Aims of Innovative Learning Environment, nature and history of innovation: holistic picture of organization

School Context

This section of the case study examines how ‘The Lakes’ has prepared for the transition into the ILE. The new and growing school self-identifies as a purpose-built ILE and is located north-east of Melbourne in the outer City of Whittlesea. The population of this outer growth corridor is currently increasing by 200 people per week with resultant demands on community resources and public infrastructure (refer to http://www.abc.net.au/am/content/2010/s3075889.htm).

There are two campuses housing Prep-4 and Year 5-9 respectively with 899 students and 89 Staff. The grounds are large and open, offering distant views and open skies. The student population at ‘The Lakes’, according to the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA), has a limited population of ‘high achieving’ students. The school community encompasses students from low socio-economic and non-English speaking background and indigenous students. Despite these factors being seen in the larger discourses as disadvantageous, the staff at ‘The Lakes’ values diversity and the opportunities available for this growing community.

1 The school is named ‘The Lakes’ South Morang P-9’ but is often referred to in conversation as “The Lakes”. The authors have used this shortened form in the rest of this document.
The teaching staff is a combination of graduate teachers, teachers who have stayed since the first year of opening and new teachers with professional experience from more traditional contexts. There are at least 5 teachers who have been with the school since the first year of opening. Several teachers were attracted to the school by the ILE and the pedagogical opportunities it offers. The school has a clear student-centered vision and a focus on collaborative professional relationships amongst staff.

*The founding principle in this school is positive relationships.* (Principal)

The school has had ambitious and innovative pedagogical philosophies underpinning the school design and construction since its inception in 2007. Team teaching and planning is actively encouraged and whole-staff professional learning experiences have informed school directions, including Inquiry Learning and Higher Order Thinking.

*The school’s purpose:* To challenge and empower all students to strive for personal excellence and ongoing growth and development.

*Core Values:* Respect, Personal Best, Honesty, Belonging

*School Motto:* ‘Aspire to Inspire’ (School Website)

As a new school, the learning environment is architecturally designed to embody, house and generate innovative teaching and learning practices. The planning group and architects researched 21st century learning spaces. They were primarily interested in creating an environment which could cater for different learning styles and would enable teachers to teach in different ways. They were also seeking design features that could accommodate learning in both indoor and outdoor spaces.

...the specialty and best thing about ‘The Lakes’ is the open learning spaces. You’re able to do lots of flexible groupings. The children can work in different areas, on tables, on the floor, whatever suits their learning style. (Teacher, School DVD)

The Early Years campus includes open plan flexible learning spaces, a specialist art room and library resource pod (see Figure 8). The campus shares with Merriang Special Development School the Music and Performing Arts area and multipurpose facilities, including a ½ size indoor basketball court. The Middle Years campus specialist facilities include a state of the art Research and Development centre housing specialist science rooms, an environmental science space with hot house and specialist (wood, metal, plastics, electronics) design studios.

The most frequently used description of ‘The Lakes’ ILE is ‘open’-ness and flexibility: no walls signifying classrooms; no desks specifying teacher space; mobile and/or frequently dispersed ICT pods; and functional doors and windows allowing easy access to the outdoors.
The leadership team see an opportunity to embed the school’s vision, purpose and motto in the built and non-built school environment; to extend this ‘open’-ness and flexibility to pedagogical orientations within teacher practice and student learning experiences. In this way, the ILE is acknowledged as a space to be engaged in ‘differently’ by teachers requiring thoughtful, innovative pedagogy and a re-orientation to curriculum concepts.

I think the design is very important if you are going to look at how you are changing perceptions and practices in teaching...If you are going to ask teachers to take on a different role in terms of how they present the curriculum then you need a space for that. It’s not just the inside it’s the outside as well. (Campus Principal, Early Years)

Since opening in 2007 with 200 students the school has undergone a range of changes and has significant plans for continual reform in place, including a reporting system that will allow for individual learning plans. In 2007 the entire school was located on what is now the Middle Years campus. Year 3 was nominated the roving, ‘mobile learners’, with no ‘home room’ of their own. Teachers reported enjoying the challenges of having the whole school on one campus. The planning group used the initial set up budget for landscaping to imprint signature school motifs (lizards, snakes and turtles). Further outdoor development was provided through community fundraising.

