, whilst the senior area has been completely remodelled and opened up to the external environment.

A new learning area is currently being constructed for our Junior students that will allow them very flexible learning opportunities, easy access and movement for room to room and large flexible indoor and outdoor spaces.

Facilitators

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

This is a whole school improvement journey being undertaken by the school team. It is part of our shared vision and focus on ensuring improved learning outcomes for all students and requires the commitment to improvement in professional practice by all.

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?

Our Prep Developmental Learning Centre provides many different learning spaces to provide a range of learning opportunities for children. Children have the opportunity to move from wet areas, to writing centres, ICT centres, passive reading spaces, small world play areas, and creative spaces. Children's tables are placed throughout the room and not grouped or lined up in rows. Electronic whiteboards are used for our Prep children to report back on their learning on a daily basis with the support of visual images.

Students working in the SIPOD meet together at various times of the day in their spacious common room. This room has their passive library and research space and the daily organisational resources, timetables etc. The group meets as a whole in this area to undertake whole group learning before breaking off into smaller teaching groups, collegiate groups or independent activities.

The learning space has been established to provide children with access to several electronic whiteboards, glassed enclosed learning spaces and several different open planned work spaces.

Each of the programs is based around rigorous data collection.

The school is committed to providing quality core skills in literacy and numeracy.

ICT is an integral component of learning at each level.

There is an expectation that the programs encompass a minimum of two hours core literacy and one hour of core numeracy daily although both are integral to all areas of the developmental and inquiry learning throughout the day.

A key factor in the success of the programs is the time that has been allocated to ensure that the teams of teachers can meet together each week to monitor data, reflect on their practice and to identify the required programs for the students for the coming week. This professional interaction has provide the teachers with the knowledge to see how they can work differently to what they have done in the past due to a greater understanding of the students and the opportunity to share the planning and teaching.

In designing the learning spaces we have had a focus on creating a very calm, flexible environment in which teachers and students can move around easily and use in many different ways. We were also mindful the technology use creates the need for a different learning environment where children no longer need to be sitting at a desk.

Prep Learning Centre (5 / 6 years of age)

The Prep classrooms are in the original building and each class has been established using two regular sized classrooms. They are focused around developing quality literacy and numeracy practices through the use of developmental learning and play experience.

Each Prep classroom is very spacious and is arranged with a number of different learning spaces. Literacy and Numeracy skills are developed through interaction and manipulation of materials. Children are required to problem solve together, plan ideas, measure outcomes and communicate their thinking. The focused teaching of literacy and numeracy skills is done through hands on interaction with materials as well as strategic teaching. The model provided opportunities for the development of quality speaking and listening skills. Students become quite independent in their actions within the classroom.

The teachers use the learning spaces to strategically develop specific skills.

The classrooms have writing spaces, small world play spaces, creative spaces, arts spaces, manipulation spaces, math spaces, sciences spaces etc.

At the moment the theme is animals and each classroom has a Veterinary Clinic created in a space in which the children develop their literacy and numeracy skills through real life experiences. During Term One they had play- based restaurants in the classrooms as their theme was food. This enabled the children to be writing menus, learning how to welcome customers, calculating accounts, writing labels etc.

In late 2010 the two individual Prep rooms will be opened up as one larger space enabling the two teachers to work with all of the children and have greater opportunity to provide individualized learning for the students in very flexible spaces.

The classrooms cater for a broad range of students including deaf and autistic children.

MIPOD - Middle Inquiry Pod (9 / 10 years of age)

The MIPOD is currently situated in three older classrooms within the original building.

The teachers are currently planning together to redevelop their program to prepare for a new learning space that they are about to move into.

This team of three classes with four teachers is about to move into a large new purpose built open learning environment in the next few weeks, which includes three large light and flexible learning spaces as well as an extra large open learning space.

Each room has an electronic whiteboard and the students have access to Netbook computers.

The spaces will not have specific grades with children allocated to them, but will be used by different groups of children at different times. Children will have the opportunity to work independently in passive learning spaces. The furniture has been purchased to provide more flexibility with soft furnishings, floor cushions, flexible tables and seating. Cupboards on wheels can create different learning spaces.

An inquiry model is used at this level to ensure that the children develop research, planning and team work skills as well as broad knowledge.

The teaching team will share all classroom resources and teacher's desks will not be placed in classrooms. They have been allocated a teacher space to work and plan together.

The teachers currently spend three hours each week planning together and using student data to identify the next point of learning in Literacy and Numeracy. An Instructional Coach works with the team to challenge their thinking and to encourage them to reflect on their practice. The team then groups the students according to the children's specific needs at that time. They also have PIN groups, which are 'priority, interest and needs' groups, providing additional support to groups of students.

The students set goals for their learning and reflect on their performance frequently over time. The children have a clear understanding of any tasks required of them, what they need to do to be successful and what they will learn. (WALT, WILF)

The teacher monitors student learning by using a cross check where they take anecdotal notes of student learning on a daily basis and provide frequent formal assessment tasks.

The new space will allow the four teachers to work flexibly with the group of about 75 students. At times one teacher may be focusing on tasks with only a small group of students while the other teachers work with larger groups.

