Aims of the ILE and the nature and history of the innovation: holistic picture of the organization

Established in 1970, Manchester Primary School now holds 315 students on one campus from Prep to Year 6. The school is located in the outer eastern suburb of Mooroolbark, Melbourne, at the gateway to the Yarra Ranges and is celebrating its 40th anniversary this year (2010).

Manchester Primary School is currently undergoing many physical innovations including a ‘flexible learning space’ for entire school assemblies, a brand new junior school and a new 21st Century Library Learning Neighbourhood. These upcoming and recent innovations in the physical school environment are funded by Federal Government Economic Stimulus Package – ‘National School Pride’ and ‘Building the Education Revolution’ initiatives. This adds to existing structures and spaces that include playing...
fields, two separate adventure playgrounds, sculptured landscape gardens, shaded areas, an outdoor amphitheatre and access to the local high school.

Figure 3. The new assembly and performance hall  Figure 4. The new Junior School under construction

Overall, a strong, overarching emphasis on collaboration, negotiation and community displays an organizational understanding of the relationships within the school as the components of the learning environment. The school purpose states:

To create an environment where staff and students collaborate in their learning, enabling everyone to reach their potential through an innovative and negotiated curriculum that challenges and supports all members of the school community. (website)

The school’s film-making expertise is highlighted through their presence and contribution to a local Film Festival. This collaborative, creative, student-centred initiative has been a trigger for deeper and more consistent innovations in the learning environment. Upon visiting or phoning the school the stated purpose of generating ‘optimistic’ and ‘contributing members of society’ (website) is evident as the students answer the school’s phone, manage the ordering and delivering of fruit to classrooms, have ownership over particular sites (such as the school vegetable garden) and frequently collaborate in community events such as the school fete, reunions and public performances.

‘Attitude to School’ survey results are uneven; however the school cites general anecdotal evidence of enjoyment and satisfaction with school. Parent involvement on site has many forums and staff renewal has burgeoned after many years of very little change. In the school’s documents and Principal’s description, changes in the cultural profile of the school are concurrent with changing socio-economic status evidence by recent ACIARA-ICEAS indicators. There is now a broader socio-economic spread of family income status. The school’s Student Family Occupation (SFP) Index is at 0.47 which indicates that families are becoming increasingly affluent.
The school’s motto is ‘Growth through Excellence’. The Principal asserts that this is accomplished through a sustained focus on literacy and numeracy. This excellence is clearly fostered through the generation of a student-centered learning environment and the school’s core values: ‘Respect: respect for self, others, the environment and for learning and achievement’. (website)

Manchester Primary School has a clear student-centred vision and a focus on collaborative professional relationships amongst staff. Team teaching and planning is actively encouraged and whole-staff professional learning experiences have informed school directions: the Kathy Walker Developmental Curriculum approach, TRIBES, Girlfriends, E5 and restorative practices.

The TRIBES program is a preventative, relationship based wellbeing program involving the use and fostering of behavior specific meta-language, mentoring and student led TRIBES family nights. The ‘Restorative Practices Program’ also plays a central role in promoting a positive attitude to behaviour management and conflict resolution. Words used by staff and school leadership to describe the embodiment of a general wellbeing in the Learning Environment include ‘participation’, ‘belonging’, a sense of ‘connectedness’ and ‘motivation’. These values are evidenced in a Year 2 initiative that involves students taking ownership of a designated school site and then remaining responsible for its condition and maintenance for the duration of their school experience. This demonstrates a cognizance of the significance of space and place to student experience of belongingness and connectedness at, and to, school from an early stage.

Curriculum is strongly aligned with Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS). VELS are used to create student-centered, negotiated curricula rather than as mere strata for assessment. Kathy Walker’s Developmental Curriculum informs the Prep to Year 2 classroom environment while inquiry models and negotiated curriculum informs the middle and upper primary years.
Structured patterns and characteristics of ILE: layout, sequencing and mix of learning activities

This section identifies and elaborates the main features of the built and non-built settings which are significant to the innovation of this learning environment:

- The use of traditional classrooms in pedagogical innovation
- Student leadership, ownership and responsibility
- Curriculum as learning environment
- The role of language in contributing to the learning environment
- Integrated ICT
- Outdoor learning areas and education for Sustainability

The use of traditional classrooms in pedagogical innovation

The early years (Prep-2), middle and upper primary years are housed in two parallel large blocks of traditional classroom buildings. These buildings stand alone surrounded by shared play areas. Years 3-4 are located in an isolated portable classroom in the middle of the central asphalt courtyard. A large oval, gardens and adventure playgrounds provide enjoyable sites for children in the school.