An increasing student population and staff numbers has meant that school organization and pedagogy has been in constant transition and redesign (Blackmore et. al., 2010). More recently, increased enrolments in Prep-2 area has precipitated the location of two portables on site. These have been shaped as much as possible to replicate the ‘street-scape’ of other Learning Environments (LE) to ensure that any dislocation or lack of continuity doesn’t impact unduly on the pedagogical culture that has been carefully and purposefully fostered by the school leadership and staff. Significantly, in the first year of opening, the whole school integrated topic called, ‘Eco-mania’ engaged many members of the school community in creating a wetlands area of the school. This focus on sustainability initiated a close engagement between community, school site, school spaces and LEs.

As will become apparent in the following section such inclusion, gathering and immersion in the structure and characteristics of the learning environment has clearly impacted students and staff perceptions of knowledge and the world.
Structured patterns and characteristics of ILE: layout, sequencing and mix of learning activities

This section identifies and elaborates the main features of school built and non-built design which are significant in this Innovative Learning Environment:

- the Learning Streets and Pods;
- teachers planning and teaching in teams;
- outdoor learning areas – symbolism and motifs;
- curriculum initiatives;
- safe and open environment;
- accessibility, mobility and functionality; and
- timetable and planning/organisation.

The Learning Streets and Pods

Replacing traditional notions of classroom and corridor, the buildings were designed to offer teachers greater flexibility in the way they use available space.

![Image: Open 'corridors' – the streets provide a seamless flow from one aspect into another (see Figure. 6)](image)

Figure. 5 Open ‘corridors’ – the streets provide a seamless flow from one aspect into another (see Figure. 6)

Usually to get movement in and through a school you have corridors, there are open spaces which have lockers in them. We had the idea that a Learning Street is a space that can actually be used by the school for learning. (Architect, DVD)

The Learning Street and pods embody the concept that ‘learning is everywhere’ (Teacher, DVD) and that ‘continuous learning for kids takes place’ (Principal, DVD) involving movement, circulation and spaces to make flexible pedagogical choices possible.
The design of the pods (like peas off a stem) extends the Learning Street into classroom-like spaces. Small computer or break out pods, with room for up to 6 students, form islands within the Learning Street. The design intention is to make computers available at all times. There are no doorways between the Learning Street and pods. The open-plan living style focuses the concept of school from an office-like environment with particular seating to:

...be a space more like a home, with bedrooms, lounge rooms...Open pods allows kids to get up, move, and be hands on in activities in the space. (Architect DVD)

Teachers planning and teaching in teams

These open spaces are designed for teachers to set up and transform places of learning; working between individual and group settings, as well as providing activity rich and informal learning settings (Fisher, 2005). The small computer pods provide a centre to the Learning Street. The teacher’s space seen behind ‘YEAR 5 AND 6 TEAMS’ (see Figure 9) has each teacher’s first name lettered in bold, individually patterned and bright colours on the window, creating an informal and approachable environment. The room has large glass windows on three sides allowing transparency for peers, students and parents. The small teacher space encourages collaborative work, but the openness and availability bring their own particular demands: ‘the glass discourages any sense of privacy or ‘down time’ for teachers’ (Principal).

The composite image on the following page illustrates the flows between Learning Streets, pods and collaborative teaching spaces.
This ‘Learning Street’ intersects with a pod down the far right demonstrating the vista quality afforded by the curve-linear street ‘lines’. Small computer pods populate the Learning Street, declaring it as a functional learning space as well as a transit area. The cupboard on the far left is a staff morning tea area. Next to this are the staff toilets which are all purposefully located inside the ‘classroom’ building.