The classrooms cater for a broad range of students including deaf and autistic children.

The SIPOD - Senior Inquiry Pod

This is a refurbished space completed in January 2010 in an older building for our Year 5 and 6 students (11 / 12 year olds)

The focus of the design was to provide a number of spacious light filled flexible learning spaces to cater for approximately 70 students. The large learning space is white with bright colors and is very uncluttered.

The teachers have a separate teacher space where they plan together. Students are grouped according to the particular teaching focus and move in fluid groups in and out of activities.

Every student has a Netbook computer, which is integral to the working of the program. The students use their computers to communicate with their teachers, research and plan work and to further develop their skills.

The students also have their own transportable storage case which contains their work and booklets and can be easily carried from one learning space to another.

An inquiry model is used at this level to ensure that the children develop research, planning and teamwork skills as well as broad knowledge.

Each learning space has an electronic interactive whiteboard.

The children enjoy working in a number of different spaces including on cushions on the floor. We have a room called the 'fishbowl' where the children can quietly work but be seen by the teachers.

The students develop personal goals and are required to explicitly demonstrate their outcomes in their work. They conference with their teachers in order to select new goals and to identify the work required to achieve them.

The students meet together in a relaxed common room throughout the day to undertake learning tasks and to hear daily information with their teachers.

The classrooms cater for a broad range of students including deaf and autistic children.

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 Prep learning environment is not typical of a regular Prep classroom. The room has many different learning spaces that enable children to select their investigation and then to undertake it. Technology is used to document children's investigations and track their progress over time. The Preps are required to plan as part of their learning and then to make, develop, construct, perform or write when developing their project. Maths and Literacy skills are strategically matched to the hands on learning that the children are doing. Cross checks are used on a daily basis to ensure that all aspects of the child learning are being met. The core literacy and numeracy skills are developed as a result of the value adding of the children's individual experiences.

Their learning and progress is not left to chance with data used to document their skills development and to drive their future learning. The children no longer sit and learn one letter at a time! They learn how new learning think links to more new learning and that they have the power to drive this learning!

The senior student's learning is based around personal goal development. The children meet with their teachers to discuss real data and to identify their personalised needs. The team of three teachers provides strategic programs to meet the needs of changing cohorts of children based on their next learning point of need. Groups are fluid and change, based on the child reflecting on his / her goals and providing evidence of outcomes. Children earn the right to select personal learning spaces and help to develop the expectations of tasks, rules and protocols. The teachers meet with the students on a regular basis to discuss their goals. All children have personal use of Netbook computers enabling them to work in different ways within the learning space.

The teachers have identified the learning styles of each of the children and endeavour to provide a broad range of learning experiences to cater for the needs of each of the students.

Both the senior and junior learning centres have the additional support of community volunteers at various times throughout the week.

History of ILE

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

As a new Principal to the school in late 2006, the student data clearly told me that there was a real need for differentiation in the curriculum.

We needed to identify the individual learning needs of every student and then work towards learning how to scaffold each of them from their point of need.

Student engagement, connectedness and attendance were a big issue and therefore we needed to consider how we could build our capacity as educators. Rooms were cluttered, children were seated at tables and there was little use of technology within the regular classroom. There was a strong need for the classroom to become a learning resource and for the layout of the room to cater for broader curriculum provision.

The teaching staff were keen to do things differently and undertook research and professional dialogue to identify what was needed to make the difference. This resulted in a comprehensive curriculum focus and change to what and how we taught and the establishment of the Junior Developmental Learning Centre and the Senior Inquiry Learning Centre now known as MIPOD (Middle Inquiry Pod) and SIPOD (Senior Inquiry Pod).

Classrooms are now technology rich; they display many visual learning resources for children and have greater flexibility of use. Older classrooms had walls removed, furniture was prioritised and the curriculum was designed to allow children to have greater flexibility in their learning.

The opportunity to do a substantial renovation of an older learning space has seen the development of our new spacious, flexible light filled SIPOD for our senior students.

Funding of the ILE

How is it funded?

The school has funded the more minor structural changes in the Prep area.

Government funding has enabled us to redesign a thirty five year old space to become a more light filled flexible learning space.

The new innovative learning space currently under construction and due for completion in June 2010 has been funded by the Federal Government.

Learning Outcomes

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

The school uses a range of data sources to ensure whole school improvement and to maximise student learning outcomes. Such sources include Data Plans, Strategic Plans, Annual Implementation Plans, surveys, formative assessment processes and anecdotal evidence. Data is also used to audit teacher practice and knowledge guiding new learning.

An instructional coaching model has been developed, involving members of the teaching team for one hour each on a weekly basis. Each team also receives one hour of instructional coaching prior to a scheduled two hour team planning session where data is used to plan learning for the following week. The provision of time for coaching and team planning has resulted in a greater focus on the curriculum meeting the needs of each of our students.

Our Attitude to School Survey data, Parent Opinion data and general student learning outcomes have shown continuous improvement over the past three years as we further develop our knowledge of good teaching practice, differentiated learning and purposeful learning environments.

The school has focussed on effective feedback as a means of driving improvement in student learning outcomes. We continue to improve our understanding of effective feedback and how it can be used within a differentiated curriculum to support student learning