



Warrnambool East Primary School

Where Effort Produces Success

The Learning How To Learn Program is an innovative and exciting concept developed by the principal and teachers at Warrnambool East Primary School. It was first trialed at the school in 2001 and has been reviewed and modified for implementation in 2002.

The Learning How To Learn Program

A new and innovative approach to a common curriculum issue facing schools -

The LHTL program is based on a set of beliefs and principles which lays the foundation for the building of a school and classroom culture that strives for continuous improvement. The program requires whole school commitment from students, parents and teachers. It involves the implementation of class strategies and practices, yet requires a paradigm shift and a change in mindset about learning, teaching and schooling. The role of the teacher changes from director to facilitator.

Four cornerstones (school specific) support the entire curriculum and are applied across the whole school. All teaching and learning operations are imbedded in the four foundations which provide tools for the implementation of the curriculum. The four cornerstones of the program are – You Can Do It !; Quality Classrooms; Thinking Oriented Curriculum; Student Development. – Appendix 1

The cornerstones are specific to our school as they encompass the principles and practices that we value as a school. They are pertinent to this particular learning community and may change according to where in the journey we are. Other schools would need to choose their own foundation components and build their structures accordingly.

Background to the program

Warrnambool East Primary School was involved in the Quality in Schools Program in 2000/2001. The program introduced school communities to the principles of quality and provided tools for developing systems (school) and sub-systems (classroom) which are working together to provide the optimum conditions for learning. The LHTL program, with a focus on developing optimum learning classrooms, was developed by a team of teachers at the school as a way to get the school started on its Quality journey. We believed the place where Quality principles and practices could have the most impact was in the classroom

Purpose of the program

The school, through the program, was aiming for cultural, positive, congruent and sustainable improvement processes at the school system and classroom system level in order to raise levels of student achievement and improve general attitudes and behaviour.

The aim of the program also was to take all the best elements and practices operating in all classrooms and employ the strategies and practices in a systematic way across the whole school.

How does it work?

The program is initially implemented in the classrooms during the first ten days of the new school year. The normal class program is suspended for the first ten days whilst the staff and students engage in the LHTL program. The major focus of the program is to work with the students in all classes to establish a strong purpose for their learning and the commitment to work together to build happy, safe, productive classrooms and school. Through a variety of activities, students and teachers work together to build happy positive relationships, establish class and personal goals, build skills in thinking and learning, participate in group decision making, design and build a learning plan for their class. The activities and learning experiences contribute to a class community

which will, through the use of the ethics, principles, processes and practices built during the first ten days, improve and sustain the learning community throughout the year.

Effective implementation of the innovation in an education setting -

Cornerstones of LHTL

- **You Can Do It ! Education**'s main purpose is to provide all children with the four foundations for achievement and social/ emotional well – being in school, work and the world tomorrow. The core value of the program is the development of the potential of all children (academically, intellectually, interpersonally and emotionally) through instilling in children four keys to success – Confidence, Persistence, Organisation and Getting Along – that research indicates as determining the extent to which children achieve and experience social and emotional well-being. Within the program lessons, the teachers address the question “ Are we teaching the students *how* to be successful learners? and “Are we teaching the success keys and positive habits of the mind with the same rigour and passion that we display when we teach academic curriculum?”

Teachers are aware of the need to integrate the foundations into the ethos of the classroom so that throughout the day, they absorb and practice the foundations through a variety of learning experiences.

