Skills and Attributes that Encourage Independent Learning: A Case Study of Teachers, Parents and Students

Jane Lockwood

Master of Education

27th June 2008

RMIT UNIVERSITY
DECLARATION AND LOAN APPROVAL

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for other tertiary study programs and to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text of the thesis.

____________________ Jane Lockwood____________________

I give my consent for a copy of this thesis to be available for loan and photocopying.

____________________ Jane Lockwood____________________
# Contents

**Abstract** 1

**Chapter 1 Introduction** 3

**Chapter 2 Literature Review** 7
  2.1 Introduction 7
  2.2 Definitions 9
  2.3 How Students Learn 10
  2.4 Skills 12
  2.5 Philosophical Environment 14
  2.6 Physical Environment 16
  2.7 Motivation 18
  2.8 Psychological Environment 20
  2.9 Social Environment 21
  2.10 Community/Parent Involvement 22
  2.11 Project Approach to Learning 23
  2.12 Play Based Approach to Learning 24
  2.13 Time in Relation to the Learning Environment 26
  2.14 Curriculum the Learning Environment 28
  2.15 Conclusion 29

**Chapter 3 Methodology** 31
  3.1 Demographic Information 32
  3.2 Participants 35
  3.3 Data Collection 37
  3.4 Observations 39
  3.5 Document Review 40
  3.6 Data Analysis 41
  3.7 Ethical Considerations 42

**Chapter 4 Findings and Discussion** 43
  4.1 Introduction 43
  4.2 Skills Students Need to be Independent Learners 43
  4.3 Children’s Responsibility in the Acquisition of Skills 62
  4.4 The Learning Environments Affect on Independent Learning 67
  4.5 Positive Aspects of the Schools Program 79
  4.6 Aspects of Program to Change 91
  4.7 Teaching Strategies 97
  4.8 Gifted Students and Students with Learning Difficulties 105
  4.9 Barriers Faced by Teachers 108
  4.10 Summary of Findings 113

**Chapter 5 Conclusion** 115

**Chapter 6 Recommendations** 118
Abstract

The following single case study took place at Buffymont Primary School in the Western Suburbs of Melbourne. Participants of the study were seven teachers, six early years’ teachers and one art specialist and four families, parents and students of the school. The participants were asked about their views on what they perceive to be the necessary skills and attributes needed to become independent learners. Participants were then asked what type of learning environment they believe lead to the acquisition of these skills and attributes.

These views were obtained through face - to - face interviews with participants from the three groups as well as non-participant observations in teacher participants’ classrooms as well as documents reviewed within the school and the Department of Education and Training. Gathering this data took approximately thirty two weeks during 2005.

The study was grounded by an extensive review of the literature of esteemed educators who emphasised the importance of teaching the whole child (Longworth, 2003, Lambert, 2000) to develop the skills and attributes needed to be independent learners. The literature revealed that there are a number of skills needed to achieve independent learning. These skills can be acquired through an environment where play and choice is encouraged and open-ended learning centres are presented to students. (Slentz and Krogh, 2001, Perry, 2004, Noddin 2000).

The findings in this case study suggest that a learning environment which is designed to cater to individual students’ interests and learning needs is needed to support students to become independent learners. These environments may include open-ended learning centres, such as:

- Box construction centre
- Publishing area
- Dramatic play centre e.g. a home corner
- Block area
- Cooking area
- Nature table

which cater for the multiple ways in which students learn and focus on the acquisition of skills rather than a content driven curriculum. The findings further suggest teachers, parents and students highly value social skills such as:

- working interdependently
- cooperation
➢ good communication skills
➢ able to show understanding and empathy

when it comes to students becoming independent learners.
School curricula have become increasingly overcrowded by a content driven approach rather than skills-based approach to learning. The problem with having a content driven curriculum is that content is constantly changing; the content students needed to be taught fifteen years ago may be obsolete in the twenty-first century. Ken Robinson, (2006) states, “Children starting school this year will be retiring in 2065, no-one has a clue what the world will look like in five years, let alone in sixty years. Yet we [teachers], are expected to prepare children for this future”. Robinson’s point is, teachers need to teach the attributes and skills students need to adapt in this changing world not irrelevant subjects that may change in five years from now.

Teachers are expected to teach a content driven curriculum even though many profess they don’t see the relevance of some of this content to their students and feel pressured to teach this sometimes irrelevant curriculum. One aspect that leads to this feeling of pressure is a lack of time to meet all the expectations of the curriculum. Teachers feel they just skim the surface of these requirements and do not give students the time they need to develop and practise important skills they need to become independent learners.

The growth of students’ welfare issues over the last decade also adds pressure to an already overcrowded curriculum which concentrates on content rather than skills-based learning. Because of this curriculum design, teachers are feeling overwhelmed to “fit everything in”; in the limited time they have in the classrooms.

This research investigated what the teachers, children and parents of Buffymont Primary School perceive to be the most important skills and attributes which lead to independent learning and what the learning environment would look like that encourages these skills and attributes by posing the following questions:

1. What kind of learning environment do teachers perceive will encourage independent learning for their students?

2. What kind of learning environment do parents perceive will encourage their children to be independent learners?
3. What kind of learning environment do children perceive will encourage them to be independent learners?

Independent learning is defined by the researcher as the acquisition of the skills that enable people to learn through their whole lives and according to their own learning styles. Skills such as:

- self-checking
- self-correcting
- cooperation
- time management
- persistence
- questioning and research skills

and higher – order skills such as:

- information handling
- problem solving
- teamwork
- communication
- decision making skills about own learning.

Once a learner is competent in these skills, they need to be able to adapt these skills to solve situations that occur throughout their lives.

The objective of the research was to examine factors such as:

- Influences on the learning environment e.g. time in relation to teaching and planning, Department of Education and Training (DE&T) initiatives.
- Teachers’, parents’ and students, beliefs on what an independent learning environment looks like.
- Expectations of the key stakeholders i.e. students, teachers and parents, and what they perceive are the important skills and attributes which lead to independent learning.

The research findings need to be carefully considered in context of the parameters applied to the study. These parameters are determined by the study limitations and delimitations. The limitations identified by the researcher are:

1. Study Duration. The study was to be completed within four years of the commencement date.
2. Number of participants. Due to the time constraints the researcher focused on the early years department of the school (Unit One).
3. Duration of non-participant observations. Due to time restraints of the participants and the researcher, observations were limited to 1½ hours in each teacher participant’s classroom. All of these observations were done in an afternoon session. The lessons being observed were usually an integrated studies lesson.

4. Number of documents reviewed. The school and DE&T produce numerous documents and again due to time restraints it was not possible to conduct a thorough review of all the documents available.

The delimitation imposed by the researcher that shaped the study centred on the methods used to gather information. Given the limitations identified above, the researcher selected the following methods to gather information:

1. Review of the following school documents:
   - Unit One term planners
   - School newsletters
   - School charter
   - Minutes from staff, unit one and specialist meetings
   - School handbooks

Review of the following DE&T documents:
2. Face – to – face interviews with seven unit one teachers and one specialist teacher.
3. Interviews with four families (parents and students), across the school.
4. One non-participant observation in each teacher participant’s classroom.

Together the limitations and delimitations influenced the researcher’s decision to adopt a case study approach as an inquiry method of investigation to answer the questions posed by the researcher.

Data gathering techniques used in this case study included:
1. Interviews of the three groups of participants.
2. Observations in participating teachers classrooms

Before data collection took place, a thorough literature review was undertaken. The literature reviewed looked at the five aspects of a child’s development which must be addressed in any learning environment to develop independent learners. The five aspects are: emotional, social,
physical, psychological and cognitive development. As well as the five aspects of a child’s
development, the literature also looked at the issues faced by teachers, such as curriculum, time,
teaching strategies and skills which students need to develop to become independent learners.

Chapter four analyses and discusses the finding of the research. The major findings being:

1. The importance of catering to the whole child’s development when acquiring the
   skills needed to be independent learners.
2. The importance of developing social skills.
3. Creating a learning environment which supports and guides the teaching of these
   skills by effective teachers.
Chapter Two - Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The primary goal of education is to foster and scaffold the healthy and holistic development of students and teach the content and skills students will need to solve the problems that occur in life and the interconnectedness of these occurrences (Haskell & McBee, 2000). The question is what will the content and skills be that will equip the students teachers teach now to be productive citizens of the future? Vermunt in De Corte (2003) states:

“Today’s society is characterised by an enormous growth in the availability of knowledge and information. In earlier times, education was aimed at teaching students the knowledge and skills of a subject domain with which they could practice a profession for the rest of their lives. Nowadays it is impossible to master a subject domain completely at graduation. There is too much to know and be skilled in and what we know and can do today is out of date in a couple of years. Simons et al. (2000) therefore advocate the view that graduates should foremost have acquired skills that enable them to keep on learning throughout their lives, to think independently to work together and to regulate ones own learning and thinking” (p. 109).

Similarly Dewey (2001), stated nearly ninety years earlier:

“One can hardly believe there has been a revolution in all history so rapid, so extensive so complete. Through it the face of the earth is making over…population is hurriedly gathered into cities from the ends of the earth; habits of living are altered with startling abruptness and thoroughness; the search for the truths of nature is infinitely stimulated and facilitated, and their application to life made not only practicable but commercially necessary. …That this revolution should not affect education in some other than a formal and superficial fashion is inconceivable.” (p.7)

In order to acquire the skills Vermunt mentions and to equip students for a rapid and ever changing society that Dewey discusses, teachers need to create learning environments that achieve this and foster and support the five basic areas of development: spiritual, social, emotional, cognitive and physical (Bee, 2000). As Dewey declares, “In brief, the environment consists of those conditions that promote or hinder, stimulate or inhibit, the characteristic activities of a living being”. (Dewey, 2002 p.13). So the teachers’ role in creating an independent learning environment is very important to children’s education.
Plato was unequivocal that education was concerned with developing the spiritual, moral, mental, physical and cultural aspects of the child, and maintaining a balance between them (Tate, 1999). According to Tate (1999), Plato said, “if people concentrated too much on literature and philosophy and neglected their bodies, their energy, initiative of mind and self discipline would be weakened. If on the other hand, they concentrated solely on their bodies and neglected their minds they would end up as ‘unintelligent philistines’.” (p. 8). The problem faced by teachers in developing this holistic approach to learning seems to be an overcrowded curriculum, and mandated time requirements in Key Learning Areas (KLAs). Another problem seems to be societal expectations on schools as defined by Longworth (2003),

“In the minds of much of the electorate, education is about fitting people to get jobs, about employment, about ensuring that children and adults are enveloped in a tried and tested system with tried and tested outputs, and that those who graduate from that system obtain the necessary pieces of paper to say so. Few elections are won on ‘yes, but’s – yes but those jobs won’t exist in ten years’ time; yes, but the future of the country needs creative people who can think outside the system; yes, but education is about the development of the whole person.”(p. 32 - 33)

With an emphasis on teaching subjects rather than focusing on children as a whole, this leaves teachers rushing to complete all these requirements and not leaving time for children to develop and practice skills learned in class and no time for teachers to nurture creative independent learners. Due to this overcrowded curriculum, the time left for children to reflect on their learning is diminished. (Lambert, 2000; Wilson & Wing Jan, 1996).

The growth of student welfare initiatives over the last decade also adds pressure to an already crowded curriculum (Lambert, 2000). Isbell and Exelby (2001) express, an effectively designed classroom can potentially positively influence all areas of children’s development including behaviours that are valued in society such as cooperation and persistence. A well-constructed learning environment can assist in minimizing some of the welfare issues, which can have a detrimental effect on children’s learning.

This review will discuss what the literature says about the ways in which teachers construct the teaching environment to encourage independent learning and the expectations teachers, students and parents have on this environment.
2.2 Definitions

Before teachers can create an independent learning environment, it is important to understand what an independent learning environment is. Therefore, there is a need to define the following key terms, School or learning environments.

Williams (2003) describes the school environment as having the following elements:

- the physical environment, including indoor and outdoor
- the social environment of school
- the psychological environment of school and schooling
- the philosophical considerations within schools and aspects such as teachers’ beliefs and values.

Jeroen et. al. characterise learning environments as:

“…for learning that aims at the development of complex and higher-order skills, deep conceptual understanding, and metacognitive skills such as the ability to regulate ones own learning (de Corte 1990). These outcomes foster the productive use of acquired knowledge and skill, or, the ability to apply what is learned in new problem situations and thus allow for transfer of learning” (Jeroen J, G. van Merrienboer & Fred Paas in Erik De Corte, 2003 p. 3)

While Dewey (2000), explains the environment as denoting “…something more than surroundings which encompass an individual. They denote the specific continuity of the surroundings with his own active tendencies” (p.13)

Kesten (1987) defines independent learning as “learning in which the learner, in conjunction with relevant others, can make the decisions necessary to meet the learner’s own learning needs” (p. 3).

Longworth describes learning as:

“… doing things in a different way, creating an out-and-out focus on the needs and demands of the learner; giving learners the tools and techniques with which they can learn according to their own learning styles and needs. It is not teaching not training and not even education in its narrow didactic sense. It has a much wider scope. It has a social, economic, political, personal, cultural and, of course, educational meaning in its widest sense”. (2003 p. 12).

When considering their learning environments, teachers need to look at the physical, social, psychological and philosophical environment. Teachers need to create environments in such a way as to allow students to develop higher order thinking and metacognitive skills. The environment needs to support and encourage students to be able to make decisions about their own learning and
what is important to students to learn. It needs to cater for the different learning styles and needs to give students the time and opportunity to practise new skills learned in various problem – solving situations and be able to transfer these skills from one circumstance to another. It needs to be an environment that “educates” all aspects of children’s development.

2.3 How Students Learn

When teachers are thinking about the learning environment it is useful to grasp how students learn best. When teachers take this into consideration they can then create the most independent learning environments for their students. Dewey, (2002) observed that when children have a chance at physical activity, which brings their natural impulses into play, going to school is a joy and learning is easier. Dewey also goes on to say that children, even before starting school, learn through their senses by using their hands, eyes and ears “…His senses are avenues of knowledge…because they are used in doing something in purpose. The qualities of seen and touched things have a bearing on what is done and are alertly perceived; they have a meaning.”(p. 166). It is important that the learning environment has a number of opportunities for students to use their senses as this is one way students learn.

Learning through the senses is just one way students process information. There are many other ways students learn; by being told, by comparing and contrasting information, by discussing with peers and others, by observing, through demonstration, by making and testing predictions, by practising new skills, by trial and error and many other activities. (Jeroen J, G. van Merrienboer and Fred Paas in Erik De Corte, 2003). When designing a learning environment it should be acknowledged that people learn in different ways and aim to support these different ways. (Jeroen J, G. van Merrienboer & Fred Paas in Erik De Corte, 2003). Not only do students have different learning styles, they also learn at different speeds and have different learning objectives. (Longworth, 2003).

Howard Gardner’s (2000), theory of Multiple Intelligences supports the notion of students having a number of intelligences,

“The theory of multiple intelligences (MI theory), makes two complementary claims. The first is that all human beings have eight or nine basic intelligences. School (including law school)
focuses particularly on linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligences, ranging from musical to naturalist, are important as well. The second claim: No two individuals, not even identical twins, have exactly the same profile of strengths and weaknesses; nor does strength in one intelligence (say musical) predict strength or weakness in other intelligences (say, intrapersonal or bodily-kinaesthetic). (p. 321)

Gardner supports the assumption that independent learning environments embrace the multiple intelligences and are designed in such a way as to cater for these nine intelligences. The school studied in this research, realises the importance of catering to multiple intelligences and has made multiliteracies a priority in its 2005 school charter (p.1)

Even though it is apparent that students learn in different ways and there are a number of different learning styles, traditional education seems to assume that students learn in the same way and at the same rate. Due to this assumption education can become “stuck in a time warp” (Longworth, 2003 p. 25) Schools can concentrate too much on the intellectual and linguistic aspects of learning, as Gardner has affirmed, rather than looking at the whole child (Dewey, 2001).

Robinson (2006), agrees with Longworth and Dewey’s view and states:

“Where ever you travel in the world there is the same hierarchy of subjects everywhere, at the top is mathematics and languages followed by humanities and at the bottom are the arts”

Robinson then goes on to state: “…our task [teachers] is to educate their [children] whole being.”

Robinson reiterates the importance of teaching the whole child, which leads to creative independent thinkers and learners, which equips students for the future, rather than just a few subjects which prepares them for employment.

As Gardner (2004), asserts,

“But human thinking and learning is achieved as well by artists, musicians, politicians, businesspeople, inventors, religious leaders and dreamers – we must understand their forms of learning and the ways in which they may differ from the cognition of the theoretical physicist…”(p. 10)

When teachers are thinking about the learning environment, they need to understand that students learn through physical activities and their five senses. Teachers need to realise that students learn in a variety of styles and at different rates. A learning environment that is set up to concentrate on the individual child and his/her learning needs and styles rather than subjects, is an environment that may lead to independent learners.
Motivation, though important, is not enough for students to become independent learners. It is important for students to acquire and be proficient in a number of skills to help them be independent learners. The conundrum faced by teachers is, with such an overcrowded curriculum and such little time in the classrooms, which are the most important skills to teach that, will equip students to be lifelong, independent learners in a society that is rapidly changing? Longworth (2003), makes the case that,

No matter that the basics are themselves subject to changing times and that traditional virtues become less relevant or inappropriate. Of course those old stalwarts of the diehard – reading, writing and arithmetic are still important. Without them children and adults are disenfranchised from learning. But as Naisbitt says 'to stop there is to equip children only with the skills of their grandparents. It is like giving them a wrench to fix a computer, there is nothing wrong with a wrench but it won’t fix a computer.’ (p. 123)

Longworth then goes on to establish, what he believes are some of the important skills needed,

Creativity, imagination, vision and insight have been too long absent from the curriculum of our education organisations, mainly because they are not easily examinable, and partly because they encourage a questioning of accepted wisdom and authority – in the more authoritarian cultures a difficult concept to cope with. However, attitudes cannot survive in a society dominated by change and knowledge explosion. The new emphasis is on the acquisition of a completely different set of skills and attributes, higher - order skills of information handling, problem solving, thinking, teamwork, communicating and many other. (p. 79).

It is important for students to practise their new skills. Learning environments need to function in a way that allows the acquisition and practise of these skills. The environment also needs to be one where mistakes are seen as a way of connecting and developing new learned skills,

The more a child uses his sense of consistency, of things fitting together and making sense, to find and correct his own mistakes, the more he will feel that his way of using his mind works, and the better he will get at it. He will feel more and more that he can figure out for himself, at least much of the time, which answers make sense and which do not. But if as usually happens
we point out all his mistakes as soon as he makes them, and even worse, correct them for him, self – checking and self correcting skills will not develop but will die out. (Pollard, 1994 p.8)

If students are not in an environment that allows for mistakes and self correcting of these mistakes then students will begin to doubt their own work and thinking and will be constantly checking with teachers whether their work is “right” or not. This does not lead to the development of thinking skills and therefore independent learners. Fisher’s (2002), view on creating a culture of independence is, “a culture of independence surfaces in the classroom, where children know that they do not need to rely on the teacher at every turn and they come to enjoy their autonomy” (p. 70)

Cutting and Wilson (2001), believe learning contracts develop a number of skills that lead to independent learning such as;

- developing student research, problem-solving, thinking and communication skills
- developing student responsibility for their own learning
- allowing students to work in cooperative ways with others
- creating opportunities to learn through discovery and research
- developing time management skills

The project approach, which is discussed in more detail further in this chapter, also promotes learning independently through the development of “learning to learn skills” “The project approach requires that children persist with an idea or theme from its inception through planning to doing and recording results. Project learning is therefore a key strategy for promoting “Learning-to-learn” skills” (Shipley, 2002, p. 59). These skills include students being able to:

- Focus and concentrate
- Use resources effectively
- Block out distractions
- Choose an activity from alternatives
- Start an activity
- Persist with learning experiences
- Finish the activity
- Report on finished activity

These “learning-to-learn” skills also correspond with Art Costa’s “Habit’s of Mind” which the school involved in this case study uses throughout its curriculum.
The school believes these sixteen attributes support students in their thinking and problem solving and enhance the ways in which students produce knowledge. These sixteen attributes are:

1. Persisting (Shipley’s persisting with learning activities)
2. Thinking and communicating with clarity and precision
3. Managing impulsivity (Shipley’s focus and concentrate)
4. Gathering data through all senses
5. Listening with understanding and empathy
6. Creating, imagining and innovating
7. Thinking flexibly
8. Responding with wonderment and awe
9. Thinking about thinking (metacognition)
10. Taking responsible risks
11. Striving for accuracy
12. Finding humour
13. Questioning and posing problems
14. Thinking interdependently
15. Applying past knowledge to new situations
16. Remaining open to continuous learning.

Costa and Kallick (2000) defines his “Habits of Mind” as “…16 attributes of what human beings do when they behave intelligently.” (p. 21) and “…the characteristics of what intelligent people do when they are confronted with problems, the resolutions to which are not immediately apparent” (p. 21). By practising these characteristics, students are developing the thinking skills which help them to “behave intelligently” and “…to acquire the kinds of mental habits needed to lead productive fulfilling lives” (p. 3). By imparting these thinking skills to students, teachers are giving their students the skills they need to be independent learners and the ability to solve problems for the whole of their lives and not just during their academic careers, skills which define an independent learner.

2.5 Philosophical Environment

The philosophical attitude of teachers’ and schools’ beliefs and values, will indisputably influence the learning environment in a classroom. Dewey (2001), discusses the ‘new education’ taking development too far and remarks that students are expected to think and work things out for themselves. Students cannot work out new ideas or concepts for themselves if they are not supplied
with the skills, which are prerequisites to guide their thought processes. As Dewey has established, it is the teacher’s role to guide and support students in helping them develop cognitively, socially, emotionally, physically and spiritually through child – centred education. Fisher (2002), defines child centred education as being concerned with; “… the development of children. It is seen as a natural progression that is best aided by adults who, in Darling’s words ‘have an appreciation of and respect for the ways of children’ (1994:3). This is an important element.” (p. 40)

It is important for teachers designing an independent learning environment to be knowledgeable about children’s development and how they learn, and to provide opportunities for independent learning through effective design of space (Isbell and Exelby, 2001).

Pollard (1994), outlines how teachers create independent learning environments as;

… classes where pupils’ work was organised in broad outline by the teacher, who ensured that there was always plenty of work to do. We also found that the progress of pupils benefited when they were not given unlimited responsibility for planning their own daily program of work or for choosing work activities, but were guided into areas of study or exploration and taught the skills necessary for independently managing that work. In general, therefore, teachers who organised a framework within which pupils could work, and yet encouraged them to exercise a degree of independence, and allowed some freedom and choice within this structure, were most successful (p. 252)

For students to become independent, it is important for teachers to construct an environment that gives students choice and freedom in their learning within a structured framework where teachers can still guide students. English and Wilson (2004), describe the role of teachers in creating learning environments is to:

…teach. This means that a teacher should work with groups or individuals to ask carefully considered questions so that students can develop their own understandings. There are times when it is appropriate for the teacher to “tell” or “instruct”, but learning is generally considered to be more effective if the teacher has used their skills to elicit ideas and connections from the students, rather than just giving them information. Learning centre tasks need to be designed so that students can be actively involved in constructing their own learning under the guidance of the teacher.(2004 p. 20)

English and Wilson advocate the use of learning centres in an independent learning environment, but just like Dewey and Pollard uphold the importance of teachers’ guidance in these centres, “By
systematically planning a range of learning centre activities, the teacher makes clear and comprehensive curriculum decisions. This generates a natural flow and connectedness of learning. Instead of plucking activities out of the air or out of a book, the needs, interests and dominant learning preferences of students drive task selection” (English and Wilson, 2004 p. 18).

2.6 Physical Environment

Wilson and Wing Jan (1996) assert, “Students make their own decisions about whether they are willing to become engaged in their own learning or not, partly due to personality and experience, but largely influenced by the learning environment” (p. 18). Teachers have a great deal of influence and responsibility when it comes to setting up the physical environment in a school setting. Fisher (2002), emphasises;

If young children learn naturally by being active and engaging in a range of exploratory experiences then the primary responsibility of the school is to plan opportunities to engage with a range of materials and stimuli. They need time and space to explore investigate and question. They need a range of play experiences and appropriate resources of good quality. They need in other words, a learning environment that offers concrete experiences that are relevant, meaningful and worthy of active involvement. (p. 15)

Perry (2004), describes the physical environment as being characterised by “…flexibility, accessibility and responsiveness to children and require that teachers make decisions about the physical environment”(p. 84)

An open style classroom with varying centres and materials available to students throughout the day for them to explore and investigate is more inducive for developing independent learners rather than time spent on worksheets and seatwork (Slentz and Krogh, 2001). “There should be centres that include opportunities for reading and writing, maths games, science experiments and other learning experiences” (Slentz and Krogh, 2001 p. 134).

