

Australia (South)

Mypolonga Primary School

This primary school (students aged 5 to 13) has created a school enterprise context in which students benefit from community partnerships, interdisciplinary learning, authentic assessment, and multi-age student groups. The most prominent feature of the school is a student-organised shop, in which the children sell self-made products and commissioned products from the local community to visitors and tourists on one day per week. The shop also enables students to practice the drafting of business plans, work in accounting etc. The school also has a school-wide program to build early literacy skills, including playgroups for parents with young (pre-school and school) children, and a reading competition in which students earn points for time spent reading. There is an extensive assessment system, in which students can earn several badges for excellent assessments, with the final badge allowing them to assess the performance of other students. Students are involved in the school governing council and its committees, and via the committees even in the planning of community projects.

Main focus of innovation: CONTENT, RESOURCES, ORGANISATION.

Other keywords: blended/non-formal, equity

General Information

Name of the ILE: Mypolonga Primary School

Location/Address: Martin Street. Mypolonga, South Australia 5254

Website: www.mypolongaps.sa.edu.au

ILE submitted by: South Australian Department of Education and Children's Services

Rationale

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

Educational innovations intentionally used to enhance educational outcomes at Mypolonga Primary School include community partnerships within an enterprise learning context, interdisciplinary learning and authentic assessment, and multi age student groupings.

Mypolonga Primary School is located along the River Murray about 100 km from Adelaide, the capital city of South Australia.

The school is situated within a community that frequently experiences economic difficulties as a result of long periods of drought. Partnerships are, therefore, particularly important in supporting students to 'make things happen'. That is, to take control of their learning, their future and their employment prospects. Students are extended the opportunity to take risks, to learn about the world of business, and to connect with their community, in order to equip them to seize opportunities.

A culture of innovation has been adopted by the school. An important feature of this innovation is the broad acceptance that learning happens at all times and in many places. In recognition of this, the school has extended its boundaries to include the whole community, both on site and off, in traditional and non-traditional school hours. The commitment of staff, students and the community to this model has seen high levels of engagement and achievement.

Mypolonga Primary School has adopted an interdisciplinary curriculum. The flagship program within this curriculum is the Mypolonga Primary School Shop. The business is run by students and visited every Friday by tourists on a paddle steamer 'The Murray Expedition', which passes the town along the River Murray. All classes are involved in business, craft and tourism aspects of the Mypolonga Primary School Shop. Every Friday, senior students from the school, along with a junior trainee operate the shop during school term and in school holidays. The shop sells crafts made by students and on consignment for local craftspeople. Students rotate through a series of tasks and take responsibility for all aspects of the business. As a result, they engage in numerous opportunities for authentic learning through oral and written language, mathematics, business, art, craft and hospitality.

Through interdisciplinary learning, community partnerships and enterprise program students have the opportunity to complete a Certificate of Hospitality. This involves a significant literacy focus, as well as students working with their parents in catering for community events such as football, RSL and cricket dinners. This is yet another example of innovative and authentic learning and assessment activities implemented at Mypolonga Primary School.

Throughout all learning and assessment experiences at the school, students are heavily involved in every aspect of decision making. Every school committee has significant student contribution, with equal voice in decisions made. The students take this opportunity seriously, with many even travelling out from Murray Bridge to participate in evening meetings.

Innovation at Mypolonga Primary School has produced positive outcomes. During the 15 years since the enterprise interdisciplinary programs were introduced, they have evolved into a centrepiece of student learning at the school. Regardless of their background, students achieve outstanding numeracy outcomes, often well above schools in the highest socio economic bands. In recent years, innovations through multi age leadership opportunities have improved literacy scores, with 67% of students achieving sufficient improvement to reach the upper range of proficiency in standardised national literacy assessments. The federal government of Australia has acknowledged the enterprise innovation action research projects. The school has found that these projects have contributed to students taking significant responsibility for their own learning, well above the average quality projection of authentic or integrated learning strategies.

Teachers at the school have noted many positive outcomes for students, including greater engagement and feelings of belonging and success.