Teachers have been trained in this program and are currently using the lessons in their year level. The lessons are integrated into the LHTL - Appendix 1

- **Quality Classrooms** - Students and teachers explore the question “ Why do I come to school?” and share thoughts and discuss what makes a good classroom, student, and teacher. Through the use of quality learning tools, students in each class identify their values and draw up mission and vision statements. They investigate the philosophical ideals of a perfect classroom and develop a set of classroom principles (ethics) They make a commitment as a class to live and learn by their agreements. By being involved in the development of the class community, they take more responsibility and have more ownership of their learning and behaviour. When problems occur, the teacher takes the group or individual back to their class agreements. The class builds a system which functions in line with the whole school system – the organization and all its parts have congruency and consistency. The class documents its various functions by flowcharting its processes- the ultimate aim would be that the students could tell a visitor / relieving teacher exactly how their classroom operates and functions. The learning community is improved and developed continuously through the level of accountability built into the system. – Appendix 1
- **Thinking Curriculum** – In a world of rapid change the next generation will need, more than ever, to be well schooled in thinking skills and learning tools for life-long learning. The Thinking Oriented cornerstone of the LHTL program places a high priority on empowering students with thinking skills such as ability to reason, to make informed judgements, to critically evaluate and to think creatively. Teachers need a manageable framework for the explicit teaching of thinking skills that will equip students with the thinking tools to use throughout their schooling and in the years beyond. WEPS is developing a school wide program for the explicit teaching of thinking skills. The skills, tools and strategies taught will be used, integrated and employed right across the curriculum in the CSF / specialist areas of learning. – Appendix 1
- **Students** – This cornerstone of the LHTL focuses directly on the individual student and will concern it self with any business relating to each student. This is the area of operations which will focus on the processes needed to facilitate and support individuals in all aspects of their school life – special needs, referrals to outside agencies, individual learning plans, student reports, specific events and involvements of students (competitions and excursions, camps) student records, students' work, parent/ teacher interviews, all documentation required for students. Whilst the You Can Do It ! program aims to promote psychological , social and emotional health in the individual, this aspect of the LHTL is the practical side of managing students – case management and all of the administrative tasks that go with it.

Bringing the Community on Board

School Councilors, parents, community friends and supporters and staff were invited to attend information sessions where the program was presented and discussed. Some quality tools were used to get parent input, ideas and feedback. The school community was fully supportive, if not a little curious about “no school work” for a while. They were prepared to trust the school in that the program would assist their children to better prepare for a productive year. The community remained informed through the weekly newsletter. Each department in the school conducted parent information nights during the program and students were engaged in conducting tours around the classrooms and explaining the workings of the LHTL program. One new parent to the school remarked “This is the best thing I’ve ever seen happening in a school. It’s great to see the kids know so much about their learning and be able to explain it so clearly and confidently”

Professional Development

Four workshops were designed by a team at WEPS. Prior to the first year of implementation, all staff attended the workshops after school over four hours. Refreshments and a meal were provided. (December 2000)

Four new teachers who were appointed to start in the new year attended an introductory session about the LTHL program at a lunch in the week prior to school returning.

The workshops and material provided a good basis for the first trial in 2001. ***The entire staff made the commitment to participate in the trial. This was the most crucial and important factor to ensure success – to get all staff on board, teachers and support staff making the commitment “we’re all on the same boat and we can see where we’re going”***

Whole school Professional Development programs which teachers have completed and which have contributed to a whole school understanding and commitment.

- Quality in Schools 2001/2002 – team of five , two years – cost \$ 15,000
- You Can Do It! – 2001 – all staff , one day – cost \$3,000
- Thinking Oriented Curriculum , May, 2002. – cost \$2,200
- Peer Mediation – evening 1999 – cost \$1,000
- Jo Lange – Dealing with difficult students – March 2002 – cost \$1,500

The school has a commitment to whole school PD as the most effective in terms of implementing change and improvement. Monies expended on whole school PD has been significant which demonstrated our commitment and belief in the concept.

Support for Staff

After initial information sessions (in previous year), all staff made a commitment to participate and trial the program over the first ten days. Building in the support mechanisms(listed below) were critical factors in enlisting and maintaining staff support and interest.

- Staff in-servicing – four workshops in the year prior to commencement.
- Documented overview for the ten days which incorporated the four elements provided – Appendix 1
- Daily workplans/ guidelines prepared for all teachers were provided.- Appendix 2
- No scheduled meetings for first two weeks.
- Little preparation for teachers as it was done for them/ reduction in teacher workload.
- No requirement to get into formal school work for two weeks/ chance to get to know the kids first.
- During the first ten days staff attended daily reflection, debrief sessions where new materials were distributed and new strategies or tools modeled.