Outdoor learning areas – symbolism and motifs

Large outdoor features form significant elements of the visual appearance of the school. Native grasses (see Figure 10), rocks, turf, faux lawn and concrete combine to give form and texture to the outdoor areas. Large 200 year old native trees, preserved in the planning and design stage of the school, feature strongly in the skyline and are surrounded by fences for the safety of students (see Figures 11 & 12).

On the Middle Years Campus a large serpent traces the contours of professional and student landscaped areas such as the wet/dry lands in Figure 12:
On the Early Year campus enormous sculpted lizards orient children through the playground (see Figures 13 & 14 below).

I felt we needed to incorporate some iconic elements that could be identified by the kids very quickly. (Architect, DVD)

Figures 13 & 14 Sweeping sails and basking lizards
These iconic elements are significant features of the school identified by the design team and school leadership. Over time the students have appropriated these as motifs of school belonging.

**Curriculum initiatives**

The curricular environment is a key element in the non-built ILE of ‘The Lakes’. The pedagogical language that dominates both learning and the learning environment includes ‘open’, ‘flexible’, ‘adaptive’, ‘innovative’. This epistemological commitment is publically stated through the School website:

- All students can learn and become confident lifelong learners.
- All students are unique individuals to be equally valued and nurtured.
- Students and teachers learn and teach best when they are able to build positive relationships based on mutual respect and trust.
- Teachers as adult role models can teach students many skills and social competencies beyond the normal classroom.
• Students learn best when they are actively involved in their learning.
• Teachers should see themselves as generalist teachers first, with responsibility for the whole development of their students and a commitment to the entire College, and as specialist subject teachers second.
• The school will have innovative programs in all academic areas: creative arts program including visual arts, music, theatre, drama and dance, an outdoor education, camping and adventure program, while computers will be integrated into all areas with access to eLearning. (refer to http://www.thelakes.edu.au)

The same overt messages are propagated through inspirational and explicit slogans decorating limited available display space:

The leadership team drives and supports innovative practice at ‘The Lakes’: they routinely visit the school’s ‘pods’ and offer professional development, guidance and support to encourage all teachers to align their practice with learner-centered, integrated curriculum concepts and pedagogy. The students are relaxed and welcoming of visiting adults; across all ages and both campus’ they eagerly proffer or share their work and provide explanation of their class projects or activities.

Instead of the teacher saying ‘sit down and do your work’, it’s more like, you share your ideas and you cooperate with each other. (Student, DVD)

The overarching curricular conversation is embedded in through: active learning, oral and play-based emphases, inquiry learning, student ownership, 1 to 1 learning programs, integrated programs and embedded ICT.

Safe and open environment

Natural light filled the space through high windows. The doors are open, allowing a flow of fresh air. The students are playing outside. (Field note)
School gates and classroom doors are always open. This encourages a sense of an open door policy for the community and visitors (the school has had over 200 official site visits this year). In this open environment, the implicit message is that safety is communicated as everyone’s right and responsibility. When asked, teachers said it was rarely articulated yet understood that the school welcomes and is inclusive of all.

‘The Lakes’ community includes the native reptiles and mammals that frequent the campuses. Kangaroos are common morning visitors, particularly at the borders of the schools’ campus grounds and the reserve that lies between the two. Frogs populate the wetlands and snakes are a natural inhabitant of the area. In keeping with the schools philosophy of safety being the responsibility of all, students and staff are trained in the appropriate behavior to share, and care for, a school environment with the wildlife.
Just as curriculum initiatives are open to community scrutiny and transparent to staff and students, the structural openness of ‘The Lakes’ is clear. The seamless flow between inside and outside mirrors the connections between safety and responsibility. This responsibility is not only physical but pedagogical. Metacognition is a recurring theme in the conversation between the teachers and students. Teachers are heard to ask such reflective questions as ‘how have you been learning in this task?...and what other processes and organisers will you consider useful next time?’.