Biller (2003), stresses the importance of students having opportunities to move around the classroom and engaging in activities that will increase their oxygen intake, rather than sitting in their seats for long periods of time, “… The problem with sitting down for long periods of time is that it promotes inadequate breathing patterns, increases fatigue, and adversely impacts the ability to think and learn” (p. 3).
For students to be independent in their learning, they need to know where to find appropriate resources and where to return them to, once they have finished with them (Fisher, 2002). For students to use these resources in this way the materials need to be easily accessible and students need to be guided in the appropriate use and care of these resources.

The outdoor area needs to be considered when teachers are planning an effective learning environment. Unfortunately, this area is often neglected in the primary schooling setting as a vital part of students’ learning.

In most schools the use of outdoor play areas differs considerably from those in preschools and child care centres. Instead of the playground being seen as part of the educational program it is used mainly for recreational use with the main focus being on sport and play equipment designed to cater for the children’s physical development (Berry, 2001 p. 108).

If a school believes in catering for all the needs of its students, it is important that the outdoor area includes a wide range of activities “…Children need the opportunity to be quiet or active, to socialise or to be alone and to be involved in sporting activities appropriate to the age and current interests of both genders” (Berry, 2001 p. 107).

Shipley (2000), specifies Henniger’s four characteristics of outdoor play spaces, they should provide opportunity for:

1) healthy risk taking
2) graduated challenges
3) variety of play styles
4) manipulation of the materials and equipment found there. (p. 379)

For the physical environment to encourage independent learning, it needs to be set up with space for students to play, explore and investigate. It needs to have good quality resources which are easily accessible. The outdoor environment should not be neglected when considering an independent learning environment as it can provide opportunities for practising such skills as risk taking which is important in becoming an independent learner.
2.7 Motivation

Young children have a natural desire to learn. They construct understanding of the world around them through direct experiences in their environment and their play (Davies, 1997). Nodding states that teachers are expected to manufacture this excitement about, and desire to, learn. When in fact it is already present naturally however the question seems to be “what they want to learn”. (Nodding in Johnson, 2000 p. 251)

Fisher (2002), argues that when these same young, self-motivated, learners start school this desire diminishes,

Children who have been motivated and determined become disillusioned and disaffected (Barrett 1989; Smith 1995); children who made sense of things and had begun to form their own personal construct of the world become confused and disorientated (Donaldson 1978; 1992) children who posed a thousand and one questions become quiet uncommunicative (Tizard and Hughes 1984; Cousins 1999). It seems that schooling can inhibit some of the most prominent characteristics of competent young learners (p. 1).

Longworth (2003) tells us good teachers recognise that learning comes from an inner desire and not from teachers or examination boards. It is imperative that these teachers set up environments that support and encourage this desire to learn rather than destroy it and have the type of learners of which Fisher speaks. An environment where students are engaged and actively participating in the learning, keeps students motivated to continue in their learning (Biller, 2003). Fisher (2002), reiterates Biller’s argument by asserting,

Any personal study of young children reveals almost non-stop activity in the quest for skills, strategies and understandings. Being active is what causes children both physically and cognitively to construct their own view of the world, to personalise the experience and to apply it in ways that make sense to them as individuals (Bruner and Haste 1987 cited in Fisher p.12).

Educators don’t have to work very hard to motivate students to learn, as they already have a natural desire to do so. However, it is the role of educators to create environments that sustain and extend
this desire to learn. As Kesten (1987) states an independent learning environment create opportunities and experiences which encourage student motivation and curiosity. 

The key to motivate students to learn is to make their learning meaningful to them by incorporating what interests them. Otherwise their learning just becomes a task, something to be endured rather than enjoyed, as Dewey (1969), declares in this quote;

Practically the appeal to sheer effort amounts to nothing. When a child feels that his work is a task, it is only under compulsion that he gives himself to it. At every let up of external pressure his attention, released from constraint, flies to what interest him. The child brought up on the basis of ‘effort’ acquires marvellous skill in appearing to be occupied with an uninteresting subject, while the real heart of his energies is otherwise engaged (p. 2)

Pollard (1994), reinforces Dewey’s view in the following statement “If the situations, the materials, the problems before a child do not interest, his attention will slip off to what does interest him, and no amount of exhortation or threats will bring it back.”(p. 10)

A learning environment can be set up with the most up to date, exciting materials presented in the most compelling way, but unless the subject material is of interest to students, no amount of coaxing by teachers is going to engage those students. Thus, reiterating the importance of teachers when considering students needs when planning the curriculum so as to engage them in learning;

A child is most intelligent when the reality before him arouse in him a high degree of attention, interest, concentration, involvement – in short, when he cares most about what he is doing. This is why we should make schoolrooms and schoolwork as interesting and exciting as possible, not just so that school will be a pleasant place, so that children in school will act intelligently and get into the habit of acting intelligently (Pollard, 1994 p. 10)

Pollard’s statement of “the habit of acting intelligently” matches the view of Costa’s “habits of mind” and how these “habits” are characteristic of intelligent people. The characteristics of problem solving and using thinking skills which are characteristics of independent learners.
2.8 Psychological Environment

The psychological environment needs to be addressed when considering what setting encourages independent learners. Isbell and Exelby (2001) state,

A caring and responsive teacher provides a positive climate for the child, that impact not only on their emotional security but also on other aspects of their cognitive development. A child who feels secure and supported will experiment, try new things, and express their ideas freely (p. 21).

A teacher role in creating a safe learning environment is paramount. This starts by forming positive relationships with students as Biller (2003) states,

Establishing positive rapport with your students is the foundation for creating an open and positive instructional climate. Students need to feel safe and have a sense of cohesiveness and belonging before true learning can occur. This type of learning environment can only be created by establishing a personal relationship with each student in the class.(p. 34)

By having a positive relationship with students, they in turn feel a sense of belonging and the environment lends itself to optimal learning conditions as reiterated by Perry (2004), “If you are to assist children to engage in meaningful learning experiences and to approach their learning with confidence it is vital that you and the children know each other well and build mutually trusting relationships.”(p. 24)

Maslow’s hierarchy of needs discusses feeling safe both physically and emotionally as being the second need to be met before high order thinking can be reached, and where learning begins (McInerney & McInerney, 1998). Maslow “viewed personal development as a process of natural growth in which all individuals would realise their potential provided the environment was supportive” (McInerney & McInerney, 1998, p. 360)

If the need for physical and emotional safety is not met in the environment it could have a negative effect on learning as Biller (2003), realises, “However, when instructors fail to nurture a positive environment, it can create undue stress on the students and have a negative impact on learning, by triggering the production of neurotransmitters and hormones in preparation for the anticipated stressors.”(p. 25)
After developing a positive relationship with students, the next step is to demonstrate to students that this learning environment is a place where their ideas and thoughts are recognised and valued, (Biller, 2003). If teachers do not indicate this to students through the learning environment created, this could have a negative effect on their learning, “If we ignore what children already know and can do, then their learning will not be embedded in what is already secure and what already makes sense to them. This sends messages to children that their competencies and contributions are not valued and this in turn can have a serious impact on their self esteem.”(Fisher, 2002 p. 62)

In a positive, caring learning environment set up by teachers’, students will be more willing to take risks, ask questions and make investigations freely (Isbell & Exelby, 2001), which are attributes of independent learners.

2.9 Social Environment

Maslow’s third need in the hierarchy is a sense of belonging, first in the family then the outside world. Perry (2004), back this up by stating, “Just as the physical organisation of the classroom sends messages to children about what they are expected to do, so the social climate of the classroom also sends messages to children about who they are, how they are valued and what they are capable of doing and being.”(p.107). Slentz and Krogh (2001) express, “Furthermore, they [primary age children] still learn best when they can interact with one another or, at times, choose to be alone. Small group work is attractive to most, and they are ready for learning projects requiring cooperative decision making” (p.134). Reynolds and Jones (1992), agree that students learn important concepts, not from being told by teachers, but by interacting with the physical world and with other students.

To assist students’ development is to assist every part of that development and this includes their social development, however independent learning environments do not isolate the different parts of students’ development but uses a holistic approach as Dewey (2001) states,

… the child’s life is an integral, a total one. He passes quickly and readily from one topic to another, but is not conscious of transition or break. There is no conscious isolation, hardly conscious distinction. The things that occupy him are held together by the unity of the personal and social interests which his life carries along (p. 105)

Dewey goes on to explain the importance of the social environment in learning, “A being whose activities that are associated with others has a social environment. What he does and he can do depend upon the expectations, demands, approvals and condemnations of others. A being connected
with other beings cannot perform his own activities without taking the activities of others into account” (p. 14)

The social environment of a school should be set up in such a way as to enhance a sense of belonging by encouraging such skills as communication, forming relationships, negotiation, and cooperation, skills which are vital to students developing independence.

2.10 Community/Parent Involvement in the Learning Environment

Thus far the discussion has focused on the role and responsibilities of teachers and indeed students in creating an environment that contributes to independent learning. Teachers and students are not the only stakeholders however and parents and the wider community also play a vital role in supporting and developing the skills in young people to be independent learners.

Alistair Macbeth describes parents as co-educators of children as most education happens outside of school, particularly in the early years, (Macbeth in Pollard, 1994). This being the case, it is important for teachers and parents to work together when it comes to the education of their children. Mortimore, Sammons et al discovered in their research that parental involvement in schools, including help in classrooms, excursions and parent teacher interviews, had a positive effect on students’ progress and development. (Pollard, 1994)

The home/school relationship is fundamental to informing children’s thinking about the connections between what is learned and the wider community as Dewey (2001), describes,

The child can carry over what he learns in the home and utilise it in the school; and things learned in the school he applies at home. These are the two great things in breaking down isolation, in getting connection – to have the child come to school with all the experience he has got outside school, and to leave it with something to be immediately used in his everyday life (p. 50).

Schools should be places that reflect the values of the community it is situated in, (Reynolds and Jones 1992). However all to often schools are places that are isolated from the communities around them as Longworth (2003), establishes,

Schools, often the whipping boys for society’s ills, are perhaps the
most isolated of the sectors in that they appear to work from within their own little world of education and training, operating within its own rules and regulations, and insulated from what happens in the rest of the community. If they are to carry out the foundation work for learning throughout life, they will need considerable help from everyone and every sector to help them do it (p. 96 - 97)

Dewey (2001), supports Longworth’s notion of schools being places isolated from their communities but goes on to say, “…through which school itself shall be made a genuine form of active community life, instead of a place set apart in which to learn lessons.” (p. 10)

The benefits of parents and wider community’s involvement in children’s education are numerous. It is paramount that schools be an active member of their communities so as to give their students enriching and holistic learning experiences.

2.11 Project Approach to Learning

The project approach to learning develops skills such as making choices, problem solving, communication and interpersonal (Hendrick, 1997).

Project based learning further challenges students’ thinking and effective thinking skills are an important aspect of becoming an independent learner, particularly when the project is authentic as Vermunt states,

Project-centred learning is another rung further on the ladder of self-regulated learning and thinking: the problems addressed are again more complex in nature and the degree of self regulation in learning and working expected from students is larger. The starting point of the learning process in project-centred learning is a project assignment or problem. This concerns authentic, real-life assignments that are often directly derived from professional practice.(Erik De Corte, 2003 p. 117)

The Reggio Emilia approach to learning uses the project approach. Reggio Emilia comes from the region of Italy where this project-based approach began. The late Lorris Malaguzzi and the group of educators around him, who continue to develop this approach, developed Reggio Emilia (Hendrick, 1997). As Millikan noted (2003), the Reggio Emilia approach to learning is based on adults listening to their students rather than them doing all the talking.
Reggio Emilia refers to the environment as ‘the third teacher’. The environment is set up in such a way as to show respect for children and a belief in their abilities (Millikan, 2003). This is evident in the richness and diversity of materials and the experiences provided for in these environments. (Millikan, 2003).

Reggio Emilia educators believe “projects provide the backbone of the children’s and teacher’s learning experience. They are based on the strong conviction that learning by doing is of great importance and that to discuss in groups and to revisit ideas and experiences is the premier way of gaining better understanding and learning.” (Hendrick 1997 p.22).

In Reggio Emilia the word “project” does not have the typical meaning normally associated with it, Millikan (2003), states the definition the Reggio Emilia approach assigns to it.

It does not have the intention of finding out facts about a particular topic; it is not about finding right answers, but supporting children to find good questions in their collaboration with other children. Their projects might involve the planning and making of a construction (such as an amusement park for birds), or planning and organising of an event….Sometimes they are purely imaginative and sometimes they address the larger issues of life, as in their most recent publication which addresses children’s thinking about the future. (p. 87 - 88)

Millikan also reiterates Rinaldi’s (1998a) suggestion that an important aim of Reggio Emilia’s educational project is to perpetuate the social process while instructing children in learning how to learn in both individual and collaborative situations. Using the Reggio Emilia approach to teaching and learning develop and support a number of important skills which encourage their students to become independent learners e.g. respect for materials and each other, collaboration and inquiry through good questioning.

2.12 Play Based Approach to Learning

When creating an environment that encourages the acquisition of the skills that support students in becoming independent, teachers need to consider the value of play in the educational setting. Reynolds and Jones (1992), declare

Emergent curriculum planning relies heavily on observation, and it is best represented after the fact. The teacher’s objectives are broad rather than narrowly specified…He provides a
choice-full environment where children, as they explore and play, will have many opportunities to, for example:

(1) hear and use oral language
(2) explore varied art media
(3) see and discuss written words,
(4) practice solving interpersonal problems,
(5) acquire various physical skills. (p. 90 - 91)

Reynolds and Jones discuss the many learning opportunities students have to explore and play in a naturalistic setting and to practice such skills as working interdependently and problem solving, all vital to becoming independent learners.

Hasting and Hayes (1981) specify the significance of play when it comes to children’s healthy development and through play students develop important life skills,

It is not merely a way in which he keeps himself happily occupied, though it is clearly enjoyable. It is, even more importantly, a way of learning and practising new skills and developing thinking, language and understanding of others. Through play a child can be creative and he can also learn how to compete and cooperate with others. (p. 37)

Unfortunately the educational value that play provides for students is rarely recognised by teachers and parents and often trivialised and seen as a time “to have a break” from “real” learning (Evans, 1996). The problem with the word “play”, when considered in the educational sense is the misunderstandings surrounding it. The reason play is not valued in educational settings is because teachers and parents confuse “play” with “free time” and think of it as a time where students are free to do whatever they want. However, teachers and parents who truly understand the value of play know this is not the case and a great deal of planning and design go into setting up this type of setting. As Dewey (2002) says,

Play tends to reproduce and affirm the crudities , as well as the excellencies, of surrounding adult life. It is the business of the school to set up an environment in which play and work shall be conducted with reference to facilitating desirable mental and moral growth. It is not enough just to introduce plays and games, hand work and manual exercises. Everything depends upon the way in which they are employed. (p. 230)
Play in the classroom needs to be presented in such way that is purposeful and relevant to students’ life to be of any value.

It is extremely important that advocates of a play-based curriculum continue to reiterate the value of play in the classroom to children’s five domain’s of development and in the acquisition of the life skills that lead to independent learners. Just like Tyler specifies how play engages students in their learning by making it a pleasurable experience,

If a playful, pleasurable climate facilitates learning and growth, as the data indicate, we can base our approach to education on the assumption that there is excitement in learning for both the student and the teacher. Going a step further, if we assume that play is learning and that a classroom is meant to be full of playful learning, or learningful play, then as teachers we will begin to see connection between play and math, between grammar and play (Tyler in Seefeldt, 1976 p. 241)

Through play such subjects as maths and grammar are introduced to students in a natural, engaging way, and as already mentioned in this chapter, this motivates students far more to learn then sitting at a desk all day doing worksheets.

This case study is conducted at a school which has a great commitment to play in children’s learning. The school has a play based Oral Language Program, referred to as “Hall”, and will be discussed in further detail.

**2.13 Time in Relation to the Learning Environment**

To develop independent learning skills in students it is very important they have the time to do so. However, time seems to be a precious commodity in the classrooms of the 21st century and a problem for a number of teachers who want to create the most effective learning environments which lead to independent learners, but are under pressure to meet curriculum requirements. One hundred percent of the teachers’ participating in this research stated time as a factor when creating independent learning environments. This is an important issue to be discussed when researching learning environments.
Giving students time to develop also sends a strong message of how their thinking is valued as Perry (2004), reiterates in this quote, “Children need lengthy periods of time in which to represent their ideas in some form and then to develop their play. The organisation of the daily schedule needs to be such that it sends the message, ‘There is plenty of time for you to develop your ideas and to play.'”(p. 91)

Millikan (2003) notes that Reggio Emilia educators do not appear to be pressured by time and that in Reggio Emilia schools,

…the adult provides children with sufficient time to engage with experiences and they are constantly assessing the appropriate time for their own involvement and/or intervention. Their aim is to keep motivation high and the possibility of failure low, of not intervening to quickly in providing correct information but, alternatively, to provoke children to think more deeply, or from another perspective. (p. 83)

Not only is it important to give students time to practise new skills, it is also important to give them time to develop thinking and problem-solving skills rather than teachers intervening before students have a chance to solve problems themselves.

Biller (2003), discusses the importance of giving students time to practise new concepts and how this helps with long-term memory,

When teachers allow students the opportunity to practice, construct, manipulate and personalise new knowledge with previous learning, they are paving the pathway for a unique phenomenon known as long-term potentiation (LTP)...if the experience is repeated or reinforced, it causes the brain to produce important proteins that store the event in the memory. On the other hand, if students are not provided opportunities to practice a new concept over time the bonds between the neurons will diminish and the memory will fade. Practice really does help make learning perfect.(p. 62)

It is obvious that the most effective learning environments which lead to independence, are those that give students time. Time to discuss, practise new skills and concepts and time to develop their ideas.
2.14 Curriculum in the Learning Environment

Learning environments can be set up in contrived ways for students with tasks, equipment and social interactions only found in a school environment, these environments do not lead to students becoming independent thinkers (Holt, 1965; Donaldson, 1978; Tizard & Hughes, 1984; Merry, 1998; Whitbread, 2000 in Williams 2003). Reynolds and Jones (1992), discuss the curriculum thus: “If a curriculum is pre planned toward the behavioural objectives, it is typically linear, with only one way to go. But learning, as it happens, is nonlinear, diverging along unexpected paths as new connections are made.”(p. 90). Learning is a natural process which needs to be taught in a natural environment rather than the contrived one where subjects are isolated rather than taught in a natural way with a curriculum that makes connections between the disciplines, as Dewey (2001), states in this reference,

Again in school each of these subjects is classified. Facts are torn away from their original place in experience and rearranged with reference to some general principle. Classification is not a matter of child experience; things do not come to the individual pigeonholed. The vital of affection, the connecting bonds of activity, hold together the variety of personal experiences. (p.106)

Teachers can provide environments, which are meaningful to students based on their needs and interests, and therefore motivate their students to learn while still meeting the curriculum requirements as asserted by Williams (2003), “Curriculum requirements will be achieved more comfortably in well-managed learning environments where intrinsic motivation is encouraged through independence and responsibility” (p. 75). The pressure to meet the needs of outcomes based curriculum in primary school classrooms can still be met while creating an independent learning environment

An effective environment is designed so even the youngest child can be independent. Teachers must provide children with many opportunities throughout the day to be successful, as they work to do things for themselves. Providing an orderly display of accessible play materials and creative options helps children understand that they are capable of making decisions. (Isbell and Exelby 2001, p. 22)

Slentz and Krogh (2001) state that primary school age children learn most effectively through the manipulation of concrete hands on materials. It is important to have these materials readily
available in a setting that supports independent learning so children can make choices about which materials they can use to help them in their investigations.

2.15 Conclusion

Children have an intrinsic desire from infancy to become independent people. Preschoolers are more than capable of making choices about their learning, creating plans and following through with projects (Isbell and Exelby, 2001). When discussing Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, the fifth and final need is self-actualisation, where individuals strive to satisfy their needs to grow intellectually and spiritually (McInerney & McInerney, 1998). Teachers need to create environments that support this natural desire to learn about the world. Pollard (1994), states “One of the most important things teachers can do for any learner is to make the learner less dependent on them. We need to give students ways to find out for themselves whether what they have done is correct and makes sense.” (p. 8) Teachers also need to scaffold the learning of the skills, which lead children to become independent learners throughout life. Gibbons (2002) supports this view in this quote: “independent learning is never static. As in the rest of life, it is usually moving toward action. The action process compromises related skills that students must learn in order to function successfully: goal setting, planning, self-management, problem solving and self-assessment” (p. 19). Gibbons (2002) also states that the essential skills are decision-making, planning and management of time, efforts and resources. “Skills create competence and competence is power, the power to get things done”. (p. 57). Fisher (2002), believes one of the keys to independent learning is open – endedness,

The minute that an activity is so tightly prescribed by a teacher that there is clearly only one way of doing it – and that’s the teachers’ way, then children will repeatedly come to check that what they are doing is ‘right’. If teachers want uninterrupted teaching time for teacher-intensive activities, then a great deal of consideration needs to be given to these activities which children are to undertake independently. (p. 66)

By designing an environment that encompasses open-ended activities, teachers are giving students the opportunity to practise skills that lead to independence, for example, self – regulation and developing their own self worth, as children feel great pride in managing their own learning and not have to check with an adult all the time (Fisher, 2002).

It is the intention of the researcher to generate discussion amongst professional educators in the ways in which teachers can construct environments that encourage independent learning and lead to
the acquisition of important skills such as cooperation, interdependence and creative thinking that will support children’s development in five basic areas of the spiritual, social, emotional, cognitive and physical. The way in which teachers can create this environment is to give students time to play in a naturalistic setting, give them time to develop their thinking and problem-solving skills and give students choices and responsibility in their learning. Effective teachers also create an environment that is filled with relevant resources that support students in constructing their understandings about the world. Effective schools realise the importance of parents and the wider community in the education of their students and invites the community in, and in turn goes out into the community. It is incumbent upon teachers to provide children with an education that develops them fully, allowing them to evolve and flourish into independent learners and adults who are dynamic and socially constructive members of a complex and ever changing society.
Chapter Three - Methodology

This research investigated what the teachers, parents and students at Buffymont Primary School think are the most important skills and attributes that lead to the development of independent learners and their thoughts on what type of environment supports the acquisition of those attributes and skills. The researcher interviewed a sample group of the teachers, students and parents of the school to ascertain their point of view on the topic. The researcher undertook non – participant classroom observations and a review of relevant documents to thoroughly investigate the ways in which environments are created to encourage independent learners. Stake (1995) affirms that “standard qualitative designs call for the persons most responsible for interpretations to be in the field, making observations, exercising subjective judgement, analysing and synthesizing, all the while realising their own consciousness.” (p. 41,) Stake also goes on to say “…qualitative researchers are non-interventionist. They try to see what would have happened had they not been there. During fieldwork, they try not to draw attention to themselves or their work.” (p. 44)

The epistemology that guided this research is the naturalistic inquiry approach (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Naturalistic inquiry “focuses on the everyday in non-contrived settings (hence naturalistic)” (Green 2002, p.7). This approach gives the researcher a chance to explore a phenomenon without the obligation of action. (Green 2002). “Naturalistic inquiry is well suited to the researcher interested in focusing on unanticipated or an unintended outcomes since the researcher is not locked into examination of predetermined variables.” (Bober, 2001 p.2)

Reynolds (1983) declares “the methodology of ‘naturalism’ is usually defined as the study of the social world through observation of individuals or groups in their natural settings, with minimal interference by the observer” (p. 119). In this study the group being observed was the teachers, parents and students of Buffymont Primary School and the setting their teaching and learning environment.

Case study is a valid and established methodology in naturalistic inquiry (Green, 2002) and seems to be most appropriate in order to address the questions posed in this research.

Kemmis (1983) explain case study work as being naturalistic in three senses, these are:

1. It is as much a search for phenomena in the social world as it is an attempt to develop coherent theories about given social phenomena.
2. It is a quest to articulate the (social) world by creating descriptions of particular (social) contexts.
(3) The “objects” of case study work are “given” situations. What is ‘given’ is a particular issue arising in a particular social situation or a particular social context...In general, the case study worker cannot create the situation he is to observe, nor can he artificially simplify it by manipulation of its context. He must study the situation as a whole. (p.94 - 95)

Using the case study approach, the phenomena focused on in this research is environments that lead to the acquisition of skills that lead to independent learning. The social world, in this case, is the Primary School classroom.