The school’s efforts have been recognised through several awards, including:

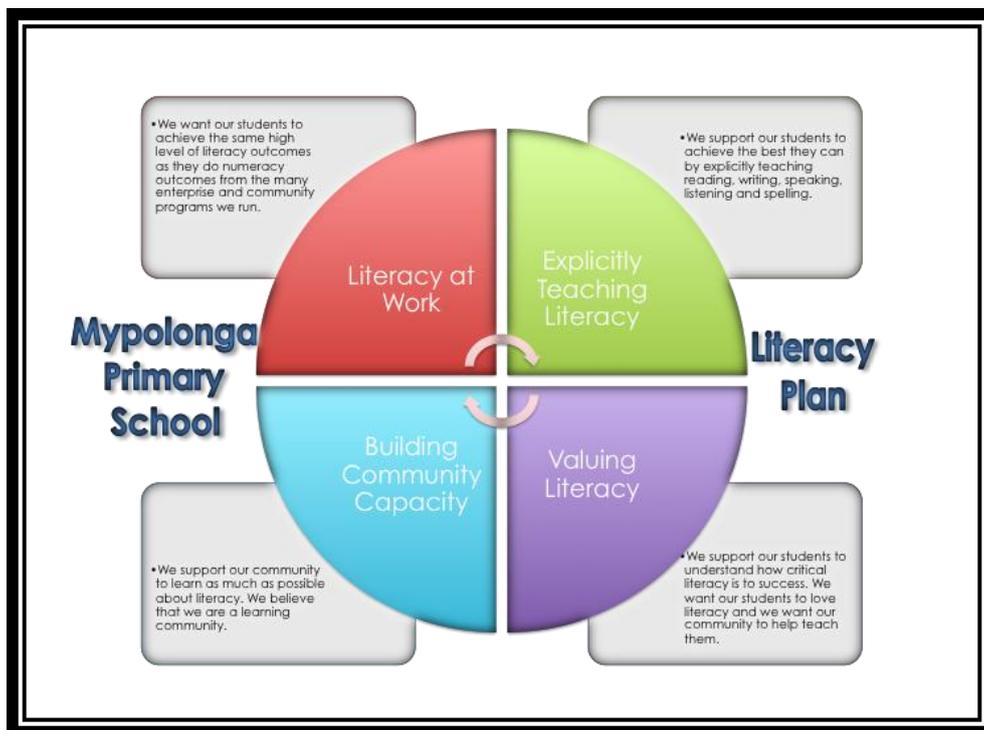
- 2004 SA Great Education Award
- 2008 Women’s Weekly Parents and Citizen’s Awards: 1st in state, 3rd nationally
- 2009 Australia Day Award: Rural City of Murray Bridge: Community Initiative of the Year
- 2009 National Australia Bank Schools First Award: State Finalist (\$50,000 prize)

Learning Aims / Intended Learning Outcomes of the ILE

What are the core learning aims and which knowledge, skills or attitudes are to be acquired? (These may include outcomes related to learners’ social, interpersonal, or meta-cognitive development)

Mypolonga Primary School aims to produce positive citizens who act locally but think globally, who are connected to the community, and have the skills and abilities to be able to make and have choices in their later life. Numeracy outcomes have been high for some time. For example, in 2009, Year 7 achievement at the school was higher than the Year 9 national mean. However, literacy outcomes have been lower, and more reflective of the socio-economic status of the school’s clientele. In 2008, all school programs were reviewed and reformed with a specific focus on literacy. A school wide Literacy Plan was developed through extensive analysis of data and alternatives. It was decided that, like the school’s values, the Literacy Plan needed to be a community plan, and not just a school plan.