**Accessibility, mobility and functionality**

A striking feature of this ILE is the Research and Development Centre located on the Middle Years Campus. This specialist facility integrates traditional technology and arts areas with the traditional science labs. The naming and structure of this area focuses on purpose (research and development) rather than tools and products. This works successfully both structurally and pedagogically. The far wall of the room can be opened like a garage door, enabling students to work outside on the concreted area. A large tool rack/box (see Figure 27) is on wheels furthering the sense of mobility: ‘We take the learning to the kids rather than expect them to come to the learning all the time’ (Teacher).
The Middle Years campus is organised within a 4 period a day timetable system. Both teachers and leadership assert that collaborative teacher planning time is essential for best practice due to the demands and opportunity of the open and shared learning spaces.

*The department requires us to give every teacher two hours planning time a week, our teachers get four.* (Principal)

In 2010, Year 4 has been located on the Middle Years’ campus because of increased numbers. This has led to serious constraints on the timetable. Efforts to find shared time for team teaching and integrated learning for Years 7, 8 and 9 have been severely limited (see appendix iv). In 2011, Year 4 will return to the Early Years’ campus. This will remove the current timetable constraints. Consequently, the Middle Years’ campus principal has been successful in working with staff over terms 3 and 4 to re-structure the 2011 timetable to accommodate team teaching and integrated learning times.

**Nature and Quality of Learning**

‘Teachers engage in purposeful teaching at all times.’ Principal (DVD)

This section of ‘The Lakes’ case study examines the extent to which this ILE contributes to changes in behavior and pedagogical practices within the school. It also considers how teachers, students and the community make use of the ILE.

Not all teachers are aware of the possibilities of the links between space and pedagogy despite the attention to the built environment in the surrounding ILE. The leadership team, working in the school from its beginning in 2007, is significantly aware of this relationship and still committed to the transformative opportunities the spaces offer. They often locate the work of the ILE in teacher practice as much as learner experience. Therefore it can also be considered an Innovative Teaching Environment (ITE): ‘The teachers are my classroom’. (Principal)

A commitment to structures that enforce/encourage togetherness is an obvious goal and strategy of leadership. This qualitative aspect of the learning environment is supportive and well resourced with planning time and professional learning opportunities. The priority of collaborative and team work between teachers is embedded in school design and organization ‘Everybody has to work in teams’ (Teacher DVD) and forms an integral part of the learning environment. The collaborative, open and
flexible structural design of the LE spills over into the pedagogical engagements with and between staff and students.

From interviews with staff, it is apparent that valuing pedagogy is strong. However articulations linking this to space and environment are not necessarily made:

> You can teach in a box if you’ve got a rapport with your kids. (Teacher, Middle Years)

> In terms of the learning, that’s happening. I don’t find the space impinges on it. (Leading Teacher, Early Years)

Other teachers see the ILE at ‘The Lakes’ as an opportunity for best practice:

> I know in other schools I’ve tried to do that (be flexible/team teach) in a more traditional setting but you don’t have the space or facilities to do that. (Teacher, DVD)

A tight schedule of rotating 2 week cycles allows ‘everyone to get a turn’ (Teacher, Middle Years) at the Smart Board, Learning Street and computer pods. With solid schedules, allocation of spaces, groups within groups, the focus is on minimising disruption to others to ‘get through’ curriculum requirements (Leading Teacher, Early Years). Scheduling all students to ‘investigate’ at the same time does not always or readily occur because they ‘spill out onto the Learning Street’ (Teacher). This creates challenges of noise and movement that can provoke classroom management issues for some teachers:

> In this environment you need to be more aware of who it is you’re teaching and how they react to things and how best to manage them. People who don’t put any thought into that become frustrated very quickly. You need to put more thought, here, into how to work with that group of kids. (Teacher, Middle Years)

**Pedagogical structures and space**

Students work in a variety of structures. The largest configuration is the campus divide: Early Years (Prep to Year 3) and Middle Years (Years 4 to 9). In 2011 this will be rearranged to the more standard middle years configuration: Early Years Prep to Year 4; Middle Years, Years 5-9. The next layer is ‘sub-schools’ in which students stay together for three years. Students are then grouped in year levels and in pastoral groups which meet for 30 minutes each day. Each student participates in group activities, whole class and individual tasks.
Small groups are seen throughout the school environment and throughout the day in a range of settings. There are a number of structures that support this including significant amounts of open space indoors and outdoors, small pods of computers and students undertaking tasks in clearly structured groups. Teachers have shared responsibility and agency over the Learning Streets and pods. The ways they exercise these are diverse and irregular.