Yin (1994) defines case study as “empirical inquiry that investigates a phenomenon in a natural setting when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clear, using multiple sources of evidence” (p. 14). While Bogdan and Biklen (1992) describe case study as “…a detailed examination of one setting, or a single subject, a single depository of documents, or one particular event.” (p. 62). The phenomenon being investigated in this case study is independent learning and the setting being Buffymont Primary School... Thomas (1998), explains “The greatest advantage of case study is that it permits a researcher to reveal the way a multiplicity of factors have interacted to produce the unique character of the entity that is subject to study. (p. 82) The multiple sources of data to be studied are interviews, observations and review of documents, to reveal how a number of factors interact to produce an independent learning environment. Case study methodology is the most practical given the time frame for this research.

Buffymont Primary School was chosen for this case study because it is accessible, which is essential for prolonged engagement. The school is the researcher’s place of employment. Department Education & Training (DE & T) Victoria has approved this research (Appendix C) and the school was informed of what to expect at each particular phase of the research.

3.1 Demographic Information (as at December 2005)

Buffymont Primary School.

Buffymont Primary School is located in the Western Suburbs of Melbourne. The school’s enrolment was 324 as at December 2005. The school is in the Like 9 school group which means the highest population of Non English Speaking Background (NESB) families and families receiving
the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA). In fact 68% of the families at Buffymont receive the EMA. The majority of families in the school are either unemployed or receive very low wages. The staff consists of:

- 16 classroom teachers Prep to Year 6 (all full time)
- 3 lead teachers (all full time)
- 5 specialist’s teachers (1 Art, 1 Phys. Ed, 1 Library, 1 ESL teaching Vietnamese and 1 oral Language teacher, all part time, except for art teacher who is full time).
- 8 Integration Aides (all part time)
- 3 Administration staff (1 full time and 2 part time).
- Principal and Assistant Principal.

There are a number of students from Non English Speaking Backgrounds (NESB) at Buffymont Primary School. Here is a breakdown of the different languages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Home Language</th>
<th>Number of students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African Languages</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albanian</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabic Languages</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bosnian</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cantonese</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croatian</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filipino</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greek</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hakka</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindi</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indo-Aryan</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macedonian</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maltese</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandarin</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pashto</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persian (Excluding Dari)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
16 Students at Buffymont Primary School are funded for various learning disabilities. This number was higher, but students diagnosed with language disorders are no longer funded on an individual basis, the school receives a lump sum for these students. 45 of the families at Buffymont are single parent families.

Before the start of each interview (Appendices A, B & G) participants were asked some demographic questions. The following data highlights the information about the teachers participating in this research.

- 100% of teachers participating were female
- 86% of participants were over the age of 45 years, while 14% were between the ages of 25 to 30 years.
- 57% of participants had a Diploma of Education – Primary. 29% had a Bachelor of Education. 14% have a Graduate Diploma. One participant as well as a Diploma of Education, also had and Advanced Diploma in Early Childhood.
- 43% of the teachers participating had 25 or more years teaching experience. 29% had 20 to 24 years experience. 14% had 15 to 20yrs experience, while another 14% had 0 to 5 years experience.
- 71% of participants had only taught in the public school system, while 29% had taught in the public and Catholic school system.
- 71% of the participants had taught levels Prep to year six. 14.5% had taught prep to year five, and 14.5% had taught prep to year two.

Parents were asked their age and gender (Appendix A) and their child’s gender age and year level.

- 100% of research participants were female
75% were between the ages of 41 to 45 years. 25% of parent participants were between the ages of 26 to 30 years.

Student participants were asked their gender; age and year level (Appendix B).

- 50% of students participants were male and 50% were female.
- 50% of participants were 7 years old, with 25% being 10 years old and another 25% being 11 years old.
- 50% were in year two. 25% of participants in year four and 25% in year five.

3.2 Participants

The purpose of this research was to gain insight into teachers, parents and students’ perspective on what skills and attributes lead to independent learners and how they think the learning environment supports the acquisition of these skills. The researcher was concerned with these participant perspectives as described in this example by Bogdan and Biklen (1992) “…In one educational study, for example, the researcher focused part of his work on parent perspective on their children’s education…He also studied the teachers’ and students’ perspective on the same issue in hope of finding some intersections, and to explore the implications for schooling.” (p. 32)

The following tables show the codes for participants and their relationship with each other:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Code</th>
<th>Teacher’s Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>011 to 013</td>
<td>Prep/one/two classroom teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O14</td>
<td>Reading recovery teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>015</td>
<td>Oral language teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>016 and 017</td>
<td>Prep/one/two classroom teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S01</td>
<td>Specialist Program teacher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teacher participants and their roles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent Code</th>
<th>Student Code</th>
<th>Relationship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P01</td>
<td>ST01</td>
<td>Parent and Child. Child is a yr 6 student.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P02</td>
<td>ST02</td>
<td>Parent and Child. Child a year 4 student</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Parent and student participants and their relationship.

**Teachers.**

Correspondence was forwarded to the Department of Education and Training (DE&T) and the Principal requesting (Appendix D) permission for the researcher to interview teachers, students and parents of Buffymont Primary School. The researcher also asked for access to school documents and to be able to conduct non participant observations in the classroom. Written permission was granted by DE&T (Appendix C) and verbal permission granted by the Principal of Buffymont Primary School.

After this permission was granted, *Criterion Sampling* was used to choose teachers to participate in the study. *Criterion Sampling* is “Picking cases that meet some criterion.” (Patton, 2002 p. 243). The criterion to be met was as follows;

- Needed to be a teacher at Buffymont Primary School
- Needed to teach in the Junior Area (P to 2) of the school.

The focus was on the junior school, which encompasses six prep/one/two homegroups, as this is an area of interest and the current work area for the researcher.

Each teacher, in the junior school, was given a letter of invitation (Appendix E), explaining, if they agreed to participate in the study, they would complete a semi-structured interview conducted by the researcher which would take approximately 30 to 45 minutes (Appendix G) and be observed in the classroom for approximately ninety minutes (Appendix H). Interested participants were asked to sign the plain language statement attached to the letter (Appendix E) and return to the researcher.

Out of the nine junior school teachers, seven teachers were interviewed and observed.

**Parents and Students**

Parents and students were chosen to participate in the research study using *random sampling*. Random sampling is “…to draw from the population to which we hope to apply a predictive
generalisation a random rather than a judgemental sample. A random sample is drawn on a chance basis so that each instance in the population about which we wish to generalise has an equal and independent probability of being selected.” (Stenhouse, 1983, p. 12). The researcher generated a random sample using the CASES system within the school. The system generated ten family names at random. The researcher sent each of the families a letter outlining the purpose of the research and their involvement. This involvement would be one interview, approximately 30 minutes long of parents (Appendix A) and one interview approximately 30 minutes long of their children (Appendix B). The interviews were designed to gain the parents’ and students’ perspective of independent learning. A plain language statement was attached to the letter. (Appendix F). These letters were sent to the families selected. No families chose to participate in the study. The process was repeated with another ten families, one family responded.

With only one family willing to participate in the study, the method of snowballing was used to generate other participants. “Snowball or chain sampling. This is an approach for locating information rich key informants or critical cases. The process begins by asking well suited people: ‘Who knows a lot about __________? Whom should I talk to?’ By asking a number of people who else to talk with, the snowball gets bigger and bigger as you accumulate new information rich cases.” (Patton, 2002 p. 237). By asking the one respondent if they knew of any other families in the school who would be interested in participating in such a study, four families eventually participated. Parents and students of the four families were interviewed.

3.3 Data Collection

The qualitative methods of data collection used in this case study were:

- Interviews, approximately 30 minutes long, with teachers (Appendix G), parents (Appendix A), and students. (Appendix B).
- Observations of, the learning environment, physical, social, and psychological, teachers’ classroom practice, students’ responses to the learning environment. (Appendix H)
- Review of documents.

Interviews

Interviews were the primary method of data collection in this study. As Stake (1995) explains:
“Much of what we cannot observe for ourselves has been or is being observed by others. Two principal uses of case study are to obtain the descriptions and interpretations of others. The case will not be seen the same by everyone. Qualitative researchers take pride in discovering and portraying the multiple views of the case. The interview is the main road to multiple realities.” (p. 64)

The multiple views portrayed in this research are those of the teachers, parents and students of Buffymont Primary School.

A structured face-to-face individual interview compromising no more than fifteen questions was the primary source of data collection. This method is deemed most appropriate because it:

- Overcomes problems of literacy inadequacies. (A high percentage of the families of Buffymont are either Non English Speaking, are low socio-economic or have learning difficulties).
- Provides opportunities to clarify questions and answers by both the researcher and participant
- Allows for flexibility in the structure of the interview.
- Suggests to the respondents that the researcher values their opinion
- Makes it easy to digress from central topic in ways that prove useful to the investigator (Thomas 1998)

Another major advantage of the interview as stated by Bell (1999) is “…its adaptability. A skilful interviewer can follow up ideas, probe responses and investigate motives, feelings, which the questionnaire can never do.” (p. 135)

For the interview to be productive the interviewer in this research met the following guidelines:

- The interviewees were representative of the group i.e. the classroom teachers’ and specialists were approached for an interview. Parents and students.
- Interviews were conducted on an individual basis.
- The teacher interviews were conducted in the Junior School staff office with no distractions or interruptions. The parent and student interviews were conducted in an empty classroom with no interruptions or distractions.
- A plain language statement was provided to all interviewees and written permission acquired. (Appendices E & F).
- Responses were recorded verbatim (Leedy & Ormrod 2001).
- Questions were digitally recorded, on an audio recorder, as this is a far more accurate record of conversations.
- Brief notes were taken in case of recorder malfunction.
Before the interviews, participants were asked some demographic information. The participants were informed of the purpose of the interview, and the confidentiality of the data given to the researcher (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Each interview was coded with a number and no names were used. Teachers were coded 011 to 017 parents were P01 to P04 and students were ST01 to ST04. As the topic being investigated is not a straight forward topic, the participants were asked open-ended questions (Parlett & Hamilton, 1983). It was the aim of the researcher to obtain qualitative data to study and understand the topic. Johnson and Christensen (2004) state:

“Qualitative interviews are also called in-depth interviews because they can be used to obtain in-depth information about a participant’s thoughts, beliefs, knowledge, reasoning, motivations, and feelings about a topic. Qualitative interviewing allows a researcher to enter into the inner world of another person and to gain an understanding of that person’s perspective.” (p. 183)

After participants were reassured, the interviews began. All interviews were digitally recorded (audio), with participant’s written permission, on a Dictaphone. Interviews were then transcribed and transcripts used for analysis later. (Bell, 1999).

Teacher interviews (Appendix G) consisted of fourteen questions and took approximately 30 to 45 minutes to complete, with one interview taking one hour. All interviews, except one, were conducted after the school day as this was the most convenient time for the teachers; one interview was conducted in the morning before the school day. Parent interviews (Appendix A) were all conducted after school and consisted of six questions, the interviews took approximately 30 minutes. Student interviews (Appendix B) were all conducted in one morning during class time. Student interviews consisted of seven questions and took between 15 to 30 minutes to complete.

3.4 Observations

The secondary method of data collection employed in this research was non-participant observations. Creswell (2002) defines observations as “the process of gathering first hand information by observing people and places at a research site” (p. 199). The researcher spent approximately one and half hours in the classroom of each teacher participating in the study. The researcher was much more an observer than participant and the participants were fully aware that they were being observed as part of this study (Johnson and Christensen, 2004).
The purpose for the observations was to “check interviews”, it is for this reason observations were carried out before interviews. In this way participants could interact with their students in a natural setting, rather than creating a synthetic environment in which they guessed what would please the researcher, after being interviewed (Thomas, 1998). As Stenhouse (1983) notes, “…observation is located in a study where the main weight is carried by interviewing. Observation often provides cues for the agenda of interview or follows from remarks made by the interviewee. The crucial issue for such condensed fieldwork is whether observation or interview is regarded as the more valid or reliable. Do you check observation by interview or do you check interview by observation?” (p. 34).

In this case study, the main data collection was by interview and observations were taken to check these interviews.

These observations included:

- The physical environment
- Teachers’ practices in the classrooms
- Student’s responses to different learning environments.

Methods for recording these observations were:

- field notes (appendix H)
- matrices (Thomas, 1998)

3.5 Document Review

The final method of data collection was review of relevant documents. Erlandson, Harris, Skipper and Allen (1993) define documents as “the broad range of written and symbolic records, as well as any available materials and data “(p. 99). Creswell (2002) states these sources are valuable to the researcher to help understand the central phenomena in qualitative studies. Stake (1995) and Stenhouse (1983) felt important documents to be studied include, annual reports, correspondence, minutes of meeting, syllabuses and hand-outs produced for teachers, students and parents.

The documents reviewed in this study included:

- Buffymont Primary School Charter, 05/06
- Other policy documents of Buffymont Primary School
- Minutes from relevant meetings e.g. unit meetings, professional learning teams and staff meetings of 2005
3.6 Data Analysis

Analysing the data gathered from interviews, observations and document reviews was an ongoing process, conducted simultaneously with the data collection and interpretation (Creswell, 2002; Erlandson, Harris, Skipper and Allen, 1993). Bogdan and Biklen (1992) define the process of qualitative research as,

“… descriptive. The data collected are in the form of words or pictures rather than numbers. The written results of the research contain quotations from the data to illustrate and substantiate the presentation. The data include interview transcripts, field notes…memos and other official records. In their search for understanding, qualitative researchers do not reduce the pages upon pages of narration and other data to numerical symbols. They try to analyse the data with all of their richness as closely as possible to the form in which they were recorded or transcribed.” (p. 30).

All interviews and field notes from observations were transcribed by the researcher for analysis (Johnson & Christensen, 2004).

The researcher also used a journal to record ideas generated during analysis. This practice is referred to as “memoing”. Memoing is,

“…reflective notes that researchers write to themselves about what they are learning from their data. The content of memos can include notes about anything, including thoughts on emerging concepts, themes or patterns found in the data, the need for further data collection, a comparison that needs to be made in the data and virtually anything else.” (Johnson & Christensen, 2004, p. 501).

The initial analysis involved grouping the data collected under themes or patterns emerging from the process. In the search for meaning in the data collected, the researcher looked for patterns or consistencies. These patterns were sought out immediately, while interviewing, observing and reviewing documents and later on when the researcher coded the records and added them to matrices. (Stake, 1995)

Once interviews were completed and transcribed, the data was added to a matrix for analysis and interpretation. Interview questions were placed on the vertical and teachers codes at the top.
Teachers answers were placed in the matrix and patterns or consistencies were highlighted. (Sample in Appendix M) Teacher interviews and observations data was then placed in a matrix to show similarities (Sample in Appendix M). Parent and student interviews were recorded in the same way. To show patterns and similarities between, teachers, parents and students interviews a third matrix was created with the collective data from all participants. (Samples in Appendix M).

3.7 Ethical Considerations

As stated earlier, all appropriate documentation was sent out to all the participants in this study. Letters outlining what would be expected of each participant was sent out. Attached to the letter was a plain language statement (Appendices E and F) outlining the responsibility of the researcher and the participants. The plain language statement and letter both stressed participants would remain anonymous and could withdraw from the project at any time.

The Department of Education and Training (DE&T) approved this research to be conducted at Buffymont Primary School (Appendix C). RMIT gave ethical clearance for this research (Appendix H).
Chapter Four - Findings and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

This case study looked at the skills and attributes teachers, parents and students perceived were the most important to become an independent learner and what the participants thought the learning environment would look like that lead to the acquisition of those skills and attributes. Teachers, parents and students underwent interviews to ascertain their views on this topic and teachers were observed in their classrooms to examine how they encouraged independence in their students. Documents from Buffymont Primary School and the Department of Education and Training were also examined. The results of these interviews, observations and document reviews are discussed in detail in this chapter.

4.2 Skills Students Need To Be Independent Learners.

The following questions were asked of the participants in this study to ascertain their beliefs about the most important life skills needed to be independent learners:

Asked of teachers: What do you believe are the most important skills children need to become independent learners? Why?

Asked of parents: What do you believe are the most important life skills your child needs to be independent?

Asked of students: What do you believe are the most important things you need to learn at school?

The following diagram represents the commonalities within the three different groups interviewed regarding the most important life skills to becoming independent learners.
Figure 1 – Skills to develop independence

Figure one represents the commonalities between the three groups interviewed about the most important skills and attributes needed to become independent learners.

**Interviews – Ability to Make Friends**

Of all the skills deemed important by the participants in this study, the ability to make friends was the only one common to all three groups.

Parents were very strong in their views about the ability for their children to make friends and interact with people and the importance of this skill for their children to be independent learners throughout life, as quoted in their interview transcripts:

P01: “It is important to me for my child to feel a part of the group”

P02: “It is important for children not to feel like an outcast. It also affects their confidence and learning, if they are worried about not having friends or how they can make friends they are not concentrating on their learning.”

P04 “Good interaction and that’s not just at home, its home and school. If they are not doing it at home you just can’t expect it to happen at school either”.

Similarly, children also believe being able to make friends is important and, like parents, believe if you don’t have friends it can affect learning as stated by this student during his interview:
ST04: “Having friends helps you learn social skills you can use when you’re older. If you have no friends you can feel isolated and like you’re the only one with no friends. If you are being bullied you are more likely to go to a friend before you go to a teacher but if you have no friends you feel even lonelier. If you have no friends it can distract you from your learning because you are concentrating on the fact you have no friends and what to do about it rather than learning.”

Teachers participating in the research have similar views to parents and students as to why the ability to make friends is such an important skill:

012: “Children are happy if they have friends and if they are happy they are settled and more able to learn. Also children learn from and help each other, if they have no friends they don’t have that peer support.”

014: “Children with friends are happy and settled and more able to learn, they are not worrying about not having friends or how to get friends. For example I have seen children try and buy friendship by bringing things from home to give children like a bribe. Children ask friends for help in the classroom so if you haven’t any friends you have no one to turn to.”

016: “Relationships are important. We don’t live in isolation and we don’t learn in isolation. Students learn from each other and that is important. There is a big difference between being independent and being isolated.”

Slentz and Krogh (2001), concur with participants of the importance of the ability to make friends in learning, and state “….. [primary age children] still learn best when they can interact with one another…..” (p.134). Likewise Hendrick, Millikan and Hastings and Hayes all state the importance of friendship skills in assisting learners.

Reynolds and Jones (1992), support participants view that students learn important concepts, not from being told by the teacher, but by interacting with the physical world and other students. Dewey’s (2002), view on learning substantiates participant 016’s point about not learning in isolation by stating:

“A being whose activities that are associated with others has a social environment. What he does and he can do depend upon the expectations, demands, approvals and condemnations of others. A being connected with other beings cannot perform his own activities without taking the activities of others into account” (p. 14).
Non – Participant Observations

During the non participatory observations in classrooms, the explicit teaching of the ability to make friends was not observed. The researcher finds it curious that the ability to make friends is thought to be so important by the three groups in the study, and yet there was no evidence of it being explicitly taught in classrooms during observations. If the participants truly believe that this skill has such a positive affect on students and their learning and assists them to become independent learners, then it seems there is a need to place more emphasis on teaching students to be able to make friends. This could be achieved by setting up the classroom in such a way as to encourage social interaction, for example by using the multiple intelligence model there could be a number of activities to encourage friendship as shown in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Multiple Intelligence</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Linguistic</td>
<td>* Class friendship books – students write in each others books and state what qualities that person has which makes them a good friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logical - Mathematical</td>
<td>*Students collect data on the classes favourite food, music, TV show movie etc and graph the results. This activity could be used as a “getting to know you” activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bodily- Kinaesthetic</td>
<td>* Role play scenarios in which people are being good friends, e.g. playing a game in the playground, how to approach a group and join in their activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musical Intelligence</td>
<td>*Create raps, songs about friendship</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2 – Example of How Friendship Skills could be Explicitly Taught in the Classroom using Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences.

There were a number of other skills that could indirectly affect friendship making abilities that were observed either being modelled or explicitly taught by teachers’ which will be discussed in further detail later in this chapter.
Document Review

A number of documents reviewed during this research supported the importance of making friends. These documents are shown in the table below.

Figure 3 – Documents on skills.
Figure 2 illustrates the number of documents within the school as well as the wider educational community support the importance of being able to make friends. For example; the unit one meeting minutes 3/8/07. “Friendship groups – teachers feel we could add some other children – S has original list”. These are groups run by the school’s visiting psychologist to help children, who teachers believe need extra support, to develop their friendship skills.

The Victorian Essentials Learning Standards (VELS), which is the curriculum framework for Victorian Public Schools, recognises the importance of students being able to make and maintain friendships as stated in “Laying the Foundations” to become a successful learner there is an emphasis on socialisation”. The importance of friendship is stated throughout this document in a number of the learning strands e.g. Health and Physical Education level One; “While participating in movement and physical activity students learn to support, consider and encourage others.”

**Interviews – Cooperation**

The ability to make friends requires the development of other skills deemed important by parents and teachers for students to become independent learners. These skills include cooperation and communication.

Barry and King (2001), define cooperation, in the classroom, as: “…students working together, interacting with each other and one or some of the students helping those who need or ask for help” (p. 203).

Parents interviewed for this study believe being able to cooperate with others is important to their children’s’ learning;

P02 “It’s about the balancing act of needing to learn to get along. I suppose the main thing is the diversity of people, our school is good because we have such diversity of people, and understanding how each person functions and learning how to cooperate with that, the rest will come…”

In fact this parent went on to state that being able to cooperate needs to come before academic skills; “…the rest will come but tolerance and all that has to be taught and modelled and led because that just doesn’t come…”

Similarly, teachers interviewed reiterate the significance of students being able to cooperate to be successful independent learners, as shown from interview transcripts:
They need to first of all be able to cooperate with each other, so they need to develop skills in doing that…”

“Cooperation and respecting like respecting people…”

…but they also need social skills like, respecting themselves and other people, cooperation, …”

In all three examples of teachers interviewed, social skills, like cooperation, were held in higher regard than the academic skills of reading, writing and mathematics. Though these skills were mentioned by teachers, they were not considered as essential as skills like cooperation. Cutting and Wilson (2001) support parents and teachers’ view that cooperation is an important skill that leads to independent learning and classrooms need to allow for students to work together cooperatively.

**Non-Participant Observations - Cooperation**

As stated previously, during the non-participant observations of this research, skills of cooperation were observed as shown in these examples. The teachers explicitly spoke to the children about cooperation on two different occasions;

015; “…so please be cooperative and listen patiently.”

015; “to be fair, when you finish give your remote to someone else”.

013 “we need to share the textas and ask first, not just take them”.

Similarly teacher participant 017, explicitly encouraged students to work cooperatively and interdependently:

017; “I am going to give you a big piece of paper and I want everyone to help, I want everyone to take turns to work interdependently and cooperatively.”

**Document Review - Cooperation**

The documents reviewed uphold the view of participants on the importance of cooperation as displayed in the following diagram.
Figure 4 – Cooperation in Documents

Figure three represents where, in documents reviewed for this study, cooperation is mentioned as being an important skill which can lead to independent learning.

**Interviews - Communication**

Communication is another valuable skill parents and teachers thought students needed to become independent learners. Communication is defined by the researcher as the ability to communicate ideas, feelings and thoughts with others, using verbal and non-verbal language.

Parents’ statements indicate they want their children to be able to communicate their difficulties and feelings in order to assist their learning e.g.

P01: “able to ask questions if she doesn’t know something and ask peers, not just teachers”.

P02: “Good communication – need to feel they can talk about anything, especially boys”.

Teachers agree with parents that communication is important for students to becoming independent learner e.g.

011: “Be able to ask relevant questions to find out information”.

This teacher reiterates the importance for students to be able to communicate clearly in their questioning to find out the relevant information for their learning.
Longworth (2003), supports participants view that communication, among many others, is an important skill for learners, as do Cutting and Wilson (2001), who insert communication skills in learning contracts.

One of Art Costa’s (2000), “Habits of Mind” is to be able to “communicate clearly”. The “Habits of Mind” is referred to constantly by teachers at Buffymont Primary School and cards of the 16 “Habits” are displayed in every classroom.

Non-Participant Observations - Communication

During the non – participant observations in classrooms, there were many examples of communication skills. These skills were either being modelled or explicitly taught by teachers or practised by students. For example When observing teacher participant 011, the following statement was recorded;

“If I am talking to you, you need to sit and look at me”.