Figure 1: The Mypolonga Primary School Literacy Plan



The Mypolonga Primary School Literacy Plan

The plan is focused on four areas of improvement, namely:

- **Explicitly Teaching Literacy:** A whole school approach has been developed for the explicit building of early literacy experiences, including phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension and non-fiction writing.
- **Valuing Literacy:** The introduction of a literacy cup competition was central to building an attitudinal shift towards to importance of literacy within the whole community.
- **Building Community Capacity:** Playgroup (originally in a community building) was relocated to the school. Junior primary teachers worked with playgroup parents to create literacy rich activities, as well as workshops for parents of young children (both before and after they enrol) to support engagement in literacy rich activities at home. All new parents are given gifts of books. Upper primary students also support playgroup parents through activities to instil the value of literacy for both.
- **Literacy at work:** The enterprise programs are deliberately aligned with the plan to achieve literacy outcomes. The School Shop shows literacy engagement to tourists through the display of accounting on a “Reconciliation Board” within the shop. Students are required to be able to articulate the processes they engaged in to balance the books. Furthermore, part of the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Program Community and Service curriculum involves parents participating in school activities to support student learning.

Literacy has been incorporated further into the work of the Mypolonga School Shop through the motto ‘OK Isn’t Excellent’. Each aspect of the work at the Shop is assigned assessment criteria, with a focus on excellent assessment. Also, student’s commitment is tested as the business requires a consistent weekly commitment, including during the holidays.

Learners

Which group(s) of learners is it aiming at? Who is eligible to take part? How many learners are there? What are their ages?

The *Mypolonga Primary School* is a government (public) school catering for students from Reception (~5 years of age) to Year 7 (~12-13 years of age). The school is classified at Category 3 on the school disadvantage scale of 1-7. The school population hovered at around 70 students for many years. However, the population has swelled by students coming in from other locations. The school will reach 120 students by the end of 2011. Currently, 56% of students are driven to the school from Murray Bridge, a large regional town 20kms away. One family even makes an 80km round trip to school every day. The school now has a waiting list and parents have started enrolling their children from birth to secure a place. The school incorporates others into their community of learners, including children not ready to attend school and adults learning alongside the students.

Facilitators

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

Mypolonga Primary School has a total of 7.6 teaching staff, including the principal and 7 support staff. There is a culture of shared leadership, where staff, students, and community members have a voice which is heard and valued. Everyone is a teacher and everyone is a learner.

Consequently, innovation is seen as an everyday part of the improvement process. Shared leadership is embedded in all programs at *Mypolonga Primary School*. However, there is a strong commitment by the whole school community to empower students to take risks by extending themselves beyond their comfort zone to find new learning experiences. For example, each week students rotate through different activities in the School Shop. Each activity has criteria which establish the quality of service performed. Each 5 'excellent' assessments accumulate towards the achievement of a badge. Students move through red to blue, green, silver then gold. Students then achieve a 'Quality Assurance Badge' which enables them to assess the performance of other students.

In order to further extend student learning, a 'Certificate of Retail' and 'Certificate of Business Leadership' were developed, based on employability skills. An example of the outcomes needed to be achieved are when students provide 4 pieces of evidence that they can 'work unsupervised to a high degree'. The onus is on the student to determine what constitutes evidence and to provide justification for this.

Organization of the ILE

How is learning organised? How do learners and facilitators interact? What kind of pedagogy do they follow? What curriculum is used?

Mypolonga Primary School provides learning experiences for students in line with both the state curriculum framework, known as the South Australian Curriculum Standards and Accountability (SACSA) Framework, and the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Program (IBMYP). Learning innovations primarily include community partnerships and resources, inter-disciplinary and authentic learning and assessment, and multi-age and leadership focused strategies.

Community partnerships and resources

The *Mypolonga Primary School* Curriculum has adopted a community partnerships approach, operating within the broader IBMYP focus of Community and Service, and Sustainability, Health and Social Education, within the bounds of the SACSA Framework. The school has strong links with the community through shared values, participation in local events, playgroups for young families, incorporation of members of the community in school activities, the School Shop, and a number of environmental programs through Landcare and Waterwatch providing information to locals and initiating projects such as the rehabilitation of the local landing and a revegetation program at the Town Tank.