It cannot be assumed that there is a causal, or inevitable, link between innovative structures and innovative pedagogy. Three factors must be taken into account in understanding teacher pedagogical positions: ‘The Lakes’ has only been in operation for 4 years; half the school has had to relocate to a second campus; and finally, huge staff influx in 2010. It is to be expected that within a transitional stage pedagogical alignment is uneven. 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. Some teachers are clearly the centre of their spaces having set up rented or corralled spaces reflecting traditional instructional layouts. Others have engaged the pedagogical possibilities of these innovative spaces.
Delivery activity in Middle Years Pod: Teacher lead, formal presentation locates knowledge in one source.

Figure 32. Literacy lesson Early years

Delivery activity in Early Years Pod: Teacher lead, formal presentation locates knowledge in one source. Teacher leads class through introductory session before breaking into groups in the Learning Street and completing a worksheet (see Figure 28).

Figure 33. Shifting to Team teaching of Maths (same pod as lesson in Figure 33.)

Creating: Research and divergent thinking includes distributed attention. (Instructional icons above sourced from Fisher 2005)
Embedded ICT

‘The Lakes’ school vision includes 1-1 computers to facilitate flexibility and student choice in creating, harnessing and sustaining the pedagogical opportunities for research and divergent thinking. The embedded approach at ‘The Lakes’ seeks to ‘put computers to work’:

_Not restricted to one classroom to use computers in, we take them outside, we take them everywhere. They are able to work on the floor if they want to, on couches, tables._ (Principal)

The integrated and accessibility of IT for students is considered a metaphor for flexible, innovative learning. Staff ensure that programs are ICT rich and not occurring as add-ons to tasks. Learning and computer access is synonymous on both campus’:

_Instant access, learning anywhere, any time._ (Early Years Campus Principal)

Fit Out: furnishings and forming

The furniture has been chosen to reflect and enhance the flexible environment. The Principal made a specific commitment to the purchase of an eclectic array of comfortable chairs, sofas and lounge chairs in a variety of colours, textures, shapes and sizes. It was a determined choice to under-supply traditional tables and chairs – requiring students to position themselves and their work in a variety of ways.
Throughout the campuses the uses these furnishings have been variously co-opted to respond to the demands of individual student-centered pedagogy. In other instances teachers have used furnishings to reform the pods into closed classroom areas resembling traditional learning spaces. Apart from group assemblies and performances a shared spatial environment is sometimes segregated into owned and rented spaces.
Impact and Effectiveness of ILE

This section particularly addresses the question: To what extent have schools consolidated and evaluated the effectiveness of new learning and teaching practices in the innovative learning environment?

‘The Lakes’ has almost completed its fourth year of operation. This time span permits a limited evaluation of the impact and effectiveness of this whole school ILE. Student learning and student satisfaction are initially considered followed by Staff professional learning, community responses and finishing with initiatives for further possible development.

**Student learning**

There are positive indicators regarding student learning, student satisfaction and student agency and engagement. The data presented in this report responds to the question of the effectiveness of the ILE and also indicates possibilities for future student learning and satisfaction. The issues addressed earlier in this report have also been influential in student learning and satisfaction:

- the Learning Streets and Pods;
- teachers planning and teaching in teams;
- outdoor learning areas – symbolism and motifs;
- curriculum initiatives;
- safe and open environment;
- accessibility, mobility and functionality; and
- timetable and planning/organisation.

Two other issues, one cautionary and one opportunistic and promising, are influential and need to be considered when reviewing the data in this section. 2010 is only the fourth year of operation of the school. The Preps, who started in 2007, are now completing Year 3. The current Year 9 cohort came to the school (in general) in their Year 6. The other issue is that ‘The Lakes’ does not have, nor is considering having, a senior cohort (Year 10-12). This places a strong emphasis and value on the middle years.