“When you talk to someone you need to look at them so they know you are listening”.

This teacher instructs students on the importance of eye contact and listening when communicating with others.

Buffymont Primary School places a great deal of emphasis on students learning through play and hands on activities. The school runs an Oral Language Program referred to as “Hall”, which is a play based program. Non-participant observations were taken during one of these sessions. A number of examples of communication skills were observed.

For instance; Each session ends with small groups of students sharing their learning, for this purpose a “host” is chosen each session to chair the sharing sessions.

Teacher 015 facilitates these sessions and gives the students very explicit instructions on communication skills, e.g.;

015: “Must make eye contact with the audience when sharing”. And

“When introducing yourself state your first and last name”. 

015: “We don’t just come to the learning centre to play and have fun; you need to share your ideas as well

Besides giving instruction, teacher 015, prompted and encouraged students to think about their communication skills. For example; one student’s explanation for their learning was “I made a car”.

51
Teacher 015 prompted the child for more information by asking questions such as “how did you make the car?”

The students also have the opportunity to ask questions of each other about their learning, giving them an opportunity to practise communication skills. A common question students are asked is “what Habits of Mind did you use?”, again referring to Art Costa’s Habits of Mind. The student during this observation replied “I was being accurate and precise”.

**Document Review - Communication**

Unit One, Term One Planner includes activities to assist students’ communication e.g. “Role play scenarios reflecting positive and negative communication e.g. sharing toys”. “How do we cooperate and communicate effectively with others?”

The planner states the importance of communication in relation to interpersonal development rather than an academic point of view, reiterating the importance of students developing such social skills to becoming independent learners, before moving on to academic skills.

Specialists Planners encourage students to develop their communication skills as well e.g. Term Three Planner for Art:

“Create art works that focus on expressive ways of communicating ideas and feelings”.

Term Three Planner for library:

“Listening viewing and responding”
“Identifying communication conventions”
“Being attentive listeners, facing the speaker, taking turns, clarifying meaning and extending interactions”.

**Interviews – Risk Taking/Persistence**

Art Costa (2000) defines persistence and risk taking as two of the sixteen attributes human beings need to behave intelligently. These two skills were also discussed by parents and teachers during their interviews as skills their children and students need to be independent learners.

Teacher 011 stated:
“To take risks, they need to know that in the classroom it is o.k. to make mistakes, so they need an environment where they are happy, they need to know they can take risks without thinking ‘Oh if I get this wrong someone is going to jump on me’. I guess if you develop all those in all those areas children are going to take risks and become independent doing so”.

Similarly teacher 013 states:

“They need to be able to take risks; they need to feel happy and safe in the environment in order to take those risks”.

Teacher 013 also stated how persistence assists children’s learning

“They [students] need to be given work that is challenging but not too hard for them, so they are happy to have a go at it. It needs to be interesting work to keep them on task, variety in the work that they do”.

Teacher 015 concurs that it is important for students to develop persistence if they are to become independent learners, as does parent P04.

Isbell & Exelby (2001) support teachers’ and parents’ view that it is important for students to take risks. They state that in a positive and caring environment set up by teachers, students will be more willing to take risks, ask questions and make investigations freely.

Pollard (1994), discusses the importance of students taking risks and making their own mistakes in relevance to developing their thinking skills e.g.:

‘The more a child uses his own sense of consistency, of things fitting together and making sense, to find and correct his own mistakes, the more he will feel that his way of using his mind works, and better he will get at it. …But if as usually happens we point out all his mistakes as soon as he makes them, and even worse, correct them for him, self-checking and self correcting skills will not develop but will die out”.(p. 8)

Pollard believes if students don’t take risk and therefore don’t make mistakes they will not develop important self correcting skills.

Robinson (2006), states: “Kids will take a chance, if they don’t know, they’ll have a go, and they’re not frightened of being wrong. If you are frightened of being wrong you will never come up with something original. But by the time they become adults, most kids have lost that capacity and are frightened of being wrong”.
Robinson believes it is important to make mistakes and take risks because if students don’t risks they won’t develop thinking skills which lead to original ideas.

Shipley (2002) states a number of skills students need as “learning to learn” skills. One of these skills is to “persist with learning activities” (p.59).

**Non-Participant Observations – Risk Taking/Persistence**

During non – participant observations in teacher participant 011’s classroom there was an example of the teacher encouraging students to take risks;

“….someone else, it’s always the same people with their hands up. I’m going to choose someone, SH – have a go it doesn’t matter if you are wrong.”

Later in the lesson, teacher participant 011, praised students who had completed a report further encouraging their risk taking;

“You all had a go and did a great job”.

During the non-participant observations in classrooms there was no clear evidence of persistence being encouraged or promoted in the classrooms.

**Document Review – Risk Taking/Persistence**

In the documents reviewed for this research there was only one reference to risk taking as an important skill for students. This reference was found in the Unit One Planners for Terms One, Two, Three and Four of 2005. The reference was “…using language describing Habits of Mind”; one of the sixteen habits is “taking responsible risks”. The reference to risk taking is an indirect one. This is also the case with persistence, the only mention in the documents reviewed in the four term planners from unit one and again it was the reference “…use the language describing the Habits of Mind.”, one of the sixteen habits is “persisting”.

It would seem that, even though risk taking and persistence are important to teachers and parents when it comes to their children’s’ learning and the literature supports risk taking and persistence as important the documents reviewed do not support this view.

**Interviews – Thinking/problem Solving Skills**
Thinking and problem solving are skills valued by teachers’ and parents participating in this research and both participant groups believe important for students’ to become independent learners.

Art Costa (2000), defines thinking skills as the ability to:

- draw upon a repertoire of problem-solving strategies
- create and seek novel approaches to solving problems
- approach problems from new angles referred to as ‘lateral thinking’
- consider alternative points of view
- deal with several sources of information simultaneously
- plan a strategy for producing what information is needed
- reflect on and evaluate the productiveness of our own thinking.

Teacher participants 011, 016 and S01 all stated in interviews that thinking skills and problem solving skills are important to be independent learners as shown in the following quotes:

016: “Be able to have thinking skills to be proactive in their learning to question appropriately”

S01: “…I suppose they have to be able to use some of their own thinking, they need to be able to think for themselves and to like, for example a lot of children aren’t even able to put their own clothes on, I mean you get kids who can’t put on something, take off something and that’s all a part of building on those skills and then transferring them to learning.”

Parent P01 believed it was important for their child to be a bit more independent because of a learning disability. The parent believed having good problem solving skills would help this child in becoming an independent learner.

There are a number references made in the literature regarding the importance of thinking and problem solving skills. Longworth (2003), supports teachers’ and parents’ view of thinking and problem solving skills being important to becoming independent learners in this society of change and knowledge explosion, as stated in the following quote:

‘The new emphasis is on the acquisition of a completely different set of skills and attributes, higher-order skills of information handling, problem solving, thinking, teamwork, communicating and many other.” (p. 79)
Cutting and Wilson (2001), affirm the importance of developing student research, problem solving, thinking and communication skills which lead to independent learning.

**Non-Participant Observations – Thinking/Problem Solving Skills**

Thinking and problem solving skills are greatly encouraged in the curriculum at Buffymont Primary School. As already discussed, Art Costa’s 16 “Habits of Mind” are strongly encouraged. There is a great deal of evidence of teachers encouraging and supporting students in these skills as shown in the non-participant observations.

Teacher participant 011 started this maths lesson by reviewing the work they did before lunch:

011: “Who can tell me - what is a report?”
011 “use thinking time”.

A number of the maths activities teacher 011 set up were open-ended so the students had the opportunity to expand on their thinking. Teacher 011 encouraged students to use the language of maths further encouraging them to think about their activities, e.g. when describing activity one using pattern blocks;

011; “…make a picture with pattern blocks you need to tell me the shapes and when describing shapes use the language.”

In activity four, students needed to grab a handful of number tiles and put them in order from the smallest number to the largest, giving students the opportunity to think about numbers.

Teacher participant 012’s lesson was about the school rules and consequences of following them or not following them. Teacher 012 instructed students to think about their behaviour and the consequences e.g.

012; “If you choose to kick Ja what will be the consequence?”
Ja: “A negative”.
012; “So why would you choose to do this?”
012; “You need to think about your choices”.

Teacher participant 013’s lesson was about the integrated topic of the time, “minibeasts”. The teacher chose an open-ended activity of classifying minibeasts, giving the students the opportunity
to think about the features of minibeasts and classifying them using their own criteria, e.g. using plastic minibeasts one child classified them as one that can fly and ones that can’t.

013: “I want someone to group them but don’t tell us how, we need to guess”.

Child classify’s the minibeasts into six groups:
1. Nippers
2. lots of legs
3. wings
4. walk
5. jump
6. bite

Document Review – Thinking/Problem Solving Skills

A number of the documents reviewed, make clear the importance of thinking and problem solving skills in students becoming independent learners.

Unit One Term Planners for Term One, Two, Three and Four include the following thinking skills; Each term discusses using De Bono’s six thinking hats and Art Costa’s Habits of Mind in the classrooms. Term Two Planner also mentions using Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences.

The Term Three Art planner encourages thinking skills in the following way;

“apply creative ideas in practical ways using creative, imaginative and flexible thinking.”

In the VELS document under “Laying the Foundations” the following examples of encouraging thinking skills were found;

“Knowledge is constructed; we build our brains through experience, both real and perceived. Learning is cumulative and consequently the ability to transfer learning is a key skill”.

And

“One of the fundamental skills successful learners must develop is to reflect on learning, to link new knowledge to existing knowledge.” [Art Costa’s Habit of Mind “using previous knowledge”]
Buffymont Primary’s school charter also shows a commitment to thinking skills when it comes to its students becoming independent learners, e.g.

“This charter is committed to a curriculum that will further develop the thinking skills, multiliteracies and assessment for learning.”

Buffymont Primary School Newsletter dated the 21/6/05 contained an article discussing the skills learned in the Oral Language Program, these skills included applying Art Costa’s Habit’s of Mind in students learning.

**Interviews - Literacy**

Of all the skills mentioned by participants in this study, teachers and students only agreed on one as important to becoming independent learners. This skill is literacy skills of reading and writing. Of the student participants interviewed, 50% agreed that reading and writing or English skills were important to them becoming independent learners.

Of teacher participants interviewed, 50% spoke of the importance for students to have basic literacy skills. The teacher participants spoke of these skills in relation to other skills already discussed above and the importance of students having those skills first before the more academic skills of literacy, e.g.

013; “They need to learn cues, like that cue them into reading and writing so they can go and work things out by themselves and not come up to the teacher all the time. If they didn’t just know it then they have to know what to look for, for example look for familiar letters if they didn’t know it, look for it around the room that sort of thing.”

Teacher participant 013 state the need for students to learn the strategies to help them with their reading and writing, so students can work these problems out for themselves rather than interrupting the teacher, which develops a students ability to become an independent lifelong learner.

014; “they need the basic skills of reading and writing but they also need social skills…”

Teacher participant 014, states the importance of literacy skills but gets back to how important the social aspects of a students development is as well in regards to them becoming independent learners.
…how to just open a book and find some information.”

First of all I think they need to feel good about themselves they need to feel happy, warm and well fed, good sleep. They need to feel part of the group. Skills as in looking after themselves first like being able to unpack their bag, dress and undress themselves. Once they have all that basic then they’re ready to start reading and writing…”

Teacher participant 017 has a similar view to learning as Maslow in his “Hierarchy of Needs” (1998). In this hierarchy Maslow discusses feeling safe both physically and emotionally and this need needs to be met before higher order thinking can be reached, and where learning begins. (McInerney & McInerney, 1998). Maslow’s third level of the hierarchy is a sense of belonging, as participant 017 believes, first in the family then in the outside world.

Longworth (2003), agrees that reading and writing skills are important to students becoming independent learners, but along with a number of other skills needed in a knowledge based rapidly changing society;

“No matter that the basics are themselves subject to changing times and that traditional virtues become less relevant or inappropriate. Of course those old stalwarts of the die hard – reading writing and arithmetic are still important. Without them children and adults are disenfranchised from learning. But as Naisbitt says ‘to stop there is to equip children only with the skills of their grandparents. It is like giving them wrench to fix a computer, there is nothing wrong with a wrench but it won’t fix a computer.’” (p. 123).

Non-Participant Observations - Literacy

During non-participant observations it was observed the following teacher participants 012, 013, 016, 017 all started the session by reading a book to the students. Often these books were used as a springboard for the lesson. For example teacher participant 016 read the John Marsden picture book “A Day in the Life of Me”, in this story the child is allowed to do whatever he likes. Teacher 017 used this to introduce the activity for the session:

016 “We’re sort of doing an anything you like activity”

016 “we are making a snail habitat and you can include whatever you like. You can use whatever materials you like.”
Similarly teacher 017 read a book entitled “creatures of the seashore” and discussed the setting of the story. The activity for the session was for students to design a poster which showed a setting from the movie “Finding Nemo”.

Teacher 012 read a book “A Day with Minibeasts” which was a book the students in the class had made previously.

Teacher 011 demonstrated to the students how to write a report.

**Document Review - Literacy**

Documents reviewed show evidence of reading and writing skills being held as important to students becoming independent learners. For example the Prep Information Book for 2005 states;

“Beginning School Program, types of things children do;
  - Story time
  - Borrowing Books from the Library
  - Read together from big books.

The introduction to the VELS document states;

“Levels one and two focus largely on foundational literacy and numeracy skills…”

And in “Laying the Foundations” section of the document it states;

“The foundation knowledge, skills and behaviours that children must develop in levels one and two to become successful learners at school are: reading, writing, speaking and listening….”

**Interviews - Numeracy**

Parents and student participants agree on only one skill as being important to becoming independent learners, that skill is mathematical skills.

Parent participant P03 state;

“Mathematical skills, if you don’t have that you don’t have a lot”.

60
100% of students interviewed stated maths as an important skill, for example:

ST02: “Probably maths because you use maths everyday, like to buy things…”
ST03: “Maths because um, I like maths best”.
ST04 “Maths because you learn to do sums”.

As quoted before, Longworth (2003), undisputedly states the importance of maths skills, but in relation to a number of skills needed to be an independent successful learner.

**Document Review - Numeracy**

Documents reviewed show evidence of maths skills being held as important to students becoming independent learners.

The introduction to the VELS document states;

“Levels one and two focus largely on foundational literacy and numeracy skills…”

And in “Laying the Foundations” section of the document it states;

“The foundation knowledge, skills and behaviours that children must develop in levels one and two to become successful learners at school are:….and numeracy”.

Unit Planner for Term One and Three for 2005 state incorporating maths skills in the classroom.

Term One: “Maths – students practise and explore skills and understanding”
Term Three: “Maths – money, provide children with real life experiences e.g. how much to buy an apple at the canteen”.

“Use calculators”.

There are a number of skills the three participating groups of this study agree are important to the students of Buffymont Primary School to becoming independent learners. The skills the participants refer to are also thought of as important in the literature reviewed for this study. Evidence of these skills was also found in the non-participant observations and documents reviewed. This concludes the findings on what skills participants of this study perceive to be most important to becoming independent learners. The next area to look at is the students’ responsibility in acquiring these skills.
4.3 Children’s Responsibility in the Acquisition of Skills

The following questions were asked of the participating groups in this study to determine their views about the students’ responsibility in acquiring the skills needed to be independent learners.

Asked of teachers: **What do you believe are the child’s responsibilities regarding his/her own education?**

Asked of parents: **What do you believe are your child’s responsibilities regarding his/her own education?**

Asked of students: **How can you help your own learning?**

The following diagram represents the commonalities between the three groups when answering the above questions.

![Diagram of commonalities between teachers, parents, and students]

Figure 5 – Children’s responsibility in becoming an independent learner.

**Interviews – Self Motivation**

As shown in figure 4, there are no commonalities between the three groups.
Teachers and parents agree that students need to be self motivated and responsible if they are to acquire the skills to become independent learners. Parents and students agree it is important for students to focus in class for them to be independent learners.

Teacher 011, 014, 016 & 017 all state the importance of students being self motivated and responsible learners which the participants believe leads to independence:

011: “be able to stay motivated and stay on task”
“follow their own self – questioning not always be reliant on teacher”
“Be aware of where things are”.
013: “need to be active learners”
014: “need to play an active role in their education”.
“Need to engage”
“Need to be active learners”
“Need to be responsible co-constructors of knowledge”.
016: “be responsible for negotiated curriculum by following their own interests and learning”.
017: “Be self-motivated and have a self belief in their abilities.
“Take care of their basic needs like food and sleep”.

Parents agree with teachers that self motivation and being responsible are important for their children to become independent learners.

P02: ‘it’s that intrinsic motivation, at the end of the day that’s what it comes down to; you have to be able to motivate yourself. Teachers can give you information but you have to want to learn it yourself. I want him to have a desire to learn. I want him to be the best he can be and if he is the best that he can be and it turns out to be mediocre than we are more than happy with that”.

P04: “Remembering their homework for example M says ‘I have to do my reader folder’, because we forget. They are taking responsibility for themselves,”

Though parent and teachers both agree that students need to be self motivated and responsible for their own learning, both groups also agree that this just doesn’t happen. As teacher participant 014 states “they don’t catch skills like they catch a cold”. Parents and teachers both agree that these skills and values need to be modelled to students and explicitly taught before they can begin to do these things for themselves. For example, teacher participant 012 states after being asked the question,
012: “That is a hard question to answer because we need to teach students to be responsible for their own learning. I want them to love learning and want them to want to succeed. They need to be thinkers but we need to give them the thinking strategies. They need to be able to make appropriate decisions after they have been taught the skills”.

Parent participant P04 agrees with teacher participant 012, e.g.;

P04: “Well that comes from the parent as well, they have to be taught to be responsible for themselves, parents need to guide them….They are taking responsibility for themselves, but that is something they have to progress to; it is not something they just learn overnight”.

Teachers and parents state they would like their children/students to be self-motivated and have a desire to learn. Many experts tell us this desire or motivation is natural in young children as Davies (1997) states. Nodding states that teachers are expected to manufacture this excitement about learning when in fact it is already present naturally. (Nodding in Johnson 2000).

Longworth (2003) also states that learning comes from an inner desire and not from teachers or examination boards.

**Non-Participant Observations – Self Motivation**

During the non-participant observations there were examples of students being motivated and responsible for their own learning, e.g.;

In teacher participant 011’s classroom, a maths activity, students seemed to be engaged in the open-ended activities and happy to participate as these students state:

ST1: “I like this game”
ST2: “me too”.

At the number tile activity where students needed to order the tiles from the smallest number to the largest. The teacher was guiding a student and gave them the opportunity to be responsible for their own learning, e.g.:

011: “you put them in order and I’ll come back.”

Teacher participant 011 came back with a number chart to support the student’s learning only after giving him an opportunity to be responsible himself, which in turn develops his thinking skills and leads to being independent.
Teacher participant 016 created an open-ended lesson in which students were responsible for choosing the people they were to work with e.g.

016: “you can choose to work in groups or on your own”.

Students were also responsible for choosing materials to use in making their snail habitat, e.g.

016: “As I am putting out materials start thinking about what you are going to use in your creation.”

**Document Review – Self Motivation**

There are a number of examples in the documents reviewed in this study for students to be responsible for their own behaviours and learning.

The Buffymont Primary School Newsletters have a number of articles throughout the year of 2005 regarding students’ responsibility, e.g.

9/2/05 – students are responsible for bringing fruit for inter school sports
16/2/05 – Library News – Children are able to choose their own books to borrow.
22/4/07 – Students need to sign internet contract and bike riding contract stating their responsibilities
4/5/07 – Reminder students need to be responsible for being in their classroom at 9am after a number of late arrivals
3/8/07 – Positive feedback was given regarding students’ behaviour and interest in learning after a number of excursions to:

- The Melbourne Aquarium
- Ace High Camp
- Roaming Reptiles
- The bus company.

Term Two Art Planner gives students the opportunity to be responsible for the medium they choose and type of minibeast they would like to create.

In the Unit One Term Planner for Term Two and Three, students are responsible for their own learning in the following ways.

Term two: “Children negotiate own questions they would like to investigate, their process of inquiry and method of presenting their findings”.

65
Term three: “Children communicate their research information through a variety of medium e.g. PowerPoint, newspaper article, book, diorama”.

Interviews – Focus in Class

Parents and students agree that it is the students’ responsibility to be focused in class if they are to become independent learners.

Parent participant P02 states the importance of their child to concentrate and focus in class:

P02: “I often say to him, when you’re at school and in your grade you need to be the best student you can be, and if that means you need to sit and listen than you sit and listen and not be dreaming over there and pretending that your eyes are there but you’re over there. Make yourself stay focused in the areas you’re dealing with even if it is something that doesn’t really interest you, you’ve still got to be focused in.”

Student participant ST02 agrees with their parent that they need to focus to help their learning:

ST02: “Try harder by listening to the teacher better. Some things I already know and it gets a bit boring and I tune out”.

Student Participant ST02 answers honestly that sometimes he gets bored in class and tunes out. Even though he sees it as his responsibility to not tune out and keep focussed in class, it is the researcher’s belief that it is the teacher’s responsibility. Teachers need to create stimulating environments which engage students by incorporating their interests and needs in the classroom. Teachers also need to challenge students in their learning rather than going back over old material that students already know.

Student participant ST03 believes by “study more, be silent and you can get more work done all the time”, they will help their learning.

As discussed previously, Shipley (2002) has a number of “learning to learn” skills, which promote independent learning. One of these skills is the student’s ability to focus and concentrate, which is similar to Art Costa’s Habit of Mind – persisting.
Non-Participant Observations – Focus in Class

There were a number of examples in non-participant observations of teachers encouraging student to focus on their learning as stated here:

011: “If I am talking to you, you need to sit and listen to me”.
012: “can’t call the roll until everyone is listening. When it looks like everyone is listening, I’ll start calling the roll”.
“I know you were listening because you understood the question and you’re sitting with your legs cross and your hands in your lap and you put your hands up and didn’t call out. Well done, you can have three positives”.
017: “I’m going to give F a positive because he is sitting and listening, the girls up the back need to watch F and how he is listening”.

Document Review – Focus in Class

The documents reviewed in this study had no direct statements regarding student’s responsibility to focus in their classroom.

The participants of this study agree that students need to be self motivated and focus in class to become independent learners. These are valid points, however the literature states students are intrinsically motivated to learn and have a natural desire and longing from any early age to discover how the world around them works (Nodding in Johnson 2000; Longworth 2003). Having stated this, maybe it is not up to the child to be self –motivated because we understand they already are, but for the teacher to maintain this self-motivation by creating a curriculum that engages students and to keep them focused. As student ST02 states, “Some things I already know and it gets a bit boring and I tune out.” Do teachers give students work to “keep them busy” or do teachers create tasks and activities that challenge students and help them to develop such important skills as thinking and problem solving so they don’t tune out? Skills which help students to become independent learners.

4.4 Learning Environments Affect On Independent Learning

After asking the three participating groups what they thought was the child’s responsibility in becoming an independent learner, it was important to ask how the environment was set up to facilitate the acquisition of skills that lead to independent learning.
The following questions were asked of the three participating groups;

Asked of teachers: **How does the environment you have structured provide for an independent approach to learning?**

Asked of parents: **In what ways can the school provide an environment that meets your child’s needs?**

Asked of students: **What can the school do to support your learning?**

The following diagram represents the commonalities of the three different groups regarding how the environment provides for independent learning

![Diagram of learning environment](Figure 6- Learning Environment)

**Interviews – Different Learning Styles**

As shown in figure five, all three groups participating in this study agree that for students to become independent learners they need to be apart of an environment which caters for individual needs by being exposed to different learning styles. Some of these styles include; modelling, inquiry and learning centres. Parents and students concur that it is important to have a safe environment to learn. Teachers and parents agree that easy access to equipment and an environment which promotes working together is important.
Teachers participating in this study discussed a number of different learning styles when interviewed. These styles included:

- small and mixed ability groups
- inquiry based learning
- peer teaching
- modelling and guiding
- learning centres
- open ended activities through mathematics and literacy rotations.

A number of teachers discussed the importance of small, mixed ability groups and how in these groups students teach each other rather than just relying on the teacher all the time. For example, Teacher participant 011 discusses the importance of small groups;

011: “When we are working in groups hopefully we try to encourage questioning and basically when they are in that small group, especially that mixed group, we encourage that those children who are having that little bit of a problem we encourage the other children to help them along. They help each other, they ask questions.