Interdisciplinary and authentic learning and assessment

The innovative Enterprise Education program involves all classes in running enterprising activities throughout the year including school lunches and the operation of the School Shop. These activities are strongly integrated into the curriculum through the inclusion of learning in business, literacy, arts, food and finance. Senior students prepare a business plan each week. Learning Activities involved in the School Shop involve greeting visitors who arrive from the steam boat, answering their questions, conducting a tour of the school, preparing brochures, record keeping in regard to the consigned goods, money counting and accounting. School commissions on consigned goods are calculated via a spreadsheet by Year 4 and 5 students. Students are also involved in the school garden. All visitors to the school are asked to send a postcard from their home countries and states and this becomes the focus for geography and social studies classes.

Multi age and leadership approaches

Significant importance is placed on developing leadership opportunities for the upper primary (Year 6/7) students, who then develop strong and significant relationships with the younger cohort. The School Shop program is a pertinent example. The program initially began in a very ad hoc way, with parents having much of the responsibility for the financial management and organisation of the program. As the program evolved, and outcomes were identified, the focus changed to be very clearly student managed, with adult support. The program needed to be structured so that every upper primary student had a task to do each week, which students rotated through. The number of tasks depended on the number of students in the upper primary class. Working in pairs, each Year 6 student is mentored by a year 7 student.

Each task is documented in the School Shop Assessment book, which explains to students:

- What to do before the bus arrives.
- What to do after the bus leaves.
- What to do while the tourists are in the school.
- How to achieve an excellent assessment, that is, the criteria for success.

The focus of the Shop over time has changed from being initially about students making crafts, then providing a service to customers, to now being about how to run a successful business, including the development and continual revision of a business plan.

Interactions between students of different ages and leadership opportunities are central to all activities in the School Shop. However, a culture of student leadership infiltrates all aspects of learning within the school. For instance, when the Literacy Competition (the Literacy Cup) was established, it was decided to document what literacy leadership looked like. A Job and Person specification (see attachment) was developed to provide a framework on which to elect house captains, and to provide performance feedback. The Job specification is aligned to the school's Literacy Plan and the Person Specification is aligned to the school's values. A lounge suite was purchased, placed in the Upper Primary classroom and is used among other things for house Captains to hear members of their team read who may not have the opportunity to do so at home. House Captains use Community and Service time to monitor which members of their team they need to follow up.

Another avenue for student engagement in leadership roles occurs through participation in the Governing Council and its related committees. Each of the following has at least one student representative.

- Finance – which makes decisions about how school funds are spent.
- Improvement – determines priorities leading to the development of Site Improvement Plan and works to develop school culture.
- Community and Service – connections between school and community to build community capacity.
- Sustainability – to improve school resources and environment from a sustainability perspective.
- Shop Committee – which makes decisions about how shop profits are spent, whether they contribute to the cost of a dishwasher to wash lemonade cups; or whether they be spent on something else the school needs, such as resources to support Playgroup or to meet the targets of the school's literacy plan.

Each committee drives innovation. For example: the Rural City of Murray Bridge wanted to develop a community area utilising the River Murray in Mypolonga. Students who were members of the Sustainability Committee were taken to the initial consultation meeting.

From that initial meeting, (where the students were very articulate and passionate), the community decided to allow students to drive the process with community support. From then on, all meetings were conducted at the school, with community and Rural City of Murray Bridge support. The plan, conceived in drought, is now tempered by flood.

The student leadership structure means that there is an aspirational culture at the school. Older students lead by example, demonstrate integrity in actions rather than in words, and set the tone for collaboration and achievement. Younger students want to emulate them.

The introduction of a line of bush tucker, to be sold in the Shop (Sweet Chilli and Lemongrass Sauce, and Dried Apricot and Wattleseed Jam) aims to give leadership opportunities to Aboriginal students who manage this program. TIGER tucker is in its infancy, but already showing a great deal of promise.

Learning Context

In which context does learning take place? What does the physical learning environment look like? Are community resources used to facilitate learning and how?