According to ICSEA the student population at ‘The Lakes’ has a low level of high achieving students and a high level of students from determined low socio-economic situations and non-English speaking backgrounds. According to the National Assessment Plan (NAPLAN) students scored high on assessments regarding Maths, English and other subjects but lower than average on overall literacy and numeracy levels (Annual Report, 2009)(no data is currently available for 2010).

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 strong sense of student belonging, attachment to the outdoor environment and students’ well developed capacity to speak to issues of metacognition.
...Our school is about making good choices, good effort and personal best and all that ... (Year 5 student)
Professional learning: using ITE to create and sustain ILE

One of the most striking impacts of the ILE has been the comprehensive approach by the leadership team to the professional learning of staff. As has been explained earlier in the report each year the school has had to adjust to large increases in student population and also large increases in staffing. In 2010 there are 75 teaching staff -of these 40 are new staff. The leadership team is well established and their approach to professional learning is underpinned by the same learning principles which drive the school. Learning is about context, relationship, agency and incremental growth. The principal takes strong leadership in the professional learning of new staff members. She sees the staff as her ‘class room’. She knows the work of each staff member. There is a well conceptualised formal program of professional learning which is responsive to immediate needs (e.g. 3 day intensive 2010 before the beginning of the year to provide an opportunity for the 89 staff including 40 new staff to get to know each other) and to addressing ongoing and future needs and directions.

The leadership team also place considerable emphasis on their role in the informal professional learning of this rapidly expanding staff. The Principal and each campus Principals spend considerable time in the learning spaces. As they move around these, they warmly engage with students, spending time with groups, involving themselves in conversations, noting the work being done and in particular the needs of their staff. As concerns or issues arise, and in particular pedagogical issues, they later meet with individual staff to support them in their relevant learning. This focused work is critical in the ongoing work of an Innovative Teaching Environment (ITE). The relationship between the ITE and the ILE is essential for the ongoing effectiveness of the ILE.

For experienced teachers, coming into this environment has provided a renewal of professional engagement. As an example of this renewal, the technology teacher’s revived interest and motivation in pedagogical and curriculum innovation has shaped significant initiatives in his learning area. He is able to draw on substantial teaching experience to quickly and effectively implement these initiatives.

The new teachers not only need to immerse themselves in these spaces and in teams but they too bring their own pedagogical and curriculum histories with them. Many graduates coming to teach at
the school undergo a steep learning curve because the flexible learning environment is different from, not only other school settings, but also from the suppositions about LE’s they engaged with at University. The space differs from what they had expected at the start of their careers. As an experienced teacher who had been a beginning teacher in a traditional classroom recalls:

> as a graduate, for me, having those four walls and ‘my’ classroom was the best thing- because, as a graduate I just needed to learn how to teach. I needed to be able to yell at the kids and know that no-one would hear me. It was comforting to know that that was my room, my personal space, ‘Miss’... room’ I could set up certain things, whereas here you can’t. (Teacher, Middle Years Campus)

Beginning teachers bring to ‘The Lakes’ the pervasive and enduring storylines of beginning teaching; ‘gaining control’, ‘my own classroom’, ‘finding my voice’ and ‘establishing my authority’. This has reflected in the data the significance of the use of the LE to transmute the richness and potential of ILEs to innovative pedagogies. This complex issue revolves around professional learning, leadership provisions, school organization and timetabling and a host of implicit assumptions embedded throughout the discourses of education. As mentioned earlier, Innovative Learning Environments are not necessarily innovative teaching environments.

**Community: parent, inclusivity and recognition**

> It’s been good for my little boy, he’s come a long way...hardly had a day off...They’re not stuck in 4 walls like we were. (Male Parent ...sons Year 2 and 5)

Upon opening in 2007, the initial enthusiasm was well above state average. Parents’ comments reflect awareness of the ILE. This enthusiasm has dropped since then, but is still above the state average (School Annual Report, 2009). The MySchool webpage indicates that Parent satisfaction is high and the results from the annual ‘Attitude to School Survey’, averaged over a 3 year period, positioned ‘The Lakes’ higher than other like government schools. Similarly staff opinion is high around ‘student orientation’, ‘student motivation’ and ‘learning environment’. Student attendance rate of 92% (MySchool webpage, 2009) is close to the state average. This figure does fluctuate more in the Middle Years.