Whole School Organisation

Given that the concept of Learning How To Learn underpins all the arrangements the school makes for curriculum implementation across the school and constitutes the work of teachers, four professional learning teams have been formed around the four elements of the program. The teams are representative across the school and they meet regularly to extend and develop the work on a

continuing basis. Each team has developed and documented an action plan identifying proposed actions for the current year and beyond into the future. Actions are documented and achievement outcomes are stated. This is a way to capture the memory, document policies and processes and sustain the interest and impetus of the program.

Documentation of the program

As the school has developed , extended, reviewed and modified the program, the following documents contain these aspects and components.

- PD package consisting of six workshop sessions – programs and resource materials
- Daily programs for the first ten days – Appendix 2
- School produced a video where students talk about the program and why they do it.
- Class Learning Plans – each class has its own plan which outlines the class values, mission, vision and class principles – Appendix 3
- Quality Newsletter – written by the school to communicate new ideas, activities; published twice termly (Appendix 4)
- Resources list and bibliography of references
- Power Point presentation to use in PD or information sessions
- Action Plans from each Professional Learning Team – You Can Do It !; Quality Classrooms; Thinking Oriented Curriculum; Student Development
- Documented school system, policies, processes and supporting documents
- Feature article and photo published in Victorian Education Times – Appendix 5
- Article and photo published in Warrnambool Standard during the visit of the SA principals group.- Appendix 6
- Submission to Education Trust – 2001
- Articles published in WEPS newsletter “Link”

Positive impacts upon student outcomes and learning -

What Students Think

- “You get to know the kids and the teacher well.”
- “Helps you to not be nervous in a new grade.”
- “We learn who can help us to learn - ourselves , each other, community.”
- “At class meetings , you can say what you think, how you feel, identify issues and solve problems together.”
- “We’d like to do it for longer next year because it helps you to feel welcome, confident and we trust each other.”
- “Before the 5 whys, I thought that coming to school was something that you did for Mum’s and Dad’s - now I have my own reasons.” Lachlan, Year 4
- “It’s like a magic spell doing the 10 day program - you learn to think better, catch on faster and work harder.” John, Year 4.

Evaluation of the program – Target is best practice!

To study the impacts and benefits of the program so far, the school uses many quality tools to establish results and achievements. Some of these instruments include: student achievement measures, enrolments, student attendance, parent survey, A.I.M., school based assessment, budget performance, parent satisfaction, discipline issues, staff satisfaction. Questions for further study and action planning include.

- The outcomes and results of the program will be studied using a ‘plan, do, study, act’ action plan for improvement.
- What does the data tell us about the program – student achievement (CSF levels) levels of engagement, student self esteem and feelings of success (student surveys/ anecdotal information)
- What are the outcomes in the community? – use parent surveys

- What needs to be done next? – set achievement aims from PDSA
- Can we standardize the program? How will we document the processes?
- How will we capture and standardize the process?
- How will we keep the culture and practice alive?
- How will we induct, mentor and support staff?
- How will we share what we've learned? With whom?

Benefits of the project to the school community

The results and outcomes have in 18 months of implementation indicated that the program is of high value and is effective in the following ways.

- On- going continuous improvement in student learning
- Individual and collective increased student engagement , involvement, commitment and ownership for the development of their learning community.
- Improved standards of work and learning as students dialogue, demonstrate, examine and assess the quality of their own and others' work
- More opportunities for students to think and to discuss their learning in a learning place where responsibility and independence are valued and encouraged.
- Happier, and more engaged and motivated students.
- Decline in student discipline issues – data is kept on numbers and incidents.
- Processes for the management of class minor misbehaviour in place so that issues are dealt with within the department.
- Increase in the school's profile in its educative role – regarded as a 'lighthouse' school for innovative programs
- Parents are extremely supportive of the program and promote it in the community.
- Teacher absence decreasing – high moral as the organization grows healthier in its operation and purpose – “ At last we all seem to be going in the same direction as there is more clarity and consistency across the school. We're all on the same boat and we can see where we're going”

Potential application of the innovation to other schools -

Professional Development Program – to the broader education community

WEPS is convinced that this philosophy and program contributes significantly to better outcomes for students. Our conviction and passion has been able to catch the imagination of many educationalists and the school receives regular requests for school visits, information, PD and general help to get started themselves. Listed below are some of those activities.