The learning context involves traditional classroom buildings, but extends into the wider community to include tourist activities associated with the River Murray and the environment. The school buildings are quite traditional, and include four main teaching areas. The main building includes a classroom, resource centre, administration area, sickbay and principal's office. The staff room and teacher resource room are in a separate building. There is a Middle Primary building, a Junior Primary building, and Art Building (Also used by the school's Playgroup), and a Toilet Block. A new building housing the Lower Middle Primary class and the activity room has recently been transported to the school. All buildings have recently been renovated. There is also an old stone (small) building which has been converted into the School Shop. The art room provides a serviceable area for art and science lessons. It has soundproof doors which can create an extra room. The Library is automated using Bookmark and has a good collection for a school of this size. As part of the Building the Education Revolution economic stimulation package, a new building was constructed which has become the upper primary classroom.

Beyond the school itself, significant learning also takes place in the Mypolonga community. Originally, the School Shop opened across the road from the school in a disused post office. But, eventually the school needed to convert an old lunch shed within the school grounds into the new School Shop to accommodate the business growth.

History of ILE

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

The local community of Mypolonga faces long-term difficulties including drought, low fruit prices and poor returns to milk production. These create concern among locals about the future employment prospects for children in the community. To address this local challenge, *Mypolonga Primary School* introduced an enterprise focus in 1994 to generate innovative strategies for inspiring and relevant learning. The school made use of local tourism and its location along the River Murray, developing an interdisciplinary curriculum, involving business, tourism, art and craft, through establishing a shop. The School Shop was originally located in a disused Post Office across the road from the school and sold student made crafts to tourists arriving in buses. The School Shop has more recently broadened its trade to include tourists on the Murray Expedition Paddle Steamer. To supply the demand this created, the school sought higher quality local crafts and sold them on consignment, taking a 20% commission on sales. The junior primary class make bookmarks, the lower middle primary class make fridge magnets, the middle primary make recipe books and the upper primary students make chocolate coated apricots and home made lemon cordial.

In 2004, *Mypolonga Primary School* was identified as having ‘Innovative Approaches to and Best Practice in, Enterprise Education.’ The Action Research project found the school to be one of the leading practitioners of Enterprise Education in Australia. Since then, the school has evolved, whereby all programs fall under the banner of literacy with a strong enterprise flavour. The traditional role of sports house captain now includes an additional leadership role for literacy. A competition is held to win house points for the number of nights students read at home. House captains supported those students who could not read at home by making themselves available before school to hear reading.

The 2010 literacy results in standardised national testing showed 67% of students from across all levels of schooling improving sufficiently to reach the upper range of proficiency level in the test.

The school has forged strong partnerships with the community and has developed a representation of the values shared known as TIGER.

- Teamwork
- Integrity
- Generosity of Spirit
- Excellence
- Respect

These values resonated with the community and have now been adopted by all community groups, from sporting groups to Scouts, as the whole community’s values, not just the school’s values.

Funding of the ILE

How is it funded?

As a public school, *Mypolonga Primary School* is funded annually through the state government. Funds from the school’s overall budget are allocated to meet the priorities set in the Site Improvement Plan. The implementation of a Student Centred Funding Model has given the school the capacity to be more flexible in staffing and resources.

Some grants have been accessed to establish and support programs. In 1995, a grant of \$4,000 was accessed to start the school shop. Again in 2009, a Consumer and Financial Literacy grant was used to document the explicit literacy teaching that needed to be embedded into enterprise programs as part of the Literacy at Work element of the school’s Literacy Plan. These funds were also used to build capacity to implement the Certificate of Hospitality.

Shop profits are approximately \$6,000 per year. Each class provides products for the shop and profits are calculated as part of the reconciliation process, conducted by the upper primary class. Classes use these funds to subsidise school camps and excursions.

Profits made from taking 20% commission from sales of community crafts sold on consignment are managed by the Shop Committee, a student run body. Submissions (from teachers, students and parents) may contribute to improvements in Shop efficiency (such as a dishwasher to wash home made lemon cordial cups). Other contributions may include resources, such as literacy resources to help upper primary students to support Playgroup.