Conceptualizations of learning environment at Manchester Primary School are significantly non-physical in their description and emphasis. Descriptions of the school’s learning environment taken from the ‘Student Engagement Policy’ and school website include:

- ...safe, secure and stimulating learning environment
- ...Positive school culture
- ...where staff and students collaborate in their learning
- ...innovative and negotiated curriculum that challenges and supports all members of the school community
- ...shared responsibility with home, school and with the community
- ...student negotiated in an atmosphere which is secure, caring, safe and positive to all
- ...safe, secure, harassment free environment

![Figure 6. Student designs create a colourful atmosphere](image1)
![Figure 7. Small groups create a secure and stimulating learning environment](image2)

Student leadership, ownership and responsibility
Clear acknowledgement of the ‘core’ significance of students’ social and emotional wellbeing in the learning environment is evident in the ‘Student Engagement Policy’ drafted out of insight and commitment to the TRIBES program. The school asserts: ‘student engagement and school connectedness underpin student learning’.

Students have the opportunity to be elected, chosen and nominated for various responsibilities and awards including House Captains, managing assemblies, acting as ambassadors on Junior School Council and Student Recognition Awards. A volunteer environmental group, the YEP team (Young Environmental Protectors), meet at lunchtime and have achieved outstanding results on the school site, involving whole school organization of resources, and have gained significant funding and awards.

**Curriculum as learning environment**

The curricular environment is a key element in the non-built atmosphere of Manchester Primary School. It is a stated expectation that teachers negotiate the curriculum and assessment procedures and class environment with students (student engagement policy). It is intended that each child has equal opportunity to participate and play a role in fostering positive and enjoyable classroom relationships through a TRIBES focus. It is evident in the developmental curriculum model in the early years (Prep to Year 1) and middle school research projects that student learning goals are explicitly negotiated. Teachers at Manchester devote a great deal of time and attention to this aspect of their work. This was highlighted in an interview with one of the Early Years team:

*We have two focus children each day so my attention for this day is a little bit more on these children - I might take more notes, spend more time. (Teacher)*

Formative assessment and planning is a large part of a whole picture in which curriculum and assessment are both integrated and understood:

*We keep all of our observational notes, still keep running records, still moderate all of their writing, there’s still all of those checks still in place, we still have to reach all of those benchmarks. (Teacher)*

Focus on organization is paramount and is spoken of almost synonymously with learning. This overt and explicit pedagogical positioning on the part of the teachers is intended to create and support expectations of agency amongst students from a very early age. This is a gradual process and students need to assert agency in learning and the relationship with their teacher:

*Some of them are still waiting for the teacher to tell them what they’re meant to be doing. The one’s who need the support now, might be the previously ‘smarter’ one because the learning here is learning, organization… (Teacher)*

A daily plan is written up on the whiteboard and discussed with all children. From VELS and developmental observation, the teachers write their decided focus and goals for the day. For example, ‘to spell high frequency words correctly’.
The Learning Focus for Today....

**Literacy**
- writing interesting sentences
- speaking in a loud voice
- ‘th’ sound

**Numeracy**
- Compare and order items

**Other**
- Thinking for myself

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**Term 4 2010 Prep Portfolio**

“Going on the computer

Going across the monkey bars

Playing football doing big kicks

Cutting on the line”

LOOK WHAT I CAN DO…………

Individual student learning plans (ILP) are used as a remedial measure when students are identified as having difficulties. Reading recovery is an aspect of this plan, where students might individually attend these sessions in a small portable classroom. The same portable houses the music program. Intensive intervention in preparation for NAPLAN testing in May is timetabled and indicated on the Annual School Implementation Plan.