- WEPS Quality team gave a major presentation and display at the Celebration Conference at the Darebin Centre, Melbourne at the conclusion of Group 3 , Quality School program in 2001. Participants from across Victoria and South Australia indicated very high interest and many contacts were made with us as a result.
- The school has developed a comprehensive PD package which could be offered to other schools. The program consists of six workshop sessions covering the planning , organization and content of the program. WEPS PD team would assist schools to design their school program based on their own interests and needs. The program would be conducted along the lines of the EMIC, ELIC model.
- WEPS has been recognized and acknowledged by many schools both within Victoria and South Australia who have shown great interest in the program.

Below are listed some of our involvements with other schools.

- Presentations to other schools – Nullawarre, Cudgee, Grasmere, Warrnambool (Jamieson Street), Warrnambool College, Timboon P-12, Coleraine, Portland (Palmer Street), Colac. Balmoral P-12

- Requests for information or assistance – Geelong College, Heidleberg, Geelong, Gladysdale, Lancefield and Diamond Creek Primary Schools and the Catholic Education Office,
- In March, 2002, WEPS hosted a group of forty eight principals and regional personnel from South Australia. The group visited our school, spoke to teachers and students about the program in the morning. The LHTL team gave a detailed presentation to the principals in the afternoon at their conference in Port Fairy. Valuable networks and contacts were established and continue now.

Conclusion

A teacher from one of the local secondary colleges who is the Year 7 transition officer, who understands the program as his children have participated as students of this school, described the impact he felt the LHTL program had on the new Year 7 from WEPS.

“ It is quite evident that WEPS students have integrated new knowledge, skills and understandings from your program. They are confident and persistent. They are well organized and know how to establish new relationships. These students stand the best chance to reach their potential, no matter what their ability level. People with higher intellectual ability, in many cases have not shown the same degree of adaptability and maturity in their new setting. I’m convinced that your ex-students will do well and make the most of learning opportunities offered at this college. I would like to see all Year 7 come as well rounded and prepared.” Mark O’Sullivan, teacher (Warrnambool College) and parent (WEPS).

Anecdotal evidence states that if the right conditions for learning are present, then learning will be accelerated and the time put aside for the program will be more than made up. Teachers and students will sustain and further develop their learning community as the year proceeds so that quality learning is an on- going outcome.

Considering the promise and the potential that this program has shown and the extent to which it has attracted the attention of so many schools, we believe that the building of similar processes in schools could become standard practice and be the thing that happens in every primary classroom across the state, during the first weeks of each year.

“ The establishment phase of the year is a crucial time for students and teachers .Our students are psychologically and developmentally ready for us to make clear how and why we will work together this year” – Dr. Bill Rogers, Classroom Magazine, Issue 1 /2002

Excellence Award – how would we use the funding?

The funding would be used to publish the program, conduct the PD modules in the district and / or region, to provide access to on- going PD for our teachers, to further develop innovative aspects to the program and to support Warrnambool East Primary to become the best school learning community for students.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - You Can Do It!; Quality Classrooms; Thinking Oriented Curriculum; Student Development.

Appendix 2 - Daily Workplans / guidelines for the first ten days (example - 4 days)

Appendix 3 - Class Learning Plans

Appendix 4 - Quality Newsletter

Appendix 5 - Feature article and photo published in Victorian Education Times, Issue 4, 21 March, 2002.

Appendix 6 - Article and photo published in The Warrnambool Standard during the visit of group of South Australian principals