Teacher participant 013 shares 011’s view on the importance of peer teaching:

013: “I don’t have a silent classroom; if they’re talking about their work with their peers then I am happy for that to go on, I am happy for them to help each other as long as they are not doing the work for them. Like the computer, if some of the preps want to go on the computer I might get the children that are more experienced to go and teach them how to operate the computer or to get onto the game they want or whatever, and to teach them so next time they can do it themselves.”

Similarly teacher participant 017 promotes peer teaching in her classroom, particularly using the computer. Which leads back to the importance of relationships with their peers and the importance of the skill to make friends developing students’ ability to become independent learners?

Teacher participant 012 discusses using inquiry based approach to learning in the classroom to promote independent learning, e.g.:

012: “Well because they can inquire, they can go to the computer and look it up on the internet, they can go and grab whatever they want; they can use a pen and paper. They can sit on the floor if they prefer. They’re making their own choices.”
Teacher participant 015 uses learning centres in her learning environment to promote independent learning as she discusses in this quote:

015: “The learning centres, children choose what they want to learn, the resources I provide for them.”

Teacher participant 016 provides opportunities for independent learning through the design of her literacy and numeracy rotations, e.g.:

016: “Literacy rotations, there is some structure, for example, the guided reading group, but independent groups have some choice e.g. for word study children have a choice of activities e.g. play dough, dictionary, magazine hunts, computers, but if children choose play dough one day they have to choose something else the next day so they can have a variety over the five days. In maths I am trying to do open ended activities.

Parent participant P02 stresses the importance of using different learning styles in the environment, specific to her own child’s needs, e.g.

P02: “Looking at what the child’s strengths and weaknesses are and working with that. It’s like one of my children is an oral and aural learner rather than reading learner, so work in that area and acknowledging that the information is in there but sometimes has problems getting out. You have teachers who teach that way to, all the teachers here are very different so look at the way they are learning e.g. if you have a teacher who puts everything up on the board for children to copy down, well my child is not going to learn like that, but if you have a teacher who will sit and discuss openly and have the thinking hats happening and all that sort of thing well I know that is a conducive environment to my child’s learning.”

Parent participant P02 discusses the importance of using different learning styles to cater for the individual needs of her own child and the needs of other students in the classroom.

Student participant ST01 agrees with teachers and parents that using different learning styles in the learning environment supports her own learning, e.g. when asked the question, *What can the school do to support your learning?* She replied;

ST01: “Teach different ways of learning”

Participant ST01 recognises the importance of having a number of different learning strategies to draw from to help become an independent learner.
There are a number of examples in the literature reviewed which correspond to the views of the three groups of participants interviewed about the importance of different learning styles being employed in the classroom to promote independent learning.

Jeroen, Merrienboer and Paas in De Corte (2003) list the different ways students learn; by being told, by comparing and contrasting information, by discussing with peers and others, by observing, through demonstration, by making and testing predictions, by practising new skills, by trial and error and many other activities. This view directly corresponds to teacher participants 011, 013 and 017’s view of the importance of peer teaching and 012’s view of promoting an inquiry based approach to learning.

English and Wilson (2004), also state the importance of teachers providing an environment that creates opportunities for small group work, e.g.:

“…a teacher should work with groups or individuals to ask carefully considered questions so that students can develop their own understandings”. (p. 20)

English and Wilson state the significance of learning centres when it comes to students becoming independent learners.

“Learning centre tasks need to be designed so that students can be actively involved in constructing their own learning under the guidance of the teacher.”(p. 20).

Teacher participant 015 discussed how she used learning centres in her classroom environment to promote independent learning.

Howard Gardner’s (2004), view of the different learning styles of students is shared by parent participant P02 in this quote. “But human thinking and learning is achieved as well by artists, musicians, politicians, business people, inventors, religious leaders and dreamers – we must understand their forms of learning and the ways in which they may differ from the cognition of the theoretical physicists…”(p. 10).

Just like parent participant P02 is asking teachers to understand how her children are individuals and therefore have very different learning styles, so Gardner asks teachers to consider the different learning styles of students in the classroom.
English and Wilson (2004) also acknowledge the different learning preferences of different students and how it is important for teachers to cater for these differences, e.g.:

“…students learn in different ways. It is our responsibility as teachers to provide a range of learning preferences. By providing a number of different types of tasks, we are better placed to meet the needs of different students and we are encouraging difference by demonstrating that difference is acceptable” (p. 16).

**Non – Participant Observations – Different Learning Styles**

There were a number of examples of different learning styles noted during the non participant observations conducted during this study. During observations in teacher participants 011, 012, S01, 016 & 017 classrooms’, it was noted there was great deal of discussion between teachers and students and between students and students regarding their learning.

For example in teacher participant 011’s classroom there was a discussion between the teacher and the students about reporting.

011: “who can tell me what a report is? Before you answer I want you think about it first and then put your hand up”.

Student one: “It gives us information”

011: “Do you agree?”

Student two: “Yes, but different kinds of reports”.

Teacher participant 011 then leads a discussion about different reports e.g. news report and a report about minibeasts. Teacher 011 gives students time to think and discuss in her learning environment.

In teacher S01’s classroom (Art room), the teacher discusses with students the thinking skills they would use in the activity using Art Costa’s Habits of Mind, e.g.:

S01: “What Habits of Mind do we need to use in our activity today?”

Students: (Groups of students call out the answers).

- “previous knowledge
- persisting
- take responsible risks
- thinking before acting
- creating and imagining
- finding humour
Just like 011, S01 encourages the students in her learning environment to discuss learning by asking questions about their thinking.

In her learning environment (reading recovery lesson), teacher participant 014 uses hands on activities to cater for students’ different learning styles, e.g.:

014: “This word tricked you (see), let’s make it”.

*Teacher 014 gets the magnetic letters and puts them in front of the student. Teacher makes the word “see”. The teacher breaks it up and then the student has to make it.*

*Teacher gets another s and makes the word “sees”.*

*Student now makes the word “see” says it is “saw”. Teacher prompts him to read it again, looking at the middle “ee” cluster. Student reads “see” three times.*

*The student rereads the sentence in the book.*

Student: “the snake sees little chimp”.

It was observed that teacher participant 015’s (oral language teacher) learning environment was set up in the following learning centres:

- Homecorner
- Greengrocers
- Entomology department
- Peg boards
- Building blocks
- Origami
- Box construction
- Doll’s house
- Toolo*
- Painting
- Play dough

*Toolo is blocks which are constructed using screwdrivers. There are also motorised parts and children are able to make cars and other machines.*

These learning centres cater for many different learning styles e.g. toolo, play dough, building blocks are hands on activities. The homecorner doll’s house and greengrocers cater for imaginative play and the entomology department caters for research and fact finding.
Document Review – Different Learning Styles

There are a few examples of different learning styles being used in the classroom in the documents reviewed in this study. In the Unit one, Term two planner, the following examples were found of some of the learning styles discussed previously in interviews, observations and the literature:

1. “Establish a nature table in each classroom” (learning centre, hands –on )
2. “Display children’s finished inquiries about minibeasts in the classroom” (inquiry approach).

The Buffymont Primary School Charter for 2004-2006 promotes the use of different learning styles in the following quotes:

1. “Aim to create a positive learning environment that will engage all students”.
2. “The Oral Language Program provides holistic learning in oral language, social competencies, thinking skills and motor developmental activities/skills”.

The strength of the Oral Language Program is that idea of teaching the whole child and not just concentrating on the academic skills of children. As the Charter states the program provides opportunities for socialising and physical skills to be developed.

Interviews – Access to Equipment

As shown in figure 5, teachers and parents participating in this research believe that having easy access to equipment and working together are important qualities for developing an environment that leads to independent learning.

Teacher participants 011, 013 and 017 all concur that easy access to equipment is important for students to be independent learners, e.g.:

011: “They can easily access the equipment under here, they know exactly where that is. All the material that is out here they can access at any time.”

013: “The children know that there are displays and things around that they can use rather than come and ask me all the time.

017: “I have their books in their book boxes and I like them to be able to find them, easy access and that makes it easier for us. Everything is in its place.”
The teachers quoted above believe having easy access to equipment promotes independent learning because the students can think for themselves what they need and where to find it rather than asking the teacher all the time.

Parent P01 believes it is important for her child to have easy access to resources in the room to help her learning:

P01: “A resource corner, so if they need to look something up the resources are there”.

Perry (2004) describes one of the characteristics of an enriching learning environment is “accessibility” for children.

Fisher (2002), concurs that resources and equipment are important to children’s development into independent learners, e.g.

“If we want children to continue to explore, investigate and discover then we should select resources and equipment that enable this to go on”. (p. 81)

**Non-Participant Observations – Access to Equipment**

During the non-participant observations, the researcher observed in a number of classrooms having easy access to equipment.

In teacher participant 013’s classroom there were plastic tubs on each cluster of tables with textas, glue sticks and pencils for all students to use.

Teacher participant 014 had the magnetic letters she used in her lesson on the whiteboard ready for use. The letters were bright colours and stood out against the white board, easy for the student to find the letters he was looking for.

It was observed in the oral language program (teacher 015), learning centres were equipped with materials students needed for that activity. For example the waffle blocks centre was equipped with hard hats and fluorescent vests for students to wear when constructing. The blocks were stacked neatly against one wall and there was a big open floor space for expansion of the construction.

Teacher SO1’s classroom had equipment on labelled shelves in the room. When the teacher told the students’ they need “… a brush, palette and water container”, all students knew exactly where to find the materials and did not need to interrupt the teacher to find where things were.
**Document Review – Access to Equipment**

The documents reviewed for the study did not make any statements about the importance of easy access to equipment.

**Interviews – Safe Environment**

Parents and students both agreed that it was important to create a safe environment for students to become independent learners.

Parent participant P04 stated

“Safe environment, my child was scared and wouldn’t come to school but he got over it and felt safe in the end”.

Parent participate P04 went on to state further the importance of her children being in a safe environment to help their learning:

“an environment where they can feel they can ask questions and not be put down even is that is not the question to ask.”

Student participant ST02 wanted to feel physically safe in the school yard and had a solution to this problem:

“More teachers on yard duty to help, because it is hard to find them and ask for help”.

There is a great deal of literature to support parent P04 and student ST02’s view of the importance of students feeling safe in their learning environment so they can thrive as independent learners. Isbell and Exelby (2001) state, “A child who feels safe and secure and supported will experiment try new things and express their ideas freely”. (p. 21)

Biller (2003), also expresses a view about the need for students to feel safe:

“Students need to feel safe and have a sense of cohesiveness and belonging before true learning can occur. This type of learning can only be created by establishing a personal relationship with each student in the class”. (p.34)
Biller and Isbell and Exelby concur with parent P04 of the importance of her child feeling safe and wanting to come to school and her children feeling safe enough and supported enough to take a risk and ask questions and have no fear of being ridiculed.

When McInerney and McInerney (1998) discuss Maslow’s hierarchy of needs they state the second need is to feel safe both physically and emotionally. This need has to be met before higher order thinking can be reached and learning begins.

Student participant ST02’s concern about not having enough teachers on yard duty so he and his peers can feel safe in the school yard is a genuine one. As stated above he needs to feel physically safe to progress in his learning to a higher level.

**Non-Participant Observation – Safe Environment**

A lesson reiterating the school rules was observed in teacher participant 012’s classroom during the non-participant observations. The lesson started with the following conversation:

012: “Who can tell me one of our school rules?”
Student 1: “Keep your hands and your feet to yourself”
012: “What does that mean?”
Student 2: “If one of your friends is in a fight you don’t fight, you go and tell the teacher”.

012: “If someone is annoying me should I hit them?”
All Students: “No”
012: “What should I do instead?”
Student 2: “say no or move away or tell the teacher”
012: “I like those ideas”

Teacher participant 012 continued discussing other school rules which keep us safe. At the end of the discussion students chose one of the rules and created their own poster.

When observing teacher participant 014’s reading recovery class which is conducted with one student, the researcher observed situations conducive to good learning environments. Teacher participant 014 gave the student genuine praise when the student accomplished something, e.g. 014: “I like the way you went and fixed that word up”.

77
014: “I like what you did here, you looked and thought ‘it didn’t look right’ so you went back.”

By genuinely praising the student, the student’s confidence is increased and he feels secure to continue in his learning.

**Document Review – Safe Environment**

During the review of documents in this study there was a great deal of evidence supporting the school’s view on the importance of students feeling safe both physically and psychologically. The School Charter States:

“By creating a stimulating, safe, flexible, creative environment children will be happy and therefore able to participate in effective learning”.

The Staff Manual states it is not only the responsibility of teachers to create a safe environment for students, but also the legal requirement:

“All staff are expected to assume the responsibility of a ‘prudent parent’ in regard to the care and safety of students. This is a legal requirement of the Department of Education and Training and should guide teachers’ professional behaviour and decision making in all matters with students”.

The Unit One, Term One Planner was designed with learning experiences to instruct students on how to be safe, e.g.:

- Identify characteristics of places that are safe and unsafe for children
- Describe what children need to travel safely to and from school
- Make signs warning of unsafe places/activities in school e.g. walk in quiet area.”

There were articles in the school newsletter informing parents of some negative situations regarding students’ behaviour, e.g.:

- (Issue 25/5/05) “We have had some concerns about some disrespectful behaviour in the yard. We want Buffymont to be a safe and respectful environment”.
- (Issue 7/9/05) “It is unsafe for children to arrive at school too early (before 8.45am), they will be unsupervised.”

That concludes the findings on the affect the environment has on independent learning.
4.5 Positive Aspects of School Programs

The three participating groups of this research were asked what they thought were the positive aspects of the learning environment at Buffymont Primary School, and how these positive aspects may encourage independence in the students.

As asked of teachers: **What do you see as the positive aspects of the organisation of your classroom?**

As asked of parents: **What do you like about the programs the school offers the child?**

As asked of students: **What do you like about the programs at the school?**

The following diagram represents the common answers to these questions:

![Diagram](image-url)

Figure 7 – Positive aspects of learning environment at Buffymont Primary School
**Interviews - Art**

As shown in figure 6, the most positive aspect of Buffymont’s programs agreed upon by all three participating groups is the art program.

Teacher participants 015 and S01 believed Art was a positive and important part of students’ learning.

Teacher participant S01 states, “I try to open their minds to the world of art, and not just in the art room but the world outside of school”.

Teacher participant 015 also likes students to have the opportunity to be creative in her learning environment and states: “I like the fact that the program exposes the children to different experiences [including Art].”

Parents are in agreement with teachers when it comes to the positive aspect of the art program, as stated by parent participant P02:

> “the art enrichment program. I think that’s a really good program. I think that the extension of what is offered is very good. My child has loved being involved in this program. He has really taken off in his drawings and his confidence in that area has really come up too”.

Parent participant P04 also discusses the benefits of the art program when stating:

> “Art, they love it, they have an artistic streak in them”.

Students participating in this research also stated their great enthusiasm for the art program, e.g.

ST01: “Art, because you learn all different styles of art, like clay work and all different things”.

ST02: “Art and P.E. are fun, nearly all the programs I like”.

ST04: “My favourite thing is art because you get like to use clay and painting and pastings”.

When discussing, Howard Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences, Armstrong (2004), describes spatial intelligences as “The ability to perceive the visual – spatial world accurately, (e.g. as a hunter, scout or guide) and to perform transformations on these perceptions, (e.g. as an interior decorator, architect, artist or inventor). This intelligence involves sensitivity to colour, line, shape, form, space
and the relationships that exist between these elements.” (p.21). Armstrong, when discussing this intelligence, mentions all the elements that may be investigated during an art class.

Robinson (2006), believes that “Creativity is as important in education as literacy and should be treated with the same status”. Robinson also goes on to say “...many highly creative and intelligent people think they are not because the thing they were good at, at school wasn’t valued or was actually stigmatised”.

Robinson and Gardiner, again, reiterate the importance of teaching the whole child, not just the part of the child’s mind that is interested in reading and writing. Through art, students who are talented drawers, sculptors or painters are exercising their creative side and given the chance to make connections through another perspective and not through a book or through writing it down on a sheet of paper. An environment which encourages artistic pursuits, which is so obviously important to the participants of this study, is an environment that encourages skills that lead to independent learning such as:

- Risk – taking
- Investigation – e.g. experimenting with colour
- Using the senses.

**Document Review – Art**

As parent P04 stated her children “…have an artistic streak in them”. To ignore this intelligence in these and other students in the school whose strength is spatial intelligence would not only be irresponsible of the school it would also be contrary to what is stated in the School Charter, which states:

“This charter is committed to a curriculum that will further develop the thinking skills, multiliteracies and assessment for learning”.

And

“Other programs which enhance the learning opportunities for students and are highly valued by the school community: P-6 developmental learning and Oral Language Program, **Art Enrichment Program**; performing arts; JSC; Bridges; middle years literacy support; inter-school sport; lunchtime activity groups; sport and recreation awareness; tennis coaching program; PMP; Beginning School Program; Bike Ed; swimming program; camping program; family life; playgroup.
Interviews – Excursions/Incursions

A positive aspect of the program that the teacher and parent participants like are excursions and incursions offered to students.

Teacher participant S01 stated:

“I include excursions and incursions wherever possible, for example galleries, visitors come in and do workshops”.

Parents equally discuss the why they enjoy excursions/incursions. Parent participant P02 states:

“Sports awareness*, I think our sports awareness is fantastic. My favourite one is ‘Riverside’, for the simple reason that there are six or five sports that they can have a go at in one hit. ‘Epping’ is good too where they have a lot more indoor.”

*Sports awareness is a program within the school where classroom teachers are given a day to plan for the following term while the specialist teachers in the school take the students out on excursions and it varies each term e.g. Visit to Werribee Zoo, Riverside Park in Maribyrnong where students experience different sports and Rollerblading.

Similarly, parent participant P03 is also excited about the excursions offered to students, as stated:

P03: “I get excited with K about any new notices that come home, like the notice about after school activities that really had us jumping up and down. Any excursions/incursions we’re always very involved. We always make sure he has the right day and we pay on the right day”.

Longworth (2003), discusses the importance of having the community involved in students learning in the following quote:

“Schools, often the whipping boy for society’s ills, are perhaps the most isolated of the sectors in that they appear to work from within their own little world of education and training, operating within its own rules and regulations and insulated from the rest of the community. If they are to carry out the foundation work for learning throughout life, they will need considerable help from everyone and every sector to help them do it.” (p. 96, 97).

Longworth states benefits of having other members of the community involved in students’ lives to create independent lifelong learners. This involvement can be achieved through students going out into the community on excursions or having experts visit the community in the form of incursions.
Document Review – Interviews and Excursions

There was a great deal of evidence in the documents studied for this research revealing exactly how the students go out into the community as part of their learning.

Issues of Buffymont Primary School’s Newsletters had a number of articles regarding incursions and excursions the school was involved in during 2005.

- Reminders of visits from Life Education Van (Issues dated 9/2/05 & 2/3/05).
- Article discussing the recent excursions to Art Play and ACMI (issue dated 11/5/05).
- Article regarding the success of an excursion to the Aquarium and incursion from “Roaming Reptiles” (issue dated 27/7/05).

Minutes from Unit Meetings also have a number of items regarding incursions and excursions as stated below:

- Reminder for Life Education Parent Information Night. (16/2/05).
- Discuss inviting Fire Fighters to visit unit for demonstration (8/9/05).
- Bunnings Incursion – very successful student were engaged and teachers thought it was very worthwhile (19/10/05).

Interviews – Literacy Programs

Parents and teachers both value the schools Literacy Programs and believe it to be a positive aspect of the school.

Teachers like the literacy programs as stated by teacher participant 013:

“I like the time we have now with the two hour literacy block in the mornings. …I like the Take Home Book system as in we pick their books but then they have those five to choose from themselves.”

Teacher participant 014 saw the fact that having an understanding of students’ development as a positive aspect to her program:

014: “knowing the development of reading and writing, know the direction to steer children towards.”
Parent participant P04 was equally impressed with how the Literacy Reading Recovery program has assisted her child’s reading to develop and progress.

P04: “M has just started Reading Recovery and he is coming along well. He is progressing much faster, he just needed that little bit of extra time. He was stuck but now you can’t see him without a pen and paper at home. Before it was frustrating for him but now its not.”

Dewey and Fisher both support teacher participant 014’s view of the importance of teachers understanding childrens’ development and guiding that development. Dewey (2001), refers to the ‘new education’ as taking development too far and stresses that students cannot work out new ideas or concept for themselves if they not supplied with the skills or environment, which are prerequisites to guide their thought processes. Fisher (2002), reiterates this view in the definition of child – centred education:

“Child-centred education is concerned with the development of children. It is seen as a natural progression that is best aided by adults who in Darling’s words ‘have an appreciation of and respect for the ways of children’. This is an important element”. (p. 40).

It is this “important element”, that teacher participant 014 was referring to in her interview when she stated “knowing the development of reading and writing”.

Non-Participant Observations – Literacy Programs

During the non-participant observations in classrooms, it was obvious to the researcher that literacy learning was valued through the number of literacy activities observed.

When observing teacher participant 014’s reading recovery lesson, the following literacy learning was observed:

- Self –correction: the student read “cooked”, realised it was incorrect and reread correctly which was “cooking”
- Teacher uses magnetic letter to help student recognise the word “see” as already discussed in detail.
- During the writing session teacher guides student – 014: “remember to measure with your fingers so you leave nice spaces”.
- Teacher 014 uses sound boxes to assist the child in spelling the word “going” e.g. student: “can you do the boxes to help me”.

84
During teacher participant’s 012, 013, 016 and 017’s observed lessons; each participant started the lesson with a picture book.

- Teacher 012 read a book the whole class had made the previous day titled “A Day With Minibeasts”. Minibeasts was the integrated topic of the time of the observation.
- Teacher 013 read the book “GOAL” by Colin McNaughton which a student had chosen.
- Teacher 016 read the John Marsden story “A Day in The Life of Me” which she used to introduce the lesson. In the story the boy had a day in which he was allowed to do whatever he wanted. The teacher designed a lesson where “we’re sort of doing anything you like today activity”. The students were then given a selection of materials to choose from to make the habitat of a snail. The students also chose whether they worked in a group or alone.

**Document Review – Literacy Program**

There was a great deal of evidence in the documents reviewed for this study, emphasising the importance of literacy in students’ learning.

The VELS document contains a detailed Domain of English learning. The document states the expectations of each student at each level.

The Unit One Planners for Terms One, Two, Three and Four have an extensive section on what teacher’s strategies and activities teachers are expected to teach students.

The minutes of Unit One meetings for 2005 contain a number of items pertaining to literacy teaching as listed below:

- H shared poetry strategies (22/2/05)
- Observation Survey Results (9/3/05, 16/3/05).(The Observation Survey is an Assessment tool used to asses students reading and writing ability, see Appendix K).
- Sharing of spelling strategies (20/5/05)
- Scholastic resources to be used in classrooms (8/6/05)

The staff meeting minutes also contained items pertaining to literacy learning:

- Literacy Intervention Training P-2 (1/2/05)
- Observation Survey Training (1/2/05).
The Buffymont Primary School Charter shows a commitment to both students and staff when it comes to literacy learning as shown in one of their Goals:

- **GOAL** – Continue Professional Development for staff in literacy and numeracy teaching strategies.”
- “Other programs which enhance the learning opportunities for students and are highly valued by the school community: P-6 developmental learning and Oral Language Program, Art Enrichment Program; performing arts; JSC; Bridges; middle years literacy support; inter-school sport; lunchtime activity groups; sport and recreation awareness; tennis coaching program; PMP;”

**Interviews – Oral Language Program**

Figure six shows parent and student participants of this research look upon the play based oral language program in the school (Hall), very favourably.

Parent participant P02 and P01 states the reasons why she likes the Hall program:

P02: “I like the Oral Language Program (Hall). I like the idea of that hands-on learning and experiencing that too, you just have to see it in action to understand it.”

P01: “Well that they give the means to be independent like through Hall and Hall allows them to bring out their creativity, you see the kids come home from Hall with the stuff that they make”.

Students enjoy the ‘Hall’ program for the amount of choice they have in their learning and the social benefits:

ST02: “I love ‘Hall’ because you get to meet people and do fun activities you get to see kids that you don’t get to see.”

ST03: “Hall because you can play with your friends and you can have your own choice of activity.”

ST01: “Hall program because you get to do different things”.

The literature supports the importance of play and choice when it comes to students becoming independent learners. Nodding states students need to have choice in their learning and don’t need to learn everything that is presented to them, e.g.:

“There are few things that all students need to know and it ought to be acceptable for students to reject some material in order to pursue other topics with enthusiasm. Caring
teachers listen and respond differentially to their students.” (Nodding in Johnson, 2000 p 251).