The timetabling and room allocation is important both for team teaching and for the implementation of curricular programs. For example the ERP’s (Education Research Projects) is a program of planning, proposal, design and development for individual students in Years 3 to 6. These ERPs require one-on-one teacher time, which is planned for, and enough space and time to enable students to develop and complete their chosen project over the term.

That conversation is with the proposal phase, it’s quite a big document...we find we have to be one-on-one with each child. It takes about 15 mins for each child...

...Then we say, “Well what kind of project are you going to do that meets these outcomes?

(Teacher)

This aspect of the learning environment leads to student and teacher satisfaction.

Kathy said she likes to have about 3 in the week and we’ve been able to timetable 4. (Teacher)
The environmental sustainability focus has deeply and richly affected the school physical setting and reputation. These responsibilities have been carefully graphed according to the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS).

- Level 2 and 3 Z-FORCE students vigilant in preventing weeds.
- Level 3 manage composting and worm farm completing their VELS unit on Biodiversity.
- Level 4 study the sensitive ecosystems in the National Park.
- All levels learn aspects of Biodiversity in LOTE.
- YEP students train others.
- Junior School Council manages Rubbish Free Lunch Days.
- Parent Club and School council organize working bees.

The role of language in contributing to the learning environment

*When we are doing our planning for the term, rather than having a topic, we just go straight to the VELS. (Teacher Year 3-6)*

Familiar to teachers but not generally to students, the language of VELS domains and outcomes are used explicitly with students at Manchester Primary School when planning, discussing and refining working goals. Much of this language is goal oriented. The children are asked to undertake the process of setting goals, plan for learning and self assessment. This conversation and its specific language re-orient learning to not only include assessment explicitly at the outset of sequences but to also include students in all aspects of planning and achieving negotiated learning goals. This language permeates the learning environment from early years and onwards.

The intentional outcomes chosen by teachers and negotiated through projects by students are VELS focussed:

*So the language of VELS is the language we use with the children. We’ve got those (Progression points) displayed in the room, it’s in the classrooms, in the corridor, it’s in our planning, it’s in their proposals and we just constantly refer to that. (Teacher)*

Some other pedagogical language that infuses learning and the learning environment includes:

- **Appreciation** – used as a noun to invite and direct recognition and feedback i.e. “Does anyone have an appreciation?”

- **ERPs** – Education Research Projects: negotiated, individual projects for junior school students Years 3-6. “ERP time” is timetabled 4 times a week and culminates in an EXPO display, presentation and awards. This inquiry and negotiated pedagogical approach clearly partners children in the discourse of learning.

**Integrated ICT**

Manchester Primary School has a strong commitment to integrated ICT and is an integral part of student enjoyment and wellbeing; this includes a ratio of 1:4 computers to students, interactive whiteboards, digital still and video cameras in each classroom, a 15 station hub, and learning experiences and assessments based on podcasting, filming, animation and web modeling. Rather than a tool or a mode of learning, the larger-community oriented possibilities of IT have been embraced through the encouragement and creation of websites, entries into a local film festival and the production of extensive and professional animations through an ‘Artist in Residency’ program.
Manchester Primary School’s Artist in Residency Program was an artist and student collaborative animation project. Students’ animations were screened and the ‘Animate Me’ publication displays student perceptions and experiences of the learning process.

Students created their own storylines, characters and shot each frame of the filmed animations. As well as learning about the craft, the cartoon genre enabled students’ voices another platform to speak and reflect on learning and teaching experiences in their own words.
Outdoor learning areas and Education for Sustainability (EfS)

The outdoor areas in the school represent significant part of the learning environment. Several playing fields, adventure playgrounds, shaded areas, native, vegetable and sculptured landscape gardens create a vital and stimulating learning environment that implicitly acknowledges the importance of play, of nature and of whole school experience in learning.

Native trees were planted 20 years ago, which now attract birds and wildlife. This area is a rich ecology, maintained understory, a lizard lounge and nesting boxes which nourish and attract biodiversity. These are planted, maintained, researched and documented by students. These biodiverse spaces signify an acknowledgement of the schools sense of place in the global and local ecological community.