> I think ‘cause they teach in teams, rather than just knowing one teacher, there’s more teachers kids can go to if there’s an issue.... They move from teacher to teacher....not room to room, space to space don’t they. (Female Parent...children in Prep and Year 2 involved for 3 years)

The direct school community has been involved from the outset in creating the school. The ‘Eco-mania’ project (2007) established an approach to stakeholder collaboration (staff, students, families and community members) which has continued over the four years. The ILE has attracted hundreds of visitors to the school: 200 teacher visits in 2010 comprising of large cohorts of student-teachers, teachers and department officials visiting for the day. The learning spaces do challenge the understandings of school for many new families. Their initial apprehensions echo the ‘academic standards and assessment framing’ that currently dominates the general educational discourse in Australia.

**Future directions**

The school has had huge increases in staff and students since its inception. Due to numbers and

> ‘The Lakes’ P-9 School has also drawn the attention of the Education Profession. The school has won the following awards:

- **2009**
  - Proud Schools Award
  - Keep Australia Beautiful
  - Sustainable Cities

- **2007/8**
  - School Design Finalists

- **2008**
  - Wakakirri State Finalists

- **2007/9**
  - Sustainable Living Champions
  - (from school webpage)
funding, in 2011 the organization of student levels across dual-campus will more fully reflect their purpose. The Early Years campus will include Years Prep to 4 and the Middle Years campus will include Years 5 to 9. The timetable at the middle years campus has been carefully and systematically developed over the last two terms to accommodate all year levels on that campus. This will allow team teaching across disciplines so that an integrated project time, called, ‘Investigation’, is available, and so that all year 9 students have preferred electives.

The establishment of effective team teaching panels takes time. The staff numbers are stabilizing; only 3 new staff in 2011. This year (2010) the new cohort of teachers have been inducted and there has been considerable effort given to rearranging the team teaching groups for 2011 to more effectively reflect the staff approaches and teaching styles. This has been done through direct consultation with staff regarding their preferences for team membership. The leadership team build staff professional learning and adjustment through incremental steps that are responsive to the staff needs in the emerging school environment.

Along with the growth in numbers has come an increase demand for accommodation. The initial split in the school to two campuses has been the most significant change. The increase in numbers at the early years’ campus has meant the provision to the school of two portable classrooms. These have been aligned with current buildings to carry through the Learning Street sensibility. The portables face each other and will be fitted with a veranda to establish a physical link.

Succession planning is already being addressed. The school started with 200 students all on one campus with one Principal. The school now has two campuses each with a Campus Principal. This leadership team has worked together since the school’s opening. The Principal has shaped a leadership progression that reflects agency and decision making between herself and the campus Principals:

Dependence → Independence → Interdependence

As the Campus Principals establish themselves in their own terms a productive interdependence emerges - making decisions independently based on trust and shared vision between the trio.

Concluding Comments

Though changing space doesn’t directly influence pedagogy and although pedagogy can exist profoundly in impoverished spaces, by thinking differently about both makes a difference in and on the world (Lather, 1991).

This research has investigated 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. We have interpreted 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. 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. Use of multi-media approaches aligned with best practice is included in our documentation to expand upon traditional observational descriptions of people and place. In analysis we drew upon theoretical links between pedagogy and space and used a combination of Fisher’s Matrix Linking Pedagogy and Space (2005), Wolff’s Problem-Based Design Model (2003) and OECD (2009) published
22 Quality Performance Objectives of educational spaces (Blackmore, 2010) to offer a holistic and detailed account of the learning environment at ‘The Lakes’.