The play based, oral language program at Buffymont Primary School which is valued by the learning community (parents, students, and the leadership of the school) is a program which was developed through proven practice and is supported by professional theory which is stated below from a number of experts:

“…In a room where there are cardboard boxes and blocks, dress –up clothes, space for building and an accessible storeroom, it seems more likely that children will get the message, ‘Here is a place where you can play, make choices and act on your own ideas.” (Perry, 2004 p. 90).

Perry has described the ‘Hall’ program accurately in this quote. As the students have stated, the Hall program is one of their favourites because they can have fun and get to choose their activities. The importance of students having choice in their learning and how it can encourage independent learning, has already been discussed in great detail in this study.

“It is not merely a way in which he keeps himself happily occupied, though it is clearly enjoyable it is even more importantly a way of learning and practising new skills and developing thinking, language, and understanding of others. Through play a child can be creative and he can also learn how to compete and cooperate with others” (Hastings and Hayes, 1981 p. 37)

Hasting and Hayes list a number of skills that can be developed through play programs like the Hall program at Buffymont Primary School. These skills have been discussed in great detail in this research and many of the skills listed are skills participants of this study value like; Thinking skills, empathy towards others and cooperation.

Tyler reiterates the benefits of play;

“If a playful pleasurable climate facilitates learning and growth, as the data indicate, we can base our approach to education on the assumption that there is excitement in learning for both the student and the teacher. Going a step further, if we assume that play “is” learning and that a classroom is meant to be full of playful learning or learningful play, then as teachers we will begin to see connections between play and maths, between grammar and play”. (Tyler in Seefeldt, 1976 p.241).
Non-Participant Observations – Oral Language Program

A Hall lesson was observed for this study. It was observed that teacher participant 015’s (oral language teacher) had set up the following learning centres:

- Homecorner
- Greengrocers
- Entomology department
- Peg boards
- Building blocks
- Origami
- Box construction
- Doll’s house
- Toolo
- Painting
- Play dough

Students during the session could choose one of the above activities for the session. The most popular activity was Toolo with 6 students choosing that activity, followed by the nature table with 5 students.

During the non-participant observations students were heard to make such comments as:

- St1: “I like Hall I get to make things.”
- St2: “I like painting”
- St3: “My favourite is building blocks”.

At the end of the session students pack up. Students have an opportunity to practice their language skills during the sharing session. In this session, one student is chosen to be “host” and the host chooses groups of students to stand at the front and discuss what they have done, made and learned in that session. The other students referred to as the “audience” ask questions at the end of the talk. Students often ask questions using the language of Art Costa’s Habit’s of Mind for example:

- St2: “Were you being accurate and precise?”
The documents reviewed in this research show a great deal of support for the Oral language Program (Hall) at Buffymont Primary School.

The Buffymont School Newsletter featured articles about Hall through out the year, e.g.
- “The Hall program has been extended to the whole school this year”. (issue dated 9/2/05)
- “The skills learned during our Hall program include language, applying the Habits of Mind, listening and following instructions”. (issue dated 21/6/05).

The staff manual mentions the purpose of the Hall program as stated:
- “A strong focus of early years is ‘Hall’. The program is designed to provide a holistic, integrated ‘real’ learning especially in a multi-age setting.”

The Oral Language Program is also mentioned throughout the school charter, e.g.
- “Other programs which enhance the learning opportunities for students and are highly valued by the school community: P-6 developmental learning and Oral Language Program, Art Enrichment Program; performing arts; JSC…”
- “The Oral Language Program provides a holistic learning in oral language, social competencies, thinking skills and motor development activities/skills.”

In 2006 Buffymont Primary had a new building erected for the purpose of housing the Oral Language Program permanently. Proving the schools commitment to play and the importance of play in its curriculum.

Interviews – Physical Education

Another program at the Buffymont that parents and students participating in this study saw as a positive was the Physical Education (P.E.) Program. This program includes regular P.E. classes as well as inter-school sports for Unit 3 students (yrs 5 & 6).

Parent participants P04 & P01 discuss the benefits of the program:
P04: “They [her children] like P.E. as well, they play sport outside of school as well, we encourage it and it is part of all of them. It’s their whole learning, you can’t have one without the other, and it develops different areas of the mind.”

P01: “Sport is really good because it gives them a range they don’t get stuck in one sport.”

Students also state why they like the P.E. program:

ST02: “Art and P.E. are fun, nearly all the programs I like.”

ST03: “P.E., it helps you to exercise and be healthy.”

Parent participant P04 makes a relevant point regarding the importance of physical education and concentrating on the learning of the whole child. Plato takes a similar view in this statement cited in Tate:

“If people concentrated too much on literature and philosophy and neglected their bodies, their energy, initiative of mind and self discipline would be weakened. If on the other hand, they concentrated solely on their bodies and neglected their minds they would end up as ‘unintelligent philistines’” (Plato as cited in Tate 1999 p.8).

Parent participant P04, as Plato, can see the value of Physical Education as being part of a holistic learning approach when it comes to her children’s’ education.

Non-Participant Observations – Physical Education

There were no observations of physical education taking place in the classrooms during the non-participant observations.

Document Review – Physical Education

A number of the documents reviewed for this research made specific reference to the P.E. or sports programs at Buffymont Primary School.

The VELS document contains a detailed Domain of Physical Education learning. The document states the expectations of each student at each level. (Appendix L).

The Buffymont School Charter mentions sport and physical education as part of a well rounded, holistic approach to learning in the school, as quoted:
“Other programs which enhance the learning opportunities for students and are highly valued by the school community: P-6 developmental learning and Oral Language Program, Art Enrichment Program; performing arts; JSC; Bridges; middle years literacy support; inter-school sport; lunchtime activity groups; sport and recreation awareness; tennis coaching program; PMP;”

The findings indicate that the participants of this study have a positive attitude toward the many learning programs at Buffymont Primary School. The findings also indicate that the participants like the variation of programs offered and believe that a holistic approach to learning is important to students becoming independent learners. Participants find programs such as Art and “Hall” just as valuable as literacy programs.

4.6 Aspects of Program Participants’ Would Like to See Changed

When ascertaining what skills, values and competencies the participants believed encouraged independent learning; the researcher believed it was important to ask the participants what they would like to improve in the programs offered by the school.

Asked of teachers: **Which aspects of this organisation would you like to change, if necessary and possible? Why?**

Asked of parents: **Is there anything you would like to see the school do differently in terms of its programs?**

Asked of students: **Is there anything you would like to see the school do differently?**

The results of these questions are represented in figure 8.
The aspect of Buffymont’s programs which are so popular with parents and students in the previous question is the same aspect which all the groups would like to see more of. This is physical education and sport, as is shown in figure 8.

**Interviews – Physical Education**

Teacher participant 017 voiced her concerns about the lack of physical activity students at Buffymont participated in.

017: “I think they should do a lot more exercise and sport. Like in the past we had programs like ‘Huff n Puff’. I don’t think they get enough physical exercise. I remember we used to play outside so much, these kids don’t they walk around, we used to have hoops, we used play games we used to jump around and they don’t seem to do that anymore, this generation. Their nutrition worry’s me we promote nutrition but then their parents put chips and things in their lunch boxes. its healthy body, healthy mind, I think if you feel healthy and you feel fit then I think you’re ready to learn.”
The benefits of physical activity in relation to students’ learning have been discussed earlier. Teacher participant 017 just reiterates these benefits in her answer.

Parent participants P04 & P03 share teacher participant 017’s concern about the lack of physical activity by students at Buffymont Primary School. Parent participant P04 is particularly concerned with the lack of sports skills the students seem to have;

   P04: “With P.E. because when I was taking sports training I was finding, teaching the kids at a younger age the skills because when they are able to play, then the skills they should have learnt when they were seven or eight have to be learnt later. R plays netball already and when I was training the netball team R knew more about it. It is harder to teach when they are that age [11 yrs. old]”.

   P03: “I’d like to see a bit more sport too, I think kids of today are real bubble kids with their videos and DVD’s and play stations. Forty five minutes a week of P.E. is not enough. Even trying to engage like athletes and get them to give inspirational talks to the kids.”

Students would also like to participate in more sporting activities:

   ST02: “Running comps for the school in the middle of the year—you could have like the year three girls and the year three boys, you can have three legged races, like a school sports day.”

Even though these interviews were conducted in 2005 the status of Physical Education and sport has not changed at Buffymont Primary School. Students still only have a forty five minute a week P.E. lesson and only the Unit Three students are involved in inter-school sports and sports training.

**Interviews – Students to have more Input in the Curriculum**

Teachers and parents participating in this study would like to see students have more input and choice in the curriculum.

Teacher participant S01 would like to set up the learning environment in her classroom (which is the art room), just like the Oral Language Program, which, has already been mentioned, gives students more choice and input into their learning.
S01: “Set art room up like ‘Hall’, I think that would encourage more independence, creativity and more in depth learning, because they could use the same medium and form where they could explore.”

Similarly teacher participant 016 would like to see more students being independent by having more opportunities to follow through and explore their own learning paths.

016: “Kids to do more spontaneous things like visiting the library if they need to look up a book.”

Parent participant P02 agrees with the teachers and would like to see the students having more input and choice in their learning.

P02: “I would like to see more input into topics especially when they’re in the upper group, maybe a quick survey of what they would like to do, and you would be surprised at the feedback you’re likely to get”.

There are a number of examples in literature supporting teachers and parents view of the importance of students having choices in their learning. When Shipley (2000) discusses “Learning to Learn” skills, which lead to independent learning, one of them is the ability to choose an activity from alternatives.

Pollard (1994), discusses the importance of teachers creating a framework which includes students’ choice:

“…teachers who organised a framework within which pupils could work and yet encouraged them to exercise a degree of independence and allowed some freedom and choice within this structure, were most successful.” (p. 252).

Pollard states the role of the teacher is to create a structured framework to guide students and yet giving them freedom and choices within that structure to guide them towards independent learning. Hendrick (1997), states the project approach to learning develops skills such as making choices, problem solving, communication and interpersonal development.

Non-Participant Observations – Student Choice

There was some choice in the classrooms observed by the researcher during non-participant observations. For example, during teacher participant 016’s lesson students were given choice of
materials to use to make their snail habitat. Teacher participant 015’s classroom, which is the Oral Language Program already discussed in detail, gave students choice of activity and materials used.

**Interviews – Music/LOTE**

Teachers and students commented they would like to see a music specialist in the school and a LOTE program for the whole school. At the moment LOTE is only offered too students in unit two and three.  
Teacher 016 commented: “I would like a music program and LOTE across the board.”  
Parent participant P01 also commented “…it would be nice to have a language. Music should be an option, that way the kids who really really want to do it, but why force music on every kid, when they don’t want to do it?”

**Interviews – No Changes**

When student and parent participants were asked what they would like to see changed a few stated “nothing”. They were happy with the school’s programs. Parent participant P03 stated:  
“No, I don’t think so, I mean I never look into that hard but everything seems to be running along like sports awareness, incursions and excursions, I’m pretty happy with everything. As long as they’re doing something and it is not just classroom, classroom, classroom because I don’t think that is the only thing.”  
Student participants ST01 and ST03 both answered “no” to this question.

It is an interesting observation by the researcher that the aspects of the school’s programs and the things participants would like to see changed are not wholly academic pursuits but more often the hands on creative pursuits of learning, like the art program, “Hall”, P.E. and participants would like to see a music program and a more extensive LOTE program. Participants are able to see the value in these programs and how these benefit the whole child and not just concentrating on one aspect of a child’s learning. It is also obvious through the documents reviewed for this study how highly valued play and more creative pursuits are valued by the school and its community.
Responses to Interview Questions asked of Teachers Only.

During the interview process of this research, there were a number of questions specifically asked of teachers. These questions covered such issues as teaching strategies, dealing with gifted students and students with learning difficulties. It also covered barriers teachers felt they faced in creating their learning environments which could lead to independence.

4.7 Teaching Strategies

Teacher participants were asked:

Which teaching strategies do you believe help children to learn best?

The answers to this question were collated and the common responses are represented in the diagram below:

![Diagram of teaching strategies]

Figure 9 – Teaching Strategies
As shown in figure eight, teachers participating in this study believe in using a variety of teaching strategies to support their students to become independent learners.

Interviews – Small Groups and Peer Teaching.

Teacher participants discussed using small groups as a teaching strategy to help their students become independent learners, e.g.

011: “I think at this level they learn from each other and play. I set things up and have mixed ability groups so they learn from each other. Sometimes in that mixed ability group they
won’t all be able to do the same activity so I set up different ones within the same group, but around the same area. Another session of our maths might not be mixed at all; the groups will all be at the same level”.

013; “Working in small groups and depending on what you want to do, sometimes groups where they are all the same level, but in other levels mixed groups so they can learn from each other and get different ideas from each other”.

017: “Learn off each other, everyone can contribute, parents, other people. I like to work them in a variety of ways sometimes individual, sometimes groups; sometimes it can be like groups or mixed groups.”

The teacher participants 011, 013 and 017 all use small groups in a variety of ways. They use mixed ability groups to promote peer teaching and they use same ability groups depending on the situation and the focus of the teaching and learning at the time.

Slentz and Krogh (2001) share teacher participant 011’s view that students learn from their peers: “…Furthermore, they {primary age children} still learn best when they can interact with one another…” (p. 134).

Reynolds (1992), supports the view that peer teaching is an effective strategy and that students learn important concepts, not from being told by teachers, but by interacting with the physical world and other students.

For small group work and peer teaching to be a successful strategy it is important for students to build relationships. This again leads back to the importance of students having the skills to make and maintain relationships, a theme running throughout this research.

**Non-Participant Observations – Small Group and Peer Teaching**

There were a number of examples of small groups and peer teaching being used during the non participant observations for this research. Teacher participant 011 set up a maths lesson with four different activities and the class was split into four different mixed ability groups. Teacher participant 016 gave students the choice of working in groups no bigger than three, or alone. All the students chose to work alone. Teacher 017 instructed the class that “you will be working interdependently; we are going to have six groups and six different settings from ‘Finding Nemo’”. Students put themselves into groups, ensuring the groups would be mixed ability.
**Document Review – Small Group and Peer Teaching**

There are a great deal of examples of small group and peer teaching strategies being supported in the documents reviewed in this study.

Minutes from the Unit One meeting dated 9/3/05 stated “Helen to take small groups for literacy support”.

The Unit One Planners for terms one to four in 2005 all state small groups to be used during maths teaching, e.g. “Independent maths- small group reinforcement of skills taught immediately following teaching groups”.

The VELS documents also supports the use of small groups as a teaching strategy e.g. Interpersonal Development Level One – “With teacher support students begin to identify and develop the skills required to work together in groups including taking turns and sharing.”

**Interviews – Modelling/Scaffolding**

Another teaching strategy teachers agreed upon that help students become independent learners is modelling and scaffolding.

When asked about the strategies used to help support students learning, teacher participant 013 replied “Lots of modelling”.

Teacher participant 011 replied;

> “I try to make them aware of different strategies that they can use without making them explicit. I try and show them as many different ideas e.g. in writing I might show them, like I’m doing a report now this is how I write a report, modelling. The next day I might be modelling a letter. The next day something else, a lot of modelling for them to get the scaffolding needed for them to be comfortable to do it themselves”.

Dewey (2001), supports teacher participant’s 011 and 013’s view of the importance of modelling and scaffolding to students, and states that students can not work out new ideas or concepts for themselves if they are not supplied with the skills or effective environment which are prerequisites to guide their thought processes.
Pollard (1994), states the importance of scaffolding and modelling by stating

“In effective classes, pupil’s work was organised in broad outline by the teacher, who ensured that there was always plenty of work to do. We also found that the progress of pupils benefited when they were not given unlimited responsibility for planning their own daily program of work or for choosing work activities, but were guided into areas of study or explanation and taught the skills necessary for independently managing that work. In general, therefore, teachers who organised a framework within which pupils could work, and yet encouraged them to exercise a degree of independence, and allowed some freedom and choice within this structure, were most successful.” (p. 252).

Non-Participant Observations – Modelling/Scaffolding

During non-participant observations in the classrooms, all participants were observed using the teaching strategy of modelling or scaffolding. For example, teacher participant 011 modelled to her students how to form and write a report.

Teacher participant 012 modelled how to create a poster by asking the following questions:

012: “When you see a poster what does it have around it?”

ST1: “A border.”

*Teacher participant 012 drew a border around her poster on the board.*

012: “Posters need to be bright and colourful.”

Teacher participant 012 planned an activity where the students needed to sort plastic minibeasts according to their own criteria. The teacher modelled this process to the students first. A few students were chosen to try it themselves and then individuals went off and did their own sorting.

In teacher participant 016’s classroom, students were expected to create a habitat for a snail. The teacher drew a mind map on the board to help students decide what could be apart of their model, e.g.

![Environment of a Snail Mind Map](Figure_10_Teacher_participant_016s_Mind_Map_of_The_Environment_of_a_Snail)

*Figure 10 – Teacher participant 016’s Mind Map of The Environment of a Snail*
Document Review – Modelling/Scaffolding

The documents reviewed for this study support teachers’ view of modelling and scaffolding as worthwhile strategy. For instance, the following statement which appeared in the unit one planners for terms one, two, three and four 2005:

- Modelled writing - demonstrate the writing process using a variety of authentic contexts e.g. class survey experiences, innovating on a story or rhyme.
- Demonstrate how text is constructed
- Use text to model what good readers do and to predict story and what may come next.
- Model scanning information
- Demonstrate explicitly how to analyse new and unfamiliar words in text.

The term two planner has the following statement to support the view of the importance of modelling:

“Model graphic organiser of why minibeasts are useful.”

As observed in teacher participant 016’s lesson when she modelled a mind map to the students. The staff manual states that it is important to model appropriate behaviours, not only to the students but also parents and the wider school community, e.g.

“Teachers need to demonstrate the school vision in all undertakings with the students, colleagues and parents of the community.”

Interviews - Play, Engaging Children’s Interests, Open-ended Activities.

Play, engaging students’ interests and open ended activities are three strategies highly valued by the teacher participants interviewed for this study. Even though these are three separate strategies they were spoke of and observed in such a way as being interlocked, so they will be discussed together. Teachers interviewed referenced play, engaging students through their interests and open-ended activities a number of times in this study, e.g.

011: “Set up a lot of rotations at the moment because I believe a lot of learning is done through a play situation. While playing they’re actually doing a lot of learning, one of the next weeks activities might be to measure a bug using different materials, they think they are
playing but the language that will come out of that and learning from each other I reckon is very beneficial.”

012: “Learning through play, open-ended activities so that all children can achieve at their own level.”

013: “…try and choose topics that they enjoy because they learn a lot more because they are interested.”

014: “Strategies that are meaningful to the children. Strategies where children can have hands-on experiences…” “Make learning fun and engage children.”

015: “I engage their interests …”

“...I really value play.”

017: “I use their interests as a base or needs base.”

There is a great deal of validation for the teachers using these strategies in their teaching in the literature reviewed. Biller (2003) agrees with a number of the teachers by stating an environment where students are engaged and actively participating in the learning keeps students motivated to continue in their learning.

English and Wilson (2004) concur with Biller’s view by stating:

“Instead of plucking activities out of the air or out of a book, the needs interests and dominant learning preferences of students drive task selection.” (p.15)

Pollard (1994), reiterates the importance of using students’ interest to engage them in learning, e.g. “If the situations, the materials, the problems before a child do not interest, his attention will slip off to what does interest him and no amount of exhortation or threats will bring it back.” (p.10)

Both Hasting and Hayes (1981), agree with the teachers to the worthiness of play as learning strategy in the following quotes:

“It is even more importantly, a way of learning and practising new skills and developing thinking language and understanding of others. Through play a child can be creative and he can also learn how to compete and cooperate with others.” (p. 37).

Hastings and Hayes discuss the importance of play in developing skills already discussed in this research to support students in becoming independent learners.
Fisher (2002), support teachers’ view of the effectiveness of using open-ended activities as a teaching strategy, as stated in the following quote:

“The minute that an activity is so tightly prescribed by a teacher that there is clearly only one way of doing it, and that’s the teacher’s way, then children will repeatedly come to check that what they are doing is ‘right’. If teachers want uninterrupted teaching time for teacher – intensive activities, then a great deal of consideration needs to be given to these activities which children are to undertake independently.” (p.66).

Slentz and Krogh (2001) agree that primary school age children learn most effectively through the manipulation of concrete hands-on materials during open-ended activities.

**Non-Participant Observations - Play, Engaging Children’s Interests, Open-ended Activities.**

It was observed by the researcher in every teacher participant’s classroom for this study the teaching strategies of play, open-ended activities and involving students’ interests. Below are some examples from the observations:

011:
- Variety of open ended activities using concrete materials e.g.
  - **Activity One, Pattern Blocks**
    Students make a picture with pattern blocks and needed to describe the shapes they are using.
  - **Activity Two, Ladybirds**
    Students throw the coloured dice and colour the dots on the ladybird, need to copy the other ladybird (Chance and Data activity). (Appendix J).
  - **Activity Three, Number Formation**
    Students need to trace the numbers on a laminated sheet.
  - **Activity Four, Number Tiles**
    Students put their hand in a container and grab a random selection of tiles. Students then put the tiles in order from the smallest to the largest.

012: Play e.g. a number of play learning centres were set up in the middle of the room, e.g. dress ups, tennis table, nature table, cubby house, swing

013: Open-ended tasks e.g. classify the minibeasts using your own criteria

015: Hands on activities e.g. origami, box construction, building blocks
- Real life experiences e.g. beetles in entomology dept. students observing the hermit crabs
- 016: Open ended learning experiences e.g. students create snail & habitat using any materials they like.

**Document Review – Play, Engaging Children’s Interests, Open-ended Activities.**

Documents reviewed for this study show evidence of supporting the use of open ended, authentic activities which engage students’ interests. For example the school charter states;

“Activities provided by classroom teachers and specialists are authentic, engaging and transferable in all contexts.”

The school newsletter (dated 16/2/08), has the following quote from the LOTE teacher reiterating the importance of creating an atmosphere where students’ needs and interests are met:

“I am trying to gain an understanding of the students and their needs so that I could help them as effectively as possible…as a teacher I have the duty to create good conditions for their talent to develop.”

**Interviews - Inquiry/Integrated Approach**

Teacher participants 012, 014 and 016, interviewed in this research agreed that the inquiry/integrated approach was an effective teaching strategy, e.g.:

012: “…learning through inquiry, learning to ask questions, learning what to do and how to find things.”

014: “integrated approach to learning and the inquiry approach that allows you to cater for children’s interest and different learning styles.”

016: “Strategies that promote a broad learning base not just confined to a subject area. The integrated approach, the inquiry approach and also strategies which promote targeting where children are at rather than promoting where they should be.”

Cutting and Wilson (2001) support the teacher’s view of the effectiveness of inquiry and integrated approaches as a teaching strategy. They believe learning contracts achieve this by:

- Developing students’ research, problem solving, thinking and communication skills.
- creating opportunities to learn through discovery and research.
Fisher (2002) supports teacher participant 012’s view of the importance of students being able to question and inquire, e.g.:

“They need time and space to explore, investigate and question.” (p. 15).

Isbell and Exelby (2001), also support the idea that in a positive learning environment – students will be more willing to take risks, ask questions and make investigations freely.

Non-Participant Observations - Inquiry/Integrated Approach

It was observed during the non-participant observations for this study that a number of the teacher participants used the inquiry/integrated approach as a teaching strategy, below are a few examples of these observations:

- 011: the teacher was roaming around groups, questioning & monitoring students learning.
- SO1: Open ended questioning through inquiry e.g. “tell me what you know about painting?”
- 017 - Open – ended questions e.g. can you tell us about it?”
  - Discussion and questioning
  - Start from what the students know e.g. finding nemo reference.

Document Review - Inquiry/Integrated Approach

The documents reviewed for this study showed a number of examples of the inquiry/integrated approach to learning being encouraged in the school.

The School Charter states:

“The school uses the integrated teaching approach by developing broad-based units of work based around the CSF.”

The unit one planners for term two and four for 2005 both show examples of the integrated/inquiry approach to learning, e.g.:

- Term two: Sorting Out – mark off questions that have been answered after each activity.”
- Term four: “Establish a curiosity chart about tools.”
Minutes from the unit one meetings for 2005, also show a number of examples of the inquiry/integration approach, e.g.:

- “H has team building and inquiry learning materials” (issue dated 9/3/05)
- “Planning day – “under the sea”, planner look at the inquiry approach planners” (25/5/08)
- “Bring examples, if possible, of questions during an inquiry to next meeting” (26/10).