Classes maintain native garden beds. Such regular and real responsibility is organized across the primary year levels: in 2008, Year 3s completed a biodiversity audit of the school grounds, listed all the wildlife they could find, planted a vegetable garden and cooked with the produce. The vegetable garden continues to be a central part of the day-to-day life of the school, with students selling any excess produce to the school community at the end of school day.

The Australian Research Institute for Education for Sustainability (ARIES) at Macquarie University defines EfS as education ‘in’, ‘for’ and ‘about’ the environment. Differing from a conventional outdoor education focus, EfS presents engaging and progressive pedagogical opportunities that have been embraced by Manchester Primary School.

Manchester Primary School has taken up the interdisciplinary learning goals of VELS in positioning Sustainability as a ‘cross-curricula perspective’, available to all year levels and domains. Their work is rooted in the stated goals of the National Statement for Australian Schools and expresses the global citizenship commitments of both the United Nations Decade for Education for Sustainable Development (2004-2014) and the Melbourne Declaration of Educational Goals for Young Australians (2008). They have done this by student leadership, management and ownership of places around the school, maintaining consistent outdoor learning sites and valuing the ecological diversity of the school as land and country.
The school has had outstanding achievement in the area of environmental sustainability. Rainwater tanks are decorated with student murals (see for example Figure 6) and the water harvested is used to maintain the school outdoor learning areas such as the vegetable garden. There are signs on light switches and taps to remind users throughout the school to conserve.

Significantly, these accomplishments have been achieved by a student run team. A group of Year 4-6 students (the YEP Team) organize a self-initiated program that maintains the schools outdoor sustainability projects and purposefully educates the school community about sustainability.

- Won a Bluescope steel tank in the 'A Tank a Day' competition.
- Became a 'Water - Learn it. Live it.' school.
- Shire of Yarra Ranges Sustainable School - Stage 1.
- Special Commendation as a 'Biodiversity Smart School of the Year'.
- Highly Commended in the Rubbish Free Lunch.
- Won the 'Sustainables Challenge'.
- Presented achievements in sustainability to a broader community audience on the Yarra Valley Radio.
- Year 2 students presented their ideas on Energy Efficiency to a network meeting of environment teachers.
- Won and planted 700 Indigenous plants.

The YEP team meet at lunchtime (their own time) and recently won a finalist position in the statewide ResourceSmart Sustainable Schools Awards 2010 (ResourceSmart School Awards, 2010) under the auspices of Sustainability Victoria. YEP Leaders have authority that extends across the school and includes teaching teachers. They have won awards and several rounds of funding, are responsible for the maintenance of projects and the launching of new initiatives.

The ‘Rubbish Free Lunch Challenge’ is an initiative of DEECD. Manchester Primary School has created it as a student-run competition with a well-thought out plan to award a student who succeeds bringing a ‘rubbish-free lunch’ to school. Remarkably, the YEP team measured and reduced rubbish from 15.76kgs a day to 8kg.

Many of these outdoor environments were initiated by the YEP team who gained funding and maintained and used by students. Through the student YEP team and the curriculum units that surround this issue, EfS is rich part of the ILE at Manchester Primary School. Students act as wildlife watchers, ensure the mindful use and disposal of natural resources and research the biodiversity on
school grounds. This rich engagement with the learning environment relates strongly to citizenship and global learning pedagogies (MDEGYA).
Many of these outdoor environments were developed and are now used and maintained by students. The YEP team lead this work. EfS is rich part of the ILE at Manchester Primary School. Students act as wildlife watchers, ensure the mindful use and disposal of natural resources and research the biodiversity on school grounds. This rich engagement with the learning environment relates strongly to citizenship and global learning pedagogy (MDEGYA).