From the time the school was built, the leadership team at ‘The Lakes’ has been active in developing the school through strong synergies between the learning environment and pedagogical positioning. The analysis of this case study was written to foreground that synergetic relationship. We used the pedagogical reading that the learning environment is the ‘Third Teacher’ (Reggio Emilia and Loris Malaguzzi 2008) rather than a simple vessel in which the school population exist or in which learning arises: the environment is viewed as a pedagogical partner. Reggio Emilia’s educational approach and philosophy insists that children learn readily from their environment, and therefore the environment is viewed as a pedagogical partner; as the ‘third’ teacher. The extent of this engagement is the site that links ILE’s and innovative pedagogical practices. By bridging pedagogy and place, both students and the learning environment become inclusive parts of learning rather than vessels which are filled by learning and 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 nonphysical learning environment. We investigated the engagement with the environment as ‘The Third Teacher’ and as a partner in the pedagogical practice of thinking about thinking.

The ILE of ‘The Lakes’ involves the whole school. This is not limited to school design and discrete stellar projects; (‘Eco-mania’ 2007, Year 3 Blog 2010) rather it encompasses the daily enactments of pedagogy and curriculum. The innovative design structures and the pedagogical possibilities available to 200 students in 2007 have had to be re-imagined as the school has grown to 899 students over two campus’ in 2010. This is made more challenging by a significant number of the teaching staff who have had only had one year’s experience in the ILE. As the Principal recalls ‘we used to be able to have a staff meeting with all of us sitting around a table- now we need a large room to hold us all.’ Leadership at ‘The Lakes’ is cognizant of the demands on staff by this growth. They emphasise, as described earlier, professional learning which is focused and individual as well as general professional learning. This Innovative Teaching Environment, a phrase coined in this case study, is a significant contribution to the possibility of pedagogical development at the school and is also a contribution to the work of other ILEs.

At ‘The Lakes’ P-9 school, the collaborative, social and open spaces of the pods and Learning Streets makes demands on both teachers and learners to be focused, work in teams and engage in metacognitive planning and reflection. The pedagogical demands of these spaces combine with the school values:

- Students learn best when they are actively involved in their learning.
- Teachers should see themselves as generalist teachers first, with responsibility for the whole development of their students and a commitment to the entire College, and as specialist subject teachers second.
- The school will have innovative programs in all academic areas: creative arts program including visual arts, music, theatre, drama and dance, an outdoor education, camping and adventure program, while computers will be integrated into all areas with access to eLearning. (School webpage)

‘The Lakes’ recognises that these pedagogical and curriculum elements are crucial to quality and effective learning environments and are more dependent on relationships than space and environment – although these form qualitative aspects of the learning environment. The physical innovative learning environment is moving into a consolidation stage. The outdoor areas are maturing- wetlands are growing; the spaces are used for many family events; the students have appropriated the iconic elements. The new portables are being ‘assimilated’ into the street design.
and the landscaped outdoor areas are ‘growing in’ and the organisation of dual-campus transitions and relationships are evolving.

The pedagogical environment is still however in initial stages having to be reinvented in response to staff growth and teacher learning. Innovative pedagogical practice and inquiry at ‘The Lakes’ depends more upon teacher’s ongoing reflective and adaptive responses; the use of the space rather than its permanent structures. Analysis of images of students, teachers and classes (Fisher, 2005) reflects the struggle of engaging with held pedagogical positions in new spaces and the beginning of the journey towards a fluency in student oriented pedagogy. The link between control, authority, learning and physical presence is a recurring tension. The physical expression of control varied across pods, streets and campuses, and is successfully addressed by increased attention to engagement and ‘knowing your kids’.

This indicates a need to broaden the discourse of ILE in education communities from a focus on design to include an emphasis on the use of the space by teachers and learners (Blackmore et. al., 2010). And necessarily for the learning ‘environment’ to be conceptualized in a way that can include the lived, peopled and ever changing landscape of whole school experience.

References


Wolff, S.(2003). Design Features Of the Physical Learning Environment For Collaborative Project-Based Learning at The Community College Level, National Research Centre for Career and Technical Education University of Minnesota.

Appendix III. Methods / Data Collected

Methods
DATA COLLECTION ‘The Lakes’ South Morang P-9 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