The VELS document under the “Laying the Foundations” area states:

“Domains without standards in level one and two are nevertheless important areas of learning for children. Teachers are encouraged to provide experiences for children in each of these areas, either by teaching relevant subject matter independently or by integrating it with those domains that have measurement standards.”

This concludes the findings of what teaching strategies are used to encourage independent learners.

### 4.8 Gifted and Students with Learning Difficulties

Teacher participants were asked the following questions during their interviews in regards to gifted students and those with learning difficulties:

**How do your beliefs accommodate children with learning difficulties? In what way?**

And

**How do you cater for gifted children in the classroom?**

Even though the questions were asked separately the responses were the same or very similar for both questions. For instance teachers commented that they did not use strategies that different to cater for gifted students or students with learning difficulties and the open ended activities catered for all students and their levels of learning in the classroom.

The diagram below shows the common responses for the above questions and the responses that were the same for both questions.
Figure 11 – gifted and students with learning difficulties.

**Interviews – High Expectations**

Teacher participant 011 responded to these questions by stating:

“Well, I have high expectations for all children whether they are normal or have an integration aide or learning need, they still have certain expectations that I set for them. They need to set their own goals so what I expect from say C, will be different from what I expect from another child but he knows what I expect from him as well. …Of course it’s modified for what I expect those children to be able to do, I still expect them to be able to experience the range say like in report writing, I expect a modified version not the same as I might expect from someone else. Encourage them to extend on report, “where does the fish live? What does it do?” and he went off and did that I expected him to extend the same as everyone else, just a simpler version.”

The response to the question regarding gifted students:

“In the same way, because I think I try and deliver the class in a way that’s going to come across to all children. I just had a group that really were quiet exceptional. When I was conferencing with them I was talking to them about different things that would extend them, so they had different goals say “o.k. you need to do talking marks now, well you’re really good with talking marks now so let’s do new line new speaker.” Basically it’s individual teaching so when you conference you are honing in on what each child basically needs.”
Teacher participant 012 responded to these two questions by restating the effective teaching strategies she uses in the classroom for all her students, e.g.:

012’s response to accommodating children with learning difficulties:

“I believe play helps children. With oral –language having open-ended tasks and open-ended learning helps everyone to achieve at their own level and that way no-one is excluded, no-one can be made fun of and bullied because they’re all achieving they’re all having input.”

The response regarding gifted students:

“I plan my work according to their level and scaffold them up to the next growth point. I don’t believe in holding them back and reteaching them something they already know just because the rest of the class is at that level because it is a waste of time for them…What is the point of them learning their numbers again when they already know their numbers? I might work with them in their own group to start building them up to the next level.”

With regard to teaching gifted students, teacher participant 012, believes it is important to start where they are at, and move on from this point, as good teachers would do with any student they teach. It is all about teaching to the individual.

Teachers use a broad range of teaching strategies to cater for the varied needs and interests of the students in their classrooms, including students with learning difficulties and gifted students. These strategies have been discussed in great detail in the previous section, including what the literature has to say and observations conducted in the classroom and the reviewed documents.

After looking at teachers comments regarding students in their class who are gifted or have a learning difficulties, it would seem teachers have the same view of these students as they do all the students in their class. That view is, to treat all students as individuals and cater to that individuals needs whether it is that the student needs a modified program because they are struggling or extending because they are exceptional. Effective teachers are able to scaffold and support all the students in their classroom by using strategies such as play, and open-ended tasks in which all students can feel successful and have the opportunity to practise skills that develop independence in their learning.
4.9 Barriers faced by teachers.

When teachers were asked the following question:

**What barriers do you believe you face in achieving the type of curriculum you would like to present? e.g. resources/assistance**

The overwhelming response was TIME. Teachers spoke of three different aspects to time, they are:

1. lack of time in general
2. lack of time because of the crowded curriculum
3. time spent on welfare issues rather than academic endeavours

Another barrier teachers discussed was class sizes being too big and how this may be solved by having more assistance in the classroom.

**Interviews -1. Time.**

A number of teachers discussed the problem of not having enough time to meet the demands of the classroom on a day to day basis. During the interviews teachers made the following responses to the above question regarding time:

012: “Time, I wish I had more time to teach. I feel, especially this year, that things are rushed because of fitting other things in like school things like the fun run, you know like you get interrupted too many times.”

013: “Having time to, I know the school has lots of resources, but having time to actually go and hunt them down, I think you are rushing to grab what you can, but if you actually had time to look through the library or the science cupboard or even your own stuff it’s not a matter that we don’t have the resources it’s locating them and finding what’s necessary.”

017: “Time – I feel so rushed like sometimes I go home and I think ‘I haven’t had any time to ask them this or do that’, and just no time to chat to children. I would like to have more sharing time in unit meetings to get ideas, sometimes being at the end of the building I feel a bit isolated.”

S01: “Time is a big barrier and timetabling, fitting everybody in is a big restraint”.

Teachers concern about the lack of time in their days is a very real one because the literature describes how important it is for students to have time to become independent learners, as Perry (2004), states:
“Children need lengthy periods of time in which to represent their ideas in some form and then to develop their play. The organisation of the daily schedule needs to be such that it sends the message, ‘there is plenty of time for you to develop your ideas and to play’”. (p. 91)

Biller (2003), also states the importance in giving students time, in the following quote;

“When teachers allow students the opportunity to practice, construct, manipulate and personalise new knowledge with previous learning, they are paving the pathway for a unique phenomenon known as long-term potentiation (LTP)...if the experience is repeated or reinforced, it causes the brain to produce important proteins that store the event in the memory. On the other hand, if students are not provided opportunities to practice a new concept over time the bonds between the neurons will diminish and the memory will fade. Practice really does help making learning perfect.” (p.62)

Perry and Biller state the importance of giving students the time to process, practice and reflect on new skills and learning. Students need the time to develop skills and learning to become independent learners.

Millikan (2003), discusses how teachers at Reggio Emilia schools in Northern Italy deal with the problem of time in this statement:

“...the adult provides children with sufficient time to engage with experiences and they are constantly assessing the appropriate time for their own involvement and/or intervention. Their aim is to keep motivation high and the possibility of failure low, of not intervening to quickly in providing correct information but, alternatively, to provoke children to think more deeply or from another perspective.” (p.83).

There are a small group of teachers at Buffymont Primary School who practice the Reggio Emilia philosophy as part of their programs. By broadening this philosophy in the school the teachers may not feel so much pressure in regards to the issue of time.

**Interviews 2. Time – Crowded Curriculum.**

Teachers discussed, in the following statements, the lack of time due to the crowded curriculum:

011: “Sometimes it becomes a little bit crowded and you’re trying to fit things in. From when I first started to now, we used to have time to have a bit of fun with our kids and just
sit and talk and have fun and now it’s like ‘Oh I’ve got to do that, I’ve got to keep going’ or ‘I’m behind quick we need to finish’. It is more demanding, we don’t have time to have that fun, I mean we try to do that now, but in the back of your mind you’re thinking ‘we’ve got to hurry up and move on to the next thing.”

012: “Crowded Curriculum, too many things to teach.”

013: “If we did everything we were supposed to do we wouldn’t fit it in. If we did all the P.E. we were supposed to do and all the LOTE there wouldn’t be much time in the day. We have a crowded curriculum and not a lot of time to put up classroom displays or to spend an hour in the library to look for resources.”

017: “When I was first teaching, I found it easier, there was more structure, our curriculum has got so broad it’s got so much more. In the literacy, like when I had grade one and the preps you just did the sounds and three letter words and blends, it was very structured I guess it was probably boring…So all this is better but it’s more work on us. Our workload is higher and you feel more muddled or you can miss out chunks in maths like you realise ‘I haven’t even done tessellations’”.

S01: “Curriculum to a certain extent, because skills are apart of visual arts and there are still certain skills that I have to teach, and that restricts creativity. I think ‘what skills do I need to cover? What haven’t I covered yet?’ and try to accommodate those skills in as creative a way as I can.”

Both Lambert (2003) and Wilson and Wing Jan (1996) agree with teachers that due to a crowded curriculum the time left for students to reflect on their learning is diminished. As stated by Biller earlier time to reflect on learning is important for students to become independent learners.

Longworth (2003), supports teacher participant S01’s concern regarding the space for creativity in the curriculum as stated here:

Creativity, imagination, vision and insight have been too long absent from the curriculum of our education organisations, mainly because they are not easily examinable, and partly because they encourage a questioning of accepted wisdom and authority – in the more authoritarian cultures a difficult concept to cope with. (p. 79).

Williams (2003), seem to think the problem of a crowded curriculum, “…will be achieved more comfortably in well managed learning environments where intrinsic motivation is encouraged through independence and responsibility. (p.75).
Interviews 3. Time – Welfare Issues

The third issue regarding time was the time spent on welfare issues:

011: “At the moment the type of kids we’re getting, with so many behaviour problems, so much time is spent on dealing with behaviour issues, like how many minutes of the day do we spend on these sort of issues?”

012: “Too many things to do when we’re talking about the welfare of children and the social. Their home life affects them even coming to school. You find you’re spending time in the classroom teaching life skills when they should put that into the curriculum. Because if you’re planning as a team and creating a unit, well for some kids I’ve had to stop that unit and had to plan something around life skills or something around empathy, because some of my children lack this so I’ve got to develop my own little unit and do some of that just to cater for my kids. I just can’t stick to minibeasts I’ve got to cater for my students.”

014: “Lack of resources or agencies to support at risk children.”

It is interesting that teachers see the time spent on these issues as taking away from their “teaching” time or more academic pursuits. However, an effective classroom design can positively influence students’ behaviour. A well constructed environment can assist in minimizing some of these welfare issues which can have a negative effect on a students learning, (Lambert 2000; Isbell and Exelby, 2001), as stated by teacher participant 012.

Non-Participant Observations - Time

During the non-participant observations, it was noticed that teacher participant’s 012 and 013 both made the following comments to students:

012: “Do not rush it; I will give you tomorrow as well to do it.”

013: “If you haven’t finished put your pictures away and we will have time to finish tomorrow”.

Even though teachers discussed no time to finish things and felt rushed, these two teachers have decided to make time for the students to finish their work without having to rush. These actions correspond with teacher participant 014’s response to this question:

“I don’t think there are any barriers, resources don’t have to be expensive and if you believe what you are doing is important you can make time and you can find the resources.”
It is a refreshing change to hear such a positive response from a teacher who sees no barriers to her learning environment. Maybe there is a perception of a lack of time and pressure teachers actually put on themselves to “fit everything in”.

**Document Review – Time**

The Buffymont Primary School Charter seems to support teachers’ view of a crowded curriculum when listing programs expected to be met e.g.:

“Required DE&T initiatives: 8 KLA’s, Early years literacy and numeracy; Middle years literacy & Numeracy; Thinking Curriculum; ESL/Oral language program; reading recovery; LOTE; programs for students with disability funding.”

It is the belief of the researcher that the problem of time in regards to the crowded curriculum and welfare issues could be solved with a more holistic approach to teaching and learning. If teachers are interested in teaching children rather than teaching subjects like literacy and numeracy than occasions like the “fun run” could be seen as part of the learning day rather than an interruption. Such activities could be taught in class like friendship building and conflict resolution and literacy and numeracy activities could be built around these topics. For example studying books with relationship themes, writing short scenarios about what to do if a problem arises in the yard. Numeracy activities could arise out of sharing situations. Giving the students authentic real life problems to solve and talk about develops all the skills discussed to becoming independent learners e.g. thinking, conflict resolution, relationship building, cooperation, communication as well as literacy and numeracy. It doesn’t have to be an either or situation “I can’t do numeracy to day because I have to stop and solve this problem’, teach the students the skills and they will be able to solve the problems themselves.

**Interviews - Class sizes too big/More Assistance**

Another barrier teachers felt they faced was the class sizes being to big. Teacher participant 011 states:

“Smaller classes would be fantastic what we’ve been doing with Hall is fantastic because we’ve got the smaller groups to work extensively with and to do good work with some sort of ESL thing happening like we’ve got people obviously out of the classroom they need to be taking some sort of literacy support group or something to assist”.
Teacher participant S01 discusses the same problem:

“Group sizes are definitely a barrier because I have to consider space and if I want to do a large piece of work it becomes really difficult because of space.”

Teacher participant 015 agrees with 011 to the lack of assistance:

“Not enough assistance – if we had an assistant in Hall we could get around to more of the children, more recording and we could do the Reggio Emilia.”

**Non-Participant Observations - Assistance**

During the non-participant observations conducted during this study, there was no observation of any assistance in any of the teacher participants’ classroom.

**Document Review – Class size/Assistance**

The documents reviewed for this research did not address the issue of class sizes or assistance in classrooms.

**4.10 Summary of Findings**

The findings of this case study indicate that teachers, parents and students participating in this research believe there are a number of skills students need to acquire to be independent learners. These skills include cooperation, thinking and problem solving, persistence communication and academic skills such as reading, writing and mathematics. The skill that all three participating groups agree upon that leads to independent learning is the skill of being able to make and sustain friendships. Participant state that if students are having difficulties in making or sustaining friendship this can affect their learning. It affects their confidence and they concentrate their energies on seeking out friends rather than concentrating on their learning. It is the belief of the researcher therefore that there needs to be a concentrated effort on teaching such social skills and making friendships, particularly in the early years of school. If these skills are acquired by students they are then able to move onto higher order thinking skills such as information handling and problem solving which in turn leads to independent learning.

Participants stated the child’s own responsibility in becoming an independent learner was to actively engage in their learning and remain focused. However, participants also stated that this just
doesn’t happen and the adults in students’ lives are the ones who needed to guide and support them by explicitly teaching skills and engaging students in their learning. Participants believe this could be achieved by teachers presenting open – ended tasks which cater to a number of different learning styles. Another way to cater for multiple learning styles is to set up learning centres in the classroom similar to the “Hall” program at Buffymont Primary School.

Participants in this study stated they like the varied programs offered at Buffymont Primary School including Art, “Hall”, Physical Education and Excursions and Incursions offered to students. What they like about the programs was they catered to the whole child and not just their academic side. It is interesting to note that the programs participants liked at Buffymont are the ones they would like to see more of, particularly sport and Physical Education. The participants believe catering for all aspects of a child’s development it what leads to independent learners.
Chapter 5 - Conclusion

In conclusion to this study, the researcher chose a case study methodology to investigate parents, students and teachers thought on how students become independent learners. The participants were a group of prep/one/two teachers, one reading recovery teacher and one specialist teacher (art). Parents and students also participated in the study.

The primary method of data gathering was individual face-to-face interviews with all participants to ascertain each participant’s perception of how an environment should be constructed to develop independent learning. The secondary methods of data gathering were non-participant observations in teacher participant’s classroom and review of the school’s documents.

To analyse the data collected, the researcher presented it in a matrix of interviews, observation and documents reviewed (Appendix L). The data was then cross checked to discover commonalities within the information. This information was then analysed and findings sort to discover how the teacher participants created their environments which lead to independent learning. The researcher also looked at the kind of environment parents and students expected that would lead to independent learning.

The main findings arising from the analysis of the data collected by the researcher were:

1. The importance of friendship and social skills
2. The importance of an open-ended learning environment where students have choice and feel they have ownership of their learning
3. Teachers creating an environment, which caters to the whole child by using a variety of teaching and learning strategies and guiding their students to become independent.

In all three participant groups interviewed the ability to make and sustain friendships was the only skill deemed important by every group. The participants emphasised the importance of friendship in regard to students’ learning, stating that if children had stable friendships they would feel secure in their learning environment and could concentrate on their learning rather than worrying about the fact they did not have friends with feelings of loneliness and isolation. Teachers also stated that to help students become independent learners they would often use strategies involving peer teaching. If students felt isolated from their peers this could have a negative effect on their learning when it comes to peer teaching in the classroom. Parents and students also commented on how the ability to make and maintain friendships was important to a child’s learning, in that a child is more likely to
speak to a peer if they were having a social or academic problem rather than a parent or teacher. If they have no friends to turn to this can affect the child’s learning.

Through this research it was discovered that the ability to make friends is of greater importance to these participants than academic skills. Though academic skills were discussed it was always in relation to more important social skills and attributes like cooperation, tolerance, acceptance and communication skills. It is the view of the researcher that these are the important skills and attributes that students need to learn about, particularly in the early years of school. With students having a sound base in these skills they will have a feeling of security in the learning environment and be more able to acquire academic skills such as problem –solving, questioning, and thinking skills which will develop their independence.

The researcher found that the ability for students to be able to make choices in their learning was important to the participants of this study. Buffymont Primary School places a great deal of emphasis on engaging their students in learning. Buffymont does this by including students’ interests and needs in the schools programs, particularly through the played based Oral Language Program referred to as ‘Hall’. This program gives the students a choice of learning activities. Teacher participants in this research also believed that giving students’ choice in their learning was important in developing students’ independence. During the non-participant observations there were examples of students given choice in their learning.

Participants of this study stated numerous skills and attributes thought important for students to become independent learners. In discussing these skills and attributes the teacher and parent participants indicated that, yes students needed to have these skills but it was up to the adults in their lives i.e. parents/caregivers and teachers, to guide and support students to acquire them. To support students in acquiring the attributes and skills needed to become independent learners, teachers need to create learning environments which cater for the student’s individual interests and needs. Teachers can do this by using a variety of teaching strategies and creating classrooms where questioning and investigation by students is encouraged by project approaches to learning. Skills can also be developed by teachers creating open-ended learning centres which focus on needs and interests of students as well as encouraging problem solving and thinking skills. Teachers need to be constantly evaluating these centres effectiveness and observing students growth to support and guide them through their learning to become independent learners who develop a lifelong desire for learning and who will become creative thinking, problem solvers in the future.
To create the environment discussed in this research which will encourage students to acquire the attributes and skills they need to become independent learners, will take some time. Changes in education are not easy to make due to the attitude of “playing it safe” and sticking to the traditional teachings and concepts which cater to the “one size fits all” approach to learning. This approach focuses heavily on verbal and linguistic learners. Students who are visual, kinaesthetic or tactile learners are quickly disengaged because of this focus on verbal and linguistic skills rather than the whole child. But to truly make a difference to the students in the classrooms of our schools, teachers need to look at each student as a unique individual who comes to school from different backgrounds and with varied experiences. Teachers need to cater to these students interests and needs through an environment set up to encourage these individuals to problem solve, think, create and question their own learning, through open-ended activities that give students the opportunity to develop and practise these skills. Only then will education move forward into the twenty first century by creating individuals who are responsible, creative, independent thinkers.
Chapter 6 - Recommendations

Due to the limitations placed on this research study, such as time, the researcher recommends the following to extend on the findings of this study:

1. Action research

Use an Action Research Methodology. With action research the researcher defines the problem to be examined, in this case “How do teachers create a learning environment which leads to independent learning?”, accumulate relevant knowledge about the subject or problem, in this case literature review, interviews, non-participant observation and document reviews, take action, and interpret the results of the action based on what has been learned. (Greenwood and Levin, 2007).

Action research is widely used by the teaching profession for two main reasons:

- to improve practices
- to generate new theory (McNiff & Whitehead, 2005).

In the case of this research, the findings from interviews and observations could be taken and applied to the classroom. For example, a researcher could look at the teaching strategies discussed by teachers in this study and the skills teachers think lead to independent learning and create a classroom with lots of play and open-ended activities and questioning. Observe the interactions within the classroom and use other research techniques to interpret the results of these actions and what has been learned and conclude whether the strategies and skills encouraged do actually lead to independent learners.

2. Multiple Case Study

One limitation of the case study approach is making generalisations or principles and applying them to other cases, this does carry some risk of error. (Thomas, 1998).

For this reason, the researcher recommends a multiple case study approach, (Coleman and Briggs, 2002). In this instance, the researcher recommends a multiple study in four separate primary schools across Melbourne. One in each Educational Region of the Melbourne
Metropolitan Areas (Northern, Western, Southern and Eastern Regions). This way findings can be generalised across the broader educational sector.

3. **Comparative Case Study**

A comparative case study is taking the study and repeating it in a different setting and then comparing and contrasting the results (Gray, 2004). The researcher suggests a number of comparative case studies to expand on this research. They are:

a) A school in the Western Suburbs of Melbourne with a school in the Eastern Suburbs of Melbourne
b) A Rural School with a Metropolitan School
c) A public school with a private school.

4. **More Non-Participant Observations using Video Footage and Still Photographs.**

Due to time considerations the researcher was only able to spend one observational session in each teacher participant’s classroom during this research project. As stated in this research there were a few occasions when issues discussed by teachers, students and parents were not observed during the non-participant observations, e.g.

a. the explicit teaching of the ability to make friends
b. students encouraged to persist in their learning.
c. Physical Education being discussed or taught in the classroom.

The data seems to suggest the above issues are not important to the participants in this study, even though these issues were discussed in the interviews. The observations for this study were conducted only once in each participants classroom which suggests the above issues may not have been discussed, demonstrated or explicitly taught during those observations. That does not mean the issues were not discussed or taught when the researcher was not taking non-participant observations in the classroom. For this reason, the researcher recommends more observations in each classroom.

The researcher also recommends a video camera to be used during the non-participant observations because of the following advantages:

a) The video can be viewed a number of times for analysis purposes and before conclusions are made (Briggs & Coleman, 2002; Kumer 2005).
b) Other professionals can be invited to view the video and make objective input into the study (Kumer, 2005).

When conducting research, it is important for a researcher to acquaint themselves with the ethical procedures of their institution concerning using data gathering equipment such as videos and still photography. If conducting research in a school, researchers are also required to submit an ethics application to the Department of Education and Training, outlining the nature of the research including data gathering techniques and the how the researcher will protect the privacy and anonymity of the participants. (Anderson and Poole, 2001).

The advantage of using still photos is they can be used to jog the memory rather than relying on the researchers own memory and field notes. (Briggs and Coleman, 2002).

Video and still photographs are a useful tool because they may pick up details that the researcher may miss if just relying on memory and field notes.

**Recommendations for Teachers to Develop Independent Learners.**

The researcher offers the following recommendations to teachers to develop independent learners in the classroom.

1. **Learning Centres**

By creating multiple open – ended learning centre in the classroom, effective teachers will be able to observe and document students’ interactions with resources and other students. These observations can be used to plan a curriculum that starts from where students are at now and can be scaffolded to where they need to go to develop skills for independence.

The learning centre in the room should be;
- Well resourced
- Based on students interests and needs
- Challenge students, but not so difficult it sets them up for failure.
- Be designed to develop problem-solving skills
- Be designed to develop such social skills as: cooperation, communication and sharing.
➢ Changed regularly, but not so often that students don’t get to practice skills.

2. **Integrated/Inquiry Based Approach to Learning.**

Effective teachers need to ensure students are challenged and given opportunities to problem-solve and practice thinking skills. The integrated/inquiry based approach to learning caters for these skills to be developed. By incorporating these approaches in the classroom, students are supported to make their own inquiries about a topic rather than material being delivered rote style.

The researcher feels the issue of how teachers create their environments which lead to independent learning is an important educational issue. The findings and concerns discussed in this research study could be further developed in a multitude of ways to add further credence to the issues and assist and support teachers in developing their environments to the benefit of the students in their classrooms.
References:


Raaheim & Wankowski, (1981)  
http://www.brookes.ac.uk/services/ocsd/2_learntch/independent.html (accessed 22/01/05)


APPENDIX A

Parent Interview

Reference No.

General information please tick

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20 – 25</td>
<td>26 – 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 – 35</td>
<td>36 – 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 – 45</td>
<td>46 – 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 or over</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Children’s Age

Children’s Homegroup/year level

1. What do you believe are the most important life skills your child needs to be independent?

2. In what ways can the school provide an environment that meets your child’s needs?

3. What do you believe are your child’s responsibilities regarding his/her own education?

4. What do you like about the programs the school offers your child?

5. Is there anything you would like to see the school do differently in terms of its programs?
APPENDIX B

Student Interview

Reference No.

General information

Male/Female
Age:
Homegroup/year level

1. What do you believe are the most important things you need to learn at school?

2. What do you like best about the way your classroom is set up?

3. How does this set up help you learn?

4. What can the school do to support your learning?

5. How can you help your own learning?

6. What do you like about the programs at the school?

7. Is there anything you would like to see the school do differently?
APPENDIX C

Department of Education & Training
Office of Learning and Teaching

SOS002852

Ms Jane Lockwood
2 Stoneman Turn
CAROLINE SPRINGS 3023

Dear Ms Lockwood

Thank you for your application of 24 January 2005 in which you request permission to conduct a research study in government schools titled: How teachers construct environments that encourage independent learning: a case study.

I am pleased to advise that on the basis of the information you have provided your research proposal is approved in principle subject to the conditions detailed below.