Nature and Quality of Learning

"The learning the whole way through is about the process not about the product."
(Teacher)

This section of the Manchester Primary School case study examines how teachers, students and the community make use of and create the ILE. It addresses the extent of innovation as seen through student and teacher behavior and pedagogical practices. The Learning Environment is considered by the staff at Manchester as primarily pedagogical. The physical spaces respond to the demands of the pedagogical imperatives of the staff:

"...we've really come to the conclusion that it's just about the pedagogy not about the room you are working in." (Teacher, Early Years)

Despite the new investments in built settings, not all teachers are as yet fully aware of the possibilities of the links between space and pedagogy and in particular the way space can prompt pedagogical improvement. Rather, they see pedagogy as inherent in teaching practice and not dependant on spatial advantages or constraints. In spite of this, the use made of small and conventional spaces by teachers demonstrates a significantly creative and innovative awareness of this relationship as well as an active commitment to the transformative opportunities the spaces offer.

The Early Years: Prep-Year 2

In the Early Years a student-centred and goal oriented learning environment is maintained through language, daily structures, individual learning plans and relationships (see Figure 8). The aim is to specifically orient children purposefully at school and make their time feel worthwhile.

"We are not just making, we are learning..." (Teacher, Early Years)

This also specifically teaches students the discourse of learning so that the outcomes are embedded and known.
The types of play suggested by Walker (2007) is specifically planned for and organised in the nooks, indoor and outdoor places. Walker identifies: imaginative and socio dramatic play; constructive play and investigative play; explorative play; directed play and scaffolded play; and sensory play (see images in Figures 19 to 24). Walker also identifies ‘Stages of Play’ which teachers observe and anecdotally assess together in terms of the child’s eagerness, involvement, and sociability. Walker’s Stages are:

1. Onlooker Play
2. Solitary Play
3. Parallel Play
4. Associative Play
5. Cooperative Play
These are formatively assessed through observation by teachers. In Year 2 and above students are immersed in an inquiry model, where they discuss their interests with their teacher in depth and create a proposal that:

...meets the VELS outcomes while still being something they are interested in... (Teacher)

Eleven nooks in one portable classroom demonstrate active teacher work in creating an interesting, engaging and stimulating learning environment that encourages play. The images are listed here with the identified ‘types of Play’ in Kathy Walkers’ Developmental Curriculum which informs the ILE.

Figure 19. Imaginative Play
Figure 20. Explorative Play
Figure 21. Constructive Play
Figure 22. Directed or Scaffolded Play
Figure 23. Socio Dramatic Play
Figure 24. Sensory Play
The students are either scattered throughout the learning spaces equally engaged in diverse activities or sitting in a group. Individual time with teachers is planned for and managed. Teachers are passionate in speaking about their work and in identifying the purpose of their exchanges, actions and structures and articulating these with students.

_They know what they want to do...they’re not waiting to be fed._ (Teacher)

The images below evidence the positive impact of individual time with teacher. The time between the first image (Figure 25) and second (Figure 27) is one minute.

![Figure 25 Smiling student Year 1 classroom](image)

This student has just finished some one-on-one time with her teacher. She showed him her writing and read her story. He said her writing was ‘really beautiful writing’. This positive interaction fills the student and the environment.

![Figure 26 Fisher’s “applying” spatial pedagogy positioning](image)

Fisher’s (2005) matrix describes this spatial pedagogy as a learner-centered, apprentice model. The pedagogical activity is ‘applying’ in an informal though controlled, one-to-one, active demonstration and understanding positioning (p.9).

![Figure 27 Early years teacher moving away from individual focus to roving around the group](image)

Here the teacher is seen moments after, observing the group of boys work. The young student still smiling in lower right corner of the image.

Fisher recognizes this format as leaderless, egalitarian and active in multiple disciplines. The teacher has distributed attention through recognized need. This is the spatial pedagogy of ‘creating’.

![Figure 28 Fisher’s “creating” spatial pedagogy positioning](image)

The following images apply Fisher’s (2005) _Linking Pedagogy and Space_ analysis tool, which posits that pedagogical activity has associated space types. Fisher describes individual, group, activity rich, informal and staff settings in schools as having spatial correspondences with pedagogical practice.
This analysis of observational data shows teachers engaging with the pedagogical possibilities of a non-innovative space.

Each day students meet with their home group and teacher in the morning and/or afternoon. This setting brings the teacher in focus as she/he discusses and articulates the learning goals for the day. The teacher generates and controls discussion, delivers, presents and instructs.

Two children are chosen to focus on each day, as a part of ongoing, structured formative assessment. This is located in the space informally and formally. This intimate time allows for personalized learning, assessment and planning as well as demonstration.

