

Phase 2: Program and Student Grouping

Making learning goals explicit to parents to improve student engagement- Myrtleford Primary School

- **Teacher:** Bernadette Holden
- **Grade:** 3/4
- **Integrated Studies:** Understanding our Community

Description

Improving student engagement by explicitly sharing plans for future learning, learning goals and strategies to achieve goals with students and their parents/carers.

Term 2

In term 2 the children studied The Environment. The activities were organised in a [matrix \(Pdf - 43Kb\)](#). To ensure learning styles were catered for, Bloom's Taxonomy/Gardner's Multiple Intelligences were used when developing the matrix. The children were excited by the matrix and most started on the activities that they could easily manage or that suited their learning style. They were challenged to try other activities in other learning styles. Children were encouraged to take the matrix home and discuss the activities with their parents/carers and work on them at home. The response from some children was outstanding. They arrived regularly with new and creative pieces of work that they had done at home. Some other children were keen but disorganised, forgetting to take their folders home and forgetting to show their parents/carers their progress.

John's story

One such child was John, who always does what he is asked to do at school but couldn't manage to take his learning further. In an informal discussion with his parents, it was clear to them and to John that he hadn't taken this matrix on energetically. During the chat I explained that in the following term we would be studying our community and we would be presenting the findings on PowerPoint presentations. The parents seemed very keen to help and were keen to be involved. This inspired me to be clearer in outlining the 'projects' to parents so that they would have more opportunities to be involved.

Term 3

Early in the term I wrote to all parents/carers outlining the project. Every child would study a special place in the community [sporting facilities, the bakery, the tourist attractions etc] in the topic 'Understanding our Community'. The children spent some time on preparing a list of questions for owners/managers and they then went about finding the answers. This brought parents into the project because in many cases they took their children to the places to ask their questions. The children knew that I would help them find out if their parents/carers were unable to. I asked for the letters to be signed and returned to ensure that all parents knew about the project. The response to the letter was enthusiastic. Many parents had discussed the project with their children and together they chose their workplaces. Some children visited their parents' work and took digital photos of this experience. Some had started work on PowerPoints and the children were able to continue these.

It was clear that older siblings had helped many students and in John's case, an auntie had put the photos on CD after his father had taken the photos at work. John's photos of a bridge being built were of great interest to the other children and he delighted in explaining who all the workers were.

Student reflection:

In term 2, John said he kept forgetting his project and it would have been good if his Mum had helped him. He enjoyed having Mum and Dad come up to school because in his words 'they know what I'm doing'. In term 3 John's Dad became involved, taking the photos and then sitting down

with John to discuss his workplace. This was obviously very enjoyable as John shared his work with his Dad as well as his Mum.

Parent reflection:

John's Mum has noticed an improvement in John's attitude to school and many other things. She said he is starting to get a different idea of what school is all about. An important factor in this is that his father managed to get to the parent/carer/student/teacher meeting and his direct involvement was important as she said she had always relayed the information to him after interviews.

Teacher reflection:

1. Children enjoy the opportunity to follow their own interests and to learn new and interesting ways to present their findings. [PowerPoint presentation] This allowed some children to really excel as this was a way of learning that excited them.
2. With the development of digital imagery, there are increasing opportunities to share learning with families and to share family experiences with the school [i.e. a CD of family holiday photos]. Many children were taught how to make slideshows at home because they were so keen to get started. During one class, a student asked if he could go and get his big brother because he needed help with an animation. The brother arrived with three friends and the problem was solved.
3. Planning must consider the children whose families do not respond to opportunities to be involved with learning projects. The teacher, in this case, has to give special help and put in extra time with those children.
4. Setting up the project was time-consuming due to all the photos being inserted into the slideshows. However students quickly learnt the techniques of downloading, saving and inserting photos and shared this with peers. Rosters for computers were developed which ensured management became easier as the term progressed.
5. Many parents did not take advantage of the opportunities to come up and see their child's work at the beginning of term 3 and to talk about learning goals with them. Some parents have said they already know what the child does at school. They do not yet see this as a chance to set goals with the child and for parents to be clearer about future directions and thus supporting the students more effectively.
6. In term 4 more parents and children showed interest in the planned learning for their children. Many of them made time before or after school to discuss their child's learning goals without the prompt of my letter

Links to the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (the Standards)

The processes described in this story will assist Myrtleford Primary School in implementing the Information and Communications Technology and Personal Learning Domains of the Standards.

The use of the program PowerPoint, process of taking, saving and inserting photo's into PowerPoint are expected student learnings in the Level 3 'ICT for visualising thinking' and 'ICT for creating' dimensions of the Standards.

The matrix presented in this learning experience allowed students to select achievable short-term learning goals which are expected in the Level 3 'Managing personal learning' dimension of the Standards.