1. Should your institution’s ethics committee require changes or you decide to make changes, these changes must be submitted to the Department of Education and Training for its consideration before you proceed.

2. You obtain approval for the research to be conducted in each school directly from the principal. Details of your research, copies of this letter of approval and the letter of approval from the relevant ethics committee are to be provided to the principal. The final decision as to whether or not your research can proceed in a school rests with the principal.

3. No student is to participate in this research study unless they are willing to do so and parental permission is received. Sufficient information must be provided to enable parents to make an informed decision and their consent must be obtained in writing.

4. As a matter of courtesy, you should advise the relevant Regional Director of the schools you intend to approach. An outline of your research and a copy of this letter should be provided to the Regional Director.
5. Any extensions or variations to the research proposal, additional research involving use of the data collected, or publication of the data beyond that normally associated with academic studies will require a further research approval submission.

6. At the conclusion of your study, a copy or summary of the research findings should be forwarded to the Research and Development Branch, Department of Education and Training, Level 2, 33 St Andrews Place GPO Box 4367 Melbourne 3001.

I wish you well with your research study. Should you have further enquiries on this matter, please contact Chris Warne, Project Officer, Research on (03)9637 2272.

Yours sincerely

John McCarthy
Assistant General Manager
Research and Innovation Division

4/5/2005

enc
Ms. Margaret Wright    4th March, 2005
Principal
Buffymont Primary School
Victoria 3021

Dear Margaret,

I am currently enrolled in a Masters of Education by Research at RMIT University. I am writing to request permission to conduct this research at Buffymont Primary School. I want to conduct a case study, which examines ways in which teachers construct learning environments to encourage independent learning for their students. The research seeks to understand how factors such as time, the physical, social and emotional environment, DE&T initiatives and teacher, parent and student expectations might influence the ways in which teachers construct their environments to encourage independent learning for their students.

The staff at Buffymont Primary School would be invited to participate in this study and this would involve one face to face interview, conducted by me, at a time convenient to your staff, which would be approximately thirty minutes long. I would also request to being a non – participant observer in the classrooms of those wishing to participate for one session.

Ten families at the school would also be randomly selected and invited to participate in this study. This would involve one face to face interview with parents and children in the family conducted by me.

Margaret, please be assured that all information provided by the staff and families of Buffymont Primary School would remain completely anonymous. Data would be identified and entered by an identification number and only used for research purposes. A final report of the project outcomes will be provided to Albanvale Primary School.

I have taken great care when structuring the interviews to make the questions as unobtrusive as possible, so as not to cause any disturbance to the participants. I have also designed the case study to cause as minimal disruption to the everyday running of the school as possible. I have enclosed copies of a letter from the Department of Education and Training approving this research, a copy of my proposal which includes; the interview questions, plain language statements and consent forms for your perusal.

If you have any questions regarding this research please do not hesitate to contact me on 9367 2197 between 9am and 5pm Monday to Friday or my University Supervisor, Senior Lecturer Mr Peter Meaney on 9925 7852 between 9am and 5pm Monday to Friday.

Thank you for your time regarding this research project and I am looking forward to discussing it with you further.

Yours faithfully

Jane Lockwood.  B.Ed
Dear Mr Blachford,

My name is Jane Lockwood and I am a classroom teacher at Buffymont Primary School. I am currently enrolled in a Masters of Education by Research at RMIT University. I am writing to advise you I have been given approval from the Department of Education and Training to conduct this research at Buffymont Primary School. I want to conduct a case study, which examines ways in which teachers construct learning environments to encourage independent learning for their students. The research seeks to understand how factors such as time, the physical, social and emotional environment, DE&T initiatives and teacher, parent and student expectations might influence the ways in which teachers construct their environments to encourage independent learning for their students.

The staff at Buffymont Primary School would be invited to participate in this study and this would involve one face to face interview, conducted by me, at a time convenient to your staff, which would be approximately thirty minutes long. I would also request to being a non-participant observer in the classrooms of those wishing to participate for one session.

Ten families at the school would also be randomly selected and invited to participate in this study. This would involve one face to face interview with parents and children in the family conducted by me.

Please be assured that all information provided by the staff and families of Buffymont Primary School would remain completely anonymous. Data would be identified and entered by an identification number and only used for research purposes. A final report of the project outcomes will be provided to Albanvale Primary School and the DE&T.

I have taken great care when structuring the interviews to make the questions as unobtrusive as possible, so as not to cause any disturbance to the participants. I have also designed the case study to cause as minimal disruption to the everyday running of the school as possible. I have enclosed copies of a letter from the Department of Education and Training approving this research, a copy of my proposal which includes; the interview questions, plain language statements and consent forms for your perusal.

If you have any questions regarding this research please do not hesitate to contact me on 9367 2197 between 9am and 5pm Monday to Friday or my University Supervisor, Senior Lecturer Mr Peter Meaney on 9925 7852 between 9am and 5pm Monday to Friday.

Yours faithfully

Jane Lockwood. B.Ed
8\text{th} March, 2005

Dear Colleagues,

I am currently enrolled in a Masters of Education by Research with School of Education the Design and Social Context Portfolio at RMIT University. I am writing to invite you to participate in a case study I am conducting at this school. The case study examines ways in which teachers construct learning environments to encourage independent learning for their students. The research seeks to understand how factors such as time, the physical, social and emotional environment, Department of Education & Training Victoria initiatives and teacher, parent and student expectations might influence the ways in which teachers construct their environments to encourage independent learning.

Participation in this study involves one face to face, digitally recorded interview that will be approximately 30 to 45 minutes long. The interview will be transcribed for research and analysis purposes only. The digital recording will be stored on an electronic file, which will be kept for the mandatory RMIT requirement of five years, with a password that only I will have access to. Added to this, I would like to be a non-participant observer in your classroom for approximately one, 2 hour session, before the interview. I may wish to take some digital photographs of the setting only, not of yourself or the students in the homegroup. Please be assured that all information you provide will remain completely anonymous. Your data will be identified and entered by an identification number only. All information will be used for research purposes only. A copy of the final report will be made available to staff and families of Albanvale Primary school to read. This is an important research study, however you are under no obligation to participate. If you do agree to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time and any unprocessed data may also be withdrawn.

This research has been approved by the Department of Education & Training Victoria to be conducted at Albanvale Primary School.

If you have any questions regarding this study please contact me on 9367 2197 between 9am and 5pm weekdays or my university supervisor, senior lecturer Mr Peter Meaney on 99257852.

Thank you,

Jane Lockwood

Any complaints about your participation in this project may be directed to the Secretary, RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee, University Secretariat, RMIT, GPO Box 2476V, Melbourne, 3001. The telephone number is (03) 9925 1745. Details of the complaints procedure are available from: www.rmit.edu.au/council/hrec
HREC Form No 2b

RMIT HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Prescribed Consent Form For Persons Participating In Research Projects Involving Interviews, Questionnaires or Disclosure of Personal Information

PORTFOLIO OF
SCHOOL OF
Design and Social Context
Education

Name of participant:

Project Title: How teachers construct environments that encourage independent learning: A Case Study

Name(s) of investigators: (1) Jane Lockwood
Phone: 9367 2197

(2)
Phone:

1. I have received a statement explaining the interview/questionnaire involved in this project.
2. I consent to participate in the above project, the particulars of which - including details of the interviews or questionnaires - have been explained to me.
3. I authorise the investigator or his or her assistant to interview me or administer a questionnaire.
4. I acknowledge that:
   (a) Having read Plain Language Statement, I agree to the general purpose, methods and demands of the study.
   (b) I have been informed that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied.
   (c) The project is for the purpose of research and/or teaching. It may not be of direct benefit to me.
   (d) The privacy of the personal information I provide will be safeguarded and only disclosed where I have consented to the disclosure or as required by law.
   (e) The security of the research data is assured during and after completion of the study. The data collected during the study may be published, and a report of the project outcomes will be provided to RMIT University and Albanvale Primary School. Any information which will identify me will not be used.

Participants Consent

Name: ____________________________ Date: ____________

(Participant)

Name: ____________________________ Date: ____________

(Witness to signature)

Where participant is under 18 years of age:

I consent to the participation of ____________________________ in the above project.

Signature: (1) ____________________________ (2) ____________________________ Date: ____________

(Signatures of parents or guardians)

Name: ____________________________ Date: ____________

(Witness to signature)

Participants should be given a photocopy of this consent form after it has been signed.

Any complaints about your participation in this project may be directed to the Secretary, RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee, University Secretariat, RMIT, GPO Box 2476V, Melbourne, 3001. The telephone number is (03) 9925 1745. Details of the complaints procedure are available from: www.rmit.edu.au/council/hrec
Dear Parents/Caregivers,

My name is Jane Lockwood. I am a teacher at Buffymont Primary School. I am currently enrolled in a Masters of Education by Research with the design and Social Context Portfolio in the school of Education at RMIT University. I am writing to invite you to participate in a case study I am conducting at Albanvale Primary School. The case study examines ways in which teachers construct learning environments to encourage independent learning for their students. The research seeks to understand how factors such as time, the physical, social and emotional environment, DE&T initiatives and teacher, parent and student expectations might influence the ways in which teachers construct their environments to encourage independent learning.

Participation in this study involves one face to face, digitally recorded interview, conducted by me with you that will be approximately 30 minutes long and a separate interview with you child/ren that will also be approximately 30 minutes long. The interviews will be transcribed for research and analysis purposes only. The digital recording will be stored on an electronic file and be kept for the length of the study, approximately three years, with a password that only I will have access to. Please be assured that all information you and your child/ren provide will remain completely anonymous. Your data will be identified and entered by an identification number only. All information will be used for research purposes only. A copy of the final report will be made available to the staff and parents of Albanvale Primary School to read. This is an important research study, however you are under no obligation to participate. If you do agree to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time and any unprocessed data may also be withdrawn.

If you have any questions regarding this study please contact Jane Lockwood on 9367 2197 between 9am and 5pm weekdays or my university supervisor, Senior Lecturer Mr Peter Meaney on 9925 7852 between 9am and 5pm, weekdays.

Thank you,

Jane Lockwood

Any complaints about your participation in this project may be directed to the Secretary, RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee, University Secretariat, RMIT, GPO Box 2476V, Melbourne, 3001. The telephone number is (03) 9925 1745. Details of the complaints procedure are available from: www.rmit.edu.au/council/hrec
How teachers construct environments that encourage independent learning: A case study

Name(s) of investigators:
(1) Jane Lockwood
(2)
Phone: 9367 2197

1. I have received a statement explaining the interview/questionnaire involved in this project.

2. I consent to participate in the above project, the particulars of which - including details of the interviews or questionnaires - have been explained to me.

3. I authorise the investigator or his or her assistant to interview me or administer a questionnaire.

4. I acknowledge that:

   (f) Having read Plain Language Statement, I agree to the general purpose, methods and demands of the study.

   (g) I have been informed that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied.

   (h) The project is for the purpose of research and/or teaching. It may not be of direct benefit to me.

   (i) The privacy of the personal information I provide will be safeguarded and only disclosed where I have consented to the disclosure or as required by law.

   (j) The security of the research data is assured during and after completion of the study. The data collected during the study may be published, and a report of the project outcomes will be provided to RMIT University and Albanvale Primary School. Any information which will identify me will not be used.

Participants Consent

Name: ____________________________ Date: ____________________________
(name)

Name: ____________________________ Date: ____________________________
(witness to signature)

Where participant is under 18 years of age:
I consent to the participation of ____________________________ in the above project.

Signature: (1) ____________________________ (2) ____________________________ Date: ____________________________
(signature of parents or guardians)

Name: ____________________________ Date: ____________________________
(witness to signature)

Participants should be given a photocopy of this consent form after it has been signed.

Any complaints about your participation in this project may be directed to the Secretary, RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee, University Secretariat, RMIT, GPO Box 2476V, Melbourne, 3001. The telephone number is (03) 9925 1745. Details of the complaints procedure are available from the above address.
### APPENDIX G

**Teacher Interview**

**Reference No.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General information</th>
<th>please tick</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age bracket</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20 – 25</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 – 30</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 – 35</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36 – 40</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 – 45</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46 – 50</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 and over</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Please State Qualifications:**

---

**Years teaching, levels taught, System**

6. What do you believe are the most important skills children need to become independent learners? Why?

7. Which teaching strategies, do you believe, help children to learn best?

8. How do your beliefs accommodate children with learning difficulties? In what way?

9. How, do you cater for gifted children in the classroom?

10. What barriers do you believe you face in achieving the type of curriculum you would like to present? E.g. resources/assistance.

11. How does your classroom environment facilitate the acquisition of the most important knowledge/values/behaviours/life skills for the children in your homegroup?

12. How do you physically organise your classroom? And why?
13. What practical resources do you utilise in your teaching?

14. Do the children in your classroom make choices about the use of these resources in their work? In what ways?

15. How does the environment you have structured provide for an independent approach to learning?

16. How does DE&T curriculum requirements impact on the design of your teaching/learning environment?

17. Are you familiar with the school charter?

18. Are there any aspects of the Charter that influence your teaching?

19. What do you see as the positive aspects of the organisation of your classroom?

20. Which aspects of this organisation would you like to change, if necessary and possible? Why?
APPENDIX H

Observation Fieldnotes

Setting: ______________________________________

Observation reference number: ___________________

Date: ________________________________________

Time observation started: _______________________

Time observation finished: ______________________

Number of observees: __________________________

Purpose of observation: _________________________

Description

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
APPENDIX I

Design and Social Context Portfolio

HRESC
HP:HP
Building 220.2.36
Bundoora West Campus

Ms Jane Lockwood
9907826B
22 Stoneman Turn
Caroline Springs
Vic 3023

Dear Jane

Re: Human Research Ethics Application

The Design and Social Context Human Research Ethics Sub-Committee, at its meeting 3rd February 2005, considered your Master of Education application entitled "How teachers construct environments that encourage learning: A Case Study"

I write to advise that your application will receive approval as Level 2 risk classification subject to Higher Degree Proposal approval and the following minor amendments being sighted to the satisfaction of the Chair:

Section B2 Last section (under the Research Methods heading) has several spelling/punctuation errors
Section C1 Refers only to "ten families" but needs to make it clear that both parents and young children will be interviewed
Section C2 Section G refers to the Principal's approval being sought only after Dept approval is granted. Principal's approval should have been sought first
Section C4 Would advise that any families randomly selected that have students in Ms. Lockwood's class be excluded from the study to that there is no implicit social pressure for them to participate.
Section D2 This section should also refer to the photos being taken
Section E8 Must also refer to photos

PLAIN LANGUAGE STATEMENT (PLS)

i) Use RMIT letterhead No letterhead

ii) State Portfolio and School you are studying in after the sentence "This study is being undertaken as part of an MEd (Project) Degree".

iii) Add a paragraph or two about the project. Some ambiguity here i.e letter refers to ONE 30 min interview with "you and your child/ren" Will parents and child be interviewed together as this phrasing suggests and if so why are there separate interview questions? Clarification needed.

iv) Add sentence... 'you may withdraw at any time and any unprocessed data may also be withdrawn'. The last clause is missing

v) ADD For further information. Contact me at...or my senior supervisor ...on...Only gives herself as a contact – should give supervisor's details as well

vi) Sign the Plain Language Statement
You are required to complete the above amendments and submit them to the secretary of the DCS Human Research Ethics Sub-committee prior to the next meeting.

The next meeting will be held on 3rd March 2005.

Should you have any queries regarding the above amendments please seek advice from the Chair of the sub-committee Assoc. Prof. Heather Fehring on 9925 7840, heather.fehring@rmit.edu.au or contact me on (03) 9925 7877 or email heather.porter@rmit.edu.au

I wish you well in your research.

Yours sincerely

Heather Porter
Secretary
Design and Social Context
Human Research Ethics Sub-Committee
Operational Unit - Bundoora
APPENDIX J

**Beetle**

**How to play**

1. Take turns to roll the dice.
2. On your turn, colour the body part that goes with the number you roll. If you have already coloured this part, then you miss your turn.
3. The first person to colour all of their beetle is the winner.
4. Play the game again.

**You will need**

- a dice
- coloured pencils
- someone to play with

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>head</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>eye</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>feeler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>tongue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>leg</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## APPENDIX K

### Observation Survey Summary Sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th>Date:</th>
<th>D. of B.:</th>
<th>Age:</th>
<th>mins:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School:</td>
<td>Recorder:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Text Titles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Easy</th>
<th>Running Words</th>
<th>1:</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>1:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instructional</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Directional Movement

Analysis of Errors and Self-corrections:

Information used or neglected [Meaning (M), Structure or Syntax (S), Visual (V)]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Easy</th>
<th>Instructional</th>
<th>Hard</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Cross-checking on information (Note that this behaviour changes over time)

### How the reading sounds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Easy</th>
<th>Instructional</th>
<th>Hard</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### Letter Recognition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concepts About Print</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>* Sand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Word Reading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word Reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>* List A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Writing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vocabulary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sounds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>* A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Other tasks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spelling</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Circle whatever was used
# WORD TEST SCORE SHEET

Use any one list of words.

**Date:**

**TEST SCORE:**

**STANINE GROUP:**

**Name:**

**Age:**

**Date of Birth:**

**Recorder:**

Record incorrect responses beside word

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LIST A</th>
<th>LIST B</th>
<th>LIST C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>and</td>
<td>Father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>to</td>
<td>come</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>are</td>
<td>will</td>
<td>for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>here</td>
<td>look</td>
<td>a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>me</td>
<td>he</td>
<td>you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shouted</td>
<td>up</td>
<td>at</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>am</td>
<td>like</td>
<td>school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with</td>
<td>in</td>
<td>went</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>car</td>
<td>where</td>
<td>get</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>children</td>
<td>Mr</td>
<td>we</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>help</td>
<td>going</td>
<td>they</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not</td>
<td>big</td>
<td>ready</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>too</td>
<td>go</td>
<td>this</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>meet</td>
<td>let</td>
<td>boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>away</td>
<td>on</td>
<td>please</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**COMMENT:**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>to</th>
<th>is</th>
<th>up</th>
<th>for</th>
<th>big</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>he</td>
<td>at</td>
<td>one</td>
<td>my</td>
<td>sun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>went</td>
<td>girl</td>
<td>boys</td>
<td>day</td>
<td>some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>his</td>
<td>that</td>
<td>of</td>
<td>an</td>
<td>wet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>love</td>
<td>water</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>just</td>
<td>pot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or</td>
<td>now</td>
<td>things</td>
<td>told</td>
<td>sad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>carry</td>
<td>village</td>
<td>quickly</td>
<td>nurse</td>
<td>beware</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>return</td>
<td>scramble</td>
<td>twisted</td>
<td>journey</td>
<td>luncheon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>known</td>
<td>shelves</td>
<td>explorer</td>
<td>tongue</td>
<td>projecting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>terror</td>
<td>serious</td>
<td>belief</td>
<td>events</td>
<td>emergency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>refrigerator</td>
<td>steadiness</td>
<td>obtain</td>
<td>overwhelmed</td>
<td>universal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nourishment</td>
<td>encyclopaedia</td>
<td>commenced</td>
<td>circumstances</td>
<td>fringe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>formulate</td>
<td>motionless</td>
<td>trudging</td>
<td>theory</td>
<td>destiny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>scarcely</td>
<td>exhausted</td>
<td>labourers</td>
<td>urge</td>
<td>atmosphere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>apprehend</td>
<td>binocular</td>
<td>domineer</td>
<td>melodrama</td>
<td>economy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ultimate</td>
<td>reputation</td>
<td>humanity</td>
<td>excessively</td>
<td>philosopher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>autobiography</td>
<td>contemptuous</td>
<td>terminology</td>
<td>mercenary</td>
<td>glycerine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unique</td>
<td>microscopical</td>
<td>perpetual</td>
<td>efficiency</td>
<td>influential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>perambulating</td>
<td>renown</td>
<td>physician</td>
<td>champagne</td>
<td>exorbitant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hypocritical</td>
<td>atrocles</td>
<td>constitutionally</td>
<td>contagion</td>
<td>palpable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>melancholy</td>
<td>ascendency</td>
<td>fatigue</td>
<td>phlegmatic</td>
<td>tellacious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alienate</td>
<td>poignancy</td>
<td>phthisis</td>
<td>ingratiating</td>
<td>subtlety</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments:
## LETTER IDENTIFICATION SCORE SHEET

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>S</th>
<th>Word</th>
<th>I.R.</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>S</th>
<th>Word</th>
<th>I.R.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>K</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>P</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>W</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Z</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Z</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>H</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>O</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>J</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>U</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Y</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>L</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Q</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>D</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>E</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>G</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>R</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>V</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>T</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Confusions:**

\[ V \]

\[ A \]

**Letters Unknown:**

**Comment:**

**Recording:**

- **A**: Alphabet response (check)
- **S**: Letter sound response (check)
- **IR**: Incorrect response
- **Word**: Record the word the child gives

**TOTALS**

**TOTAL SCORE**
In Health and Physical Education, there is one point (0.5) at Level 1 for assessing student progress towards the Level 1 standard in the *Movement and physical activity* dimension.

**Progression point 0.5**

At 0.5, the work of a student progressing towards the standard at Level 1 demonstrates, for example:

- Movement and physical activity
  - introductory components of a range of basic motor skills in a variety of environments, both with and without equipment
  - partial control over their movements in personal and general space
  - willingness to participate regularly in physical activity
  - appropriate responses to simple directions, including following simple rules and using their own equipment and personal space safely with teacher guidance

The **learning focus** statement provides advice about learning experiences that will assist students to work towards the achievement of the standards at Level 1.
**Level 1 standard**

**Movement and physical activity**

At Level 1, students perform basic motor skills and movement patterns, with or without equipment, in a range of environments. They regularly engage in periods of moderate to vigorous physical activity. They use simple vocabulary to describe movement, the physical responses of their bodies to activity and their feelings about participation in physical activity. When participating in movement and physical activities, they follow rules and procedures and share equipment and space safely.

**Health knowledge and promotion**

In Health and Physical Education, standards for the *Health knowledge and promotion* dimension are introduced at Level 3. *Health knowledge and promotion* learning focus statements for Levels 1 and 2 provide advice about learning experiences that will assist students to work towards the achievement of the standards at Level 3.

Progressing towards Level 2, Level 3, Level 4, Level 5, Level 6 and Beyond Level 6

---

### Progressing towards Level 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Progression point 1.25</th>
<th>Progression point 1.5</th>
<th>Progression point 1.75</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Movement and physical activity</strong></td>
<td><strong>Movement and physical activity</strong></td>
<td><strong>Movement and physical activity</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>performance of a variety of basic motor skills in a range of environments</td>
<td>performance of a variety of basic motor skills and the beginnings of more complex skills</td>
<td>use of a wide variety of basic motor skills, and a range of more complex skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>use of a combination of motor skills and movement</td>
<td>use of a combination of motor skills</td>
<td>use of a combination of motor skills and movement patterns in</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At 1.25, the work of a student progressing towards the standard at Level 2 demonstrates, for example:

At 1.5, the work of a student progressing towards the standard at Level 2 demonstrates, for example:

At 1.75, the work of a student progressing towards the standard at Level 2 demonstrates, for example:
patterns during individual activities partial control when participating in locomotor activities that require a change of direction and level willingness to participate in periods of moderate to vigorous physical activity knowledge of how some simple games or small group activities are organised skills and movement patterns in activities with a partner increasing control when participating in locomotor activities that require a change of speed, direction and level regular participation in periods of moderate to vigorous physical activity and identification of some links between physical activity and health understanding of why rules and procedures are used in games and activities, including an understanding of safe use of equipment and space

The learning focus statement provides advice about learning experiences that will assist students to work towards the achievement of the standards at Level 2.

Level 2 standard

Movement and physical activity

At Level 2, students demonstrate basic motor skills and some more complex skills. They combine motor skills and movement patterns during individual and group activities. They demonstrate control when participating in locomotor activities requiring change of speed, direction and level. They create and perform simple rhythmical movement sequences in response to stimuli. They regularly engage in sessions of moderate to vigorous physical activity and describe the link between physical activity and health. They explain the contribution rules and procedures make to safe conduct of games and activities. They use equipment and space safely.

Health knowledge and promotion
In Health and Physical Education, standards for the *Health knowledge and promotion* dimension are introduced at Level 3. *Health knowledge and promotion* learning focus statements for Levels 1 and 2 provide advice about learning experiences that will assist students to work towards the achievement of the standards at Level 3.

Progressing towards Level 1, Level 3, Level 4, Level 5, Level 6 and Beyond Level 6.