Investigations time is inquiry, activity and practice where children are invited to place themselves in areas that they identify would most benefit their chosen goals for the day.

Fisher further identifies this grouping as a ‘project space’ which has spatial and pedagogical qualities.

**The Primary Years: Year 3-6**

In Years 3-6 there is a structured Numeracy and Literacy block during the day. Rather than an inquiry model, this student-centred approach is used during the rest of the learning time. It is planned that
specific, bulk, instructional focus on Literacy and Numeracy happens for Years 3’s and 5’s in May (Annual Implementation Plan).

For Years 3-6, rather than have an integrated unit they undertake Education Research Projects (ERP). Most days students undertake the planning or development of their personal project. This is a large scale, term-length, multifaceted project which has several phases including planning and proposal documentation, design and physical development and exposition and presentation. The ERP aspect of upper primary Years is the site of innovation at Manchester Primary School.

So we start a conversation at the start of the term, and I really draw that out of the children. And it can be anything. Then I say ok, keeping that in mind, these are the outcomes we’ve chosen for you this term. And we really unpack the outcomes. Then we start talking about how we can have a project that meets these objectives but is still based on what you’re interested in. (Teacher)

Timetabling and room allocation is important here for team teaching, and this structure is still developing:

So all the Grade 3s and 4s are having that at the same time. The idea is, although we are not up and running with it yet, we can move between rooms, the children can go to other teachers, or I might say I’m going to take a group of children, it might be planting or woodwork or just need a special skill and that needs that attention...so I’ll be plucking them for any of the grades, it doesn’t have to be my own. (Teacher)

**Impact and Effectiveness of ILE**

This section addresses the pedagogical innovations at Manchester Primary School that drive and substantially constitute the ILE. The age and conventional design of the school doesn’t seem to impact on pedagogy, although a few constraints are acknowledged. New buildings are currently being erected so their existence is in planning and possibility.

Our rooms, they probably hinder us but we haven’t found that it overrides pedagogy. (Teacher)

**Student learning**

There are positive indicators regarding student learning, student satisfaction and student engagement through the regular and active occurrence of student-centered opportunities,
responsibilities and initiatives. From the developmental curriculum’s goal-oriented and negotiated curriculum structures, a teacher states:

*Probably the biggest difference is the independence in their own learning, they take charge of their own learning, know what they want to do, they’re engaged, there really aren’t the behaviour issues.* (Teacher)

The use, enactment and generation of elements addressed earlier in this report:
- The use of traditional classroom environments in pedagogical innovation
- Student leadership, ownership and responsibility
- Curriculum as learning environment
- The role of language in contributing to the learning environment
- Integrated ICT
- Outdoor learning areas and education for sustainability

These have also been influential in student learning and satisfaction. The centrality of students in the school learning environment occurring in the negotiated curricular environments of the developmental curriculum in Early Years and the Inquiry Modeled Upper Years is supported by the emphasis placed on students’ social and emotional wellbeing in the learning environment.

*‘student engagement and school connectedness underpin student learning’* (Student Wellbeing Policy)

Ownership of particular sites around the school, the opportunity to be elected, chosen and nominated for various responsibilities and awards, management and community roles and in particular negotiated learning plans and goals constructs a solid example of student-centred learning environments within an old, conventional school building.

As part of the data collection process students from each campus photographed their learning environment, mapped their learning through drawing and discussed their school in focus group interviews. Their data speaks just as much about student learning as it does about student satisfaction. The following data is representative of findings regarding a strong sense of student belonging, attachment to the outdoor environment and students’ well-developed capacity to speak to issues of metacognition.