Prizes, such as the NAB \$50,000 School’s First Award were used to employ School Service Officers in the Junior Primary class as part of the school’s early year’s literacy plan.

Funds raised by the Certificate of Hospitality (between \$4,000 and \$6,000 per year) are held in the school account for that calendar year. The following year, the Community and Service Committee consults with the Improvement Committee to decide where these funds should be allocated. Currently, ICT infrastructure has been identified as a priority.

Learning Outcomes

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

Significant positive outcomes have resulted from the innovative programs implemented at *Mypolonga Primary School*.

These include:

- outstanding numeracy scores, often well above schools in the highest socio-economic bands;
- improved literacy scores, with 67% of students reaching the upper proficiency range in national standardised tests; and,
- almost no significant behavioural issues.

School achievement generally is well above like schools and district achievement. Data support the influence of the School Shop program on numeracy improvement, with Year 7 students achieving above the Year 9 national mean in 2010. In 2011, the Site Improvement Plan was expanded to include all aspects of literacy – writing, (including spelling) and listening and speaking. Significant improvements have already been observed in reading. The male and female dux of Murray Bridge High School are previous Mypolonga students, as are many of the high school's top performers. But, only 5% of Murray Bridge High School students are from *Mypolonga Primary School*.

Table 1: Numbers of students achieving low, medium and upper proficiency levels in literacy and numeracy from 2008 to 2010.

Yr 5-7	2008		2009		2010	
	Reading	Numeracy	Reading	Numeracy	Reading	Numeracy
Low	17	0	14	0	11	0
Medium	50	50	71	43	22	38
Upper	33	50	14	57	67	62

Surveys of students have indicated that they feel challenged in their learning. The eager participation of upper primary students in school committees shows their enthusiasm for the school, as does the regular volunteering of students to work at the shop during school and public holidays. Students who experienced behavioural issues in other schools learn to adapt to the school culture at Mypolonga and take on the school values. There were no suspensions in 2009 or 2010.

The success of *Mypolonga Primary School's* efforts is also demonstrated by the dramatic increase in demand for the school from parents. Increasing numbers of families from outside of the district are expressing an interest in attending the school. As a result, enrolments have been capped and a waiting list created.

Parental views were surveyed in 2010 and indicate high levels of satisfaction with the school's performance and programs. All parents surveyed agreed with the following statements.

- This school has high expectations of its students
- Teachers are enthusiastic about their teaching
- Teachers provide help and support when it is needed
- The school changes its programs and activities to improve student achievement
- Students know how they are expected to behave at school
- The school provides a safe and secure environment
- The school encourages students to have a sense of pride in their achievement
- I feel welcome at this school
- I am comfortable about approaching my child's teachers to talk about his / her progress
- There is a broad variety of communications that inform parents about this school
- Students from all backgrounds and cultures are treated fairly at this school
- I am well informed about school activities
- I believe that if I had concerns or suggestions the school would respond appropriately
- The school is well organised this year
- The school is always looking for ways to improve what it does
- Parents have the opportunity to participate in decisions about their children's education
- Overall I am satisfied with the school's planning.

When the school won the National Australia Bank School's First Award, the judges identified 'a clear link to outcomes' as one of the school's main strengths.

Documentation describing or evaluating the ILE

Is there documentation on this learning environment? Is there a website? Films? Research reports or evaluations? Other forms of documentation? (please supply references or links)

For further information about the school and its programs, please visit the website at www.mypolongps.sa.edu.au The website includes a film of how the Shop operates, as well as annual reports, newsletters and a variety of school information including personal specifications for the role of house captain and a school values statement.

In 2003 Myponga was chosen for research by consultants for the Federal Government on enterprise learning. Results were published in 2004 in the report: 'Action Research to identify innovative approaches to and best practice in, Enterprise Education.

A history of the school Shop is currently being written to document the evolution of the Shop into what it has become. A draft is included in this submission.