**Professional learning**

The projects have established an approach to stakeholder collaboration (staff, students, families and community members) which has continued over 20 years. There is a well-conceptualised formal program of professional learning which is responsive to immediate needs and future directions of the school. Three intensive professional learning days at the beginning of the school year provide an opportunity for staff to reconnect and revisit the annual goals, and to address ongoing and future needs and directions. The leadership team also place considerable emphasis on their role in the informal professional learning enabling and encouraging teachers to take term-long professional development/training breaks. An Early Years teacher summarised her perception of student responses and her words speak to the pedagogically focussed innovation of the learning environment at Manchester Primary School:

*The feedback we are all ready getting from the children is that they love doing and choosing what they want to do. But it’s actually harder for them because they have to meet their own goals.*
I think that because in traditional way of teaching has been setting work for the children rather than letting them have a say. Students don’t have a say in what they are doing. They ask or wait for the teacher to tell them what to do and then if they got it right or not. It’s kind of really giving the children the power to direct what they do. (Teacher)

Future directions
The school has had recent increases in staff and student population. A strong connection with kindergartens and early learning centres in the local area has been fostered particularly over the last year. This effort of widening the school community is directed towards identifying those children who may not be ‘school-ready’ and who may need support in some areas before they begin at Manchester Primary School. This partnership with kindergarten and early childhood teachers has resulted in specific sessions where young pre-school children visit Manchester Primary School for speech therapy and academic support. This future-focussed initiative will reveal its merits in future years and will continue in 2011.

Similarly, teachers are excited about the meta-cognitive learning accomplished by Early Years students this year. This significant part of the school’s innovative learning environment is not currently practiced across the school. Innovation is acknowledged as change:

I know that there are going to be members of staff who really don’t want to change. That’s where leadership comes into it. You can’t MAKE someone do something. But I think as a school we are getting a clear idea of where we want to be. We are starting to form a strong sort of ethos within the school. (Teacher)

The mentoring from Kathy Walker herself will continue and Early Years teachers express excitement about its solidification in practice as they learn more and fine-tune the approach to suit their children, relationships and setting. This Developmental Curriculum has contributed to feelings of professional satisfaction and increasing commitment to it from teachers.

This is the first time, it’s only been 6 months, that I’ve felt really confident that the Grade 3s going into Grade 4 next year really have these skills. (Teacher)

In 2011 the ‘Walker Approach’ will be implemented in Year 3 for the first time and it is anticipated it will continue influencing teaching and learning due to the quality of student engagement noted by staff so far and pedagogical opportunities this may generate into the successive stages of students’ schooling:

Next year it will be the first lot of Grade 2s who have had the Walker approach throughout their schooling, entering Grade 3 so I’m really interested to see how they are going to be different who have had this year. (Teacher)

The challenge of encouraging team teaching throughout the school
Increased team-teaching is becoming an integral part of teacher-initiated practice at Manchester Primary School. This is supported by curricula innovations like the Developmental Curriculum and Inquiry Models as well as available physical space. The new school buildings are expected to be completed in 2011 which will pose new opportunities and challenges for the orientation and development of team teaching panels and co-ordinated school experience. The opportunity for greater team teaching is highly valued, but challenges remain. For example, despite being able to plan collaboratively, there is only one double classroom for three Year 3 classes:
Because I team-teach in Grade 3, I don’t want to have two teachers working together and one isolated. How are we going to have 3 grades together, we just don’t have the space... (Teacher)

There is still some need to continue developing and supporting the student-centered environment through attention to issues of student agency. While some students are familiar and confident regarding negotiating and directing their own learning, other students require further support. Teachers at the school reflected that this signifies both the passive nature of learners in a non-ILE and perhaps the systemic nature of instructional pedagogy.

Some of them are still waiting for the teacher to tell them what they’re meant to be doing. The ones who need the support now, might be the previously ‘smarter’ ones because the learning here emphasises learning [and] organization. (Teacher)

For teachers at Manchester Primary School who have had longer careers in a traditional instructional learning environment, a change to student-centred, negotiated learning plans and team teaching requires time, adjustment and professional learning opportunities. However, teachers and the school leadership are excited to notice that students themselves are change agents in pedagogical practice. Student expectation and capacity to engage in meta-cognitive discussion with their teachers means that as they move through levels of schooling their new expectations and abilities play a part in driving the expansion of innovative pedagogy.

The children are one of the pushers of change as well. If they have had experiences of all this say in their learning, and then they are told to sit in a classroom, be quiet and get told what to do... well ...(Teacher)

The external ‘Reading Recovery’ area/Music room and the isolation of Year 3s physically in portable classrooms is at odds with the implicit values of the school. The new Junior school will shift the middle years and provide opportunity to incorporate these areas in more supportive environments.

Concluding Comments

This research investigates the extent to which the school’s innovative learning environment (ILE) contributes to cognitive, affective and social learning outcomes for students. The analysis here is concerned with the organization of learning and the use of space. We interpret the learning environment (LE) as the indoor and outdoor, formal, informal and implicit qualities of space and place in school experience existent for all members of the learning community.
This case study addresses how Manchester Primary School inhabits, engages and creates their learning environment as a pedagogical issue. We examined the ‘everyday’ format and modes of teaching and learning by observation and analysis of the spatial organization of teachers and learners in the school’s spaces. Commentary by leadership, interviews and focus groups with staff and students, photographs, film and policy documents informed this case study. Manchester Primary is an older school, with small portable classrooms and bare asphalt creating conventional expectations. However, the use and re-design of the spaces emphasizes the schools’ population as agents in creating and maintaining a positive and rich learning environment. The analysis of this case study is written to foreground that synergetic relationship as we have investigated the use and creation of ‘place’ by teachers and learners.

The simplicity of Manchester Primary School’s initial appearance makes assumptions about the location and quality of learning in this ‘innovative’ context. Significantly, rather than a simple vessel in which the school population exists or in which learning arises: the environment is viewed as a pedagogical partner. It should be emphasized that the architectural design and structure of the School is not innovative and yet our research focus explores innovative pedagogical practice within this setting. Rather than pedagogy occurring within the vessel of place, we seek to re-word the connection as bridging pedagogy and place so as to enable both students and the learning environment becoming inclusive co-components rather than being conceived as apart from it. The constituents and agency of a world occurring for learners as ‘out there’, objective and knowable, arises in both the physical and non-physical learning environment. The engagement with the environment as ‘The Third Teacher’ is present at Manchester Primary School, from the broad outdoor environmental programs to the arrangement of nooks for play and immersion in the traditional classroom settings. This investigation has illuminated the significance of language, negotiation and ownership as components of ILEs in that belonging and student wellbeing are agents for learning and growth. This study concludes by identifying the impact and effectiveness of environmental and pedagogical influences on students and teachers with a critical perspective on opportunities for improvement and further research.

A holistic and detailed account of the learning environment at Manchester Primary School has revealed the teaching, the learning as fundamentally intrinsic in the experienced learning environment. The scope of thinking about thinking and learning about learning is reiterated from student to teacher to student. Orientation towards learning at Manchester Primary School has a strong outcomes focus that directs students’ attention toward the purpose and context of undertaking any task or conversation. The language of goal setting and negotiation in the developmental and Inquiry models has flourished in the self-identified ILE of Manchester Primary School. We have found that pedagogical innovation leads towards physical redesign and rich engagement with a learning environment that is within and with outside the classroom walls.
References


MySchools Website, Retrieved August 2nd, 2010 from http://www.myschool.edu.au Australian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (ACARA) and Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCECDYA)


Methods

DATA COLLECTION at Manchester Primary School

- Formal School Tour and Interview with Principal
- Informal interviews with Principal and Campus Principals
- Interviews with teaching staff
- Focus Group interviews with students; both campus’
- Visual data creation with students from both campus’
  - Students Photographs of purposeful investigation
  - Student drawings
- Observation: both Campus’
  - Photographs
  - Film
  - Voice recording
  - Notes
- Teacher photographs of purposeful investigation
- Documents- Public school website; MySchool; School Annual Report; dvds previously made by school

LEADERSHIP-
  Principal
  Middle Years Prin.
  Early Years Prin.

TEACHERS

Early Years Campus
  leading teacher
  Observed class T2

Middle Years Campus
  Year 8 co-ordinator
  Science Co-ordinator Head of Teaching and Learning
  Welfare Co-ordinator
  Technology teacher, Leading Teacher

STUDENTS

Early Years Campus
  2 Students

Middle Years Campus
  2 Students

PARENTS -2
- Male – Groundsman/Maintenance - sons in Early Years Campus
- Female – Children in both Early And Middle Years Campus