Creating a calm learning environment

Renmark West Preschool has taken a new approach to their learning environment to improve outcomes for their learners.

Staff at the preschool have engaged with research that revealed that children are being over stimulated, over scheduled and over exposed to technology. As a result, the preschool has taken steps to ensure that their learning environment is a calm sanctuary where children feel supported to take risks, face challenges and lead their own learning.

Creating a calm sanctuary for learning has been a combined effort from staff, children, parents and the wider community. Careful planning and flexible budgeting has allowed the preschool to ‘mute’ the learning environment through neutral colours, wooden furniture and smaller learning spaces.

Renmark West Preschool Director Sally Schwartzkopff helped drive the changes. She explains, ‘Our preschool ‘feels’ different. Staff can articulate it, parents have responded positively to it and visitors comment on the sense of calm they feel when they walk through the door. Most importantly the children are settled, focused on their learning and happily engaged in their play.’

In addition to the physical changes in the building, staff are also teaching children how to wind down and the importance of rest. This term they have introduced a Yoga teacher to help children understand when they need to take a break, meditate and then refocus their learning.

‘At Renmark West Preschool we take a step back from play and prioritise the child’s well-being,’ Sally explains. ‘Our relationships with the child and family are important to ensure that we meet all the needs of the child.’ This focus on relationships has led to children having the time and space to get to know their learning environment and develop a strong sense of belonging.

Walking in to Renmark West Preschool it is evident this approach is working. Sally says ‘We still value play, but it is different, children lead their own learning, select their own learning materials, and build upon their relationships with staff, each other and their learning environment.’
The Boy’s Didgeridoo Group

When can I make a didgeridoo?

A simple question from a student has led to a groundbreaking program at Renmark Primary School. The Boy’s Didgeridoo Group is a student led group facilitated by teacher Martine Turnbull with help from Grant Schwartzkopff. In the group boys work together to create didgeridoos, learn the skills to play the instruments and then take to the stage to perform.

Six boys started in the group at the end of 2015. Today 17 boys participate in the group with more participants on a waiting list.

The success of the group has in large part been due to the students taking control of their learning. Teacher Martine Turnbull explains, ‘As someone with little musical knowledge or skill I can only encourage, support care and coordinate. As a female, I cannot play didgeridoo let alone teach students how to play it. Therefore the Boy’s Didgeridoo Group learn together. They determine what they need to succeed, I help them source it and then they take control and work as a group to get to their goal.’

The Boy’s Didgeridoo Group is working with the Aboriginal community to gain knowledge about the didgeridoo and Aboriginal culture. Local man, Aaron McArthur has volunteered his time to be a mentor for the group on several occasions throughout 2016.

The group is now looking as to what they will achieve next. The students’ skills have surpassed the cardboard tubes they currently use as instruments, so the boys are investigating other options. At the moment they are trialling PVC pipes with paper mache and plaster bandage.

The inspiration for the group came from a student but it is the dedication from Martine Turnbull and the rest of the staff at Renmark Primary School that has lead the boys to achieve fame. Martine explains, ‘These boys are capable of such amazing things and while I might be the person who helped them get started, I am mostly out of my depth. They have already surpassed what I can help with so we keep going, trialling things and most importantly, provide them with the opportunity to soar.’

Embracing school choir with a can-do attitude

Renmark North Primary School joined other Riverland schools in the Festival of Music for the first time in 2015. Before then, staff were hesitant to lead a choir, having limited musical experience themselves. Teacher Sam McInerney dove into the deep end and started the choir with 12 enthusiastic children.

The choir has embraced the program and worked together to learn the lyrics, understand the music and sing in harmony. Support from other teachers and parents has been vital to the success of the program. Students are released from their class once a week to sing and parents have willingly provided students with the t-shirts, books and CDs required.

This year 17 students participated in the choir and recently took to the stage at the Chaffey Theatre with students from Loxton, the Mallee, Glossop and Renmark. It was a wonderful occasion and it was fabulous to see them performing with large smiles on their faces.
The Renmark High School Child Studies course has been extremely successful and is expanding quickly. Thirty eight Year 11 students have already enrolled for the course in 2017. The Child Studies curriculum covers a variety of aspects that combine to demonstrate the complexities in raising children.

As a part of their studies, students identify and discuss the importance of play in the development of children, the responsibilities of parents and how the care for a child comes before anything else.

One of the outstanding components of the Child Studies course at Renmark High is how the school is working within the Renmark Education Partnership to provide students with hands on knowledge. Throughout the course students learn about the development of language and literacy skills in children.

Renmark High School students worked with children at the primary school to read and write stories together, learn about healthy eating and how to be safe around the house. It was truly heartwarming to see the older students providing support to the younger children to design ‘Bento’ style lunchboxes to align with their lesson on healthy eating.

At the end of the day all of the students from both the primary and high school were keen to celebrate their work, a true sign of a successful day!

LUNCHTIME CLUB HELPS STUDENTS BECOME LEADERS

Three years ago students at Renmark North Primary School initiated a lunchtime club for children to participate in constructive activities during their lunch break. Over the years, the club has evolved and is still going strong today. The club is driven by students. They make the decisions, organise the events, generate interest and work to make sure they have the equipment necessary for the activities. Teacher Athina Lioutis explains, ‘One of the most amazing things we have seen from the club is that the children become true leaders. After every event they seek feedback about the activities to determine whether they have been successful, which is fantastic.’

Staff at Renmark North Primary School have taken a ‘hands off’ approach to the lunchtime club and only assist with monitoring performance along the way. This has increased the autonomy of students and allowed them to build mastery in all facets of running the club.

It looks like the lunchtime club will continue to run for many more years with students motivated to keep the club operating successfully.

Developing important skills for the future in Child Studies

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The Renmark Children’s Centre has combined with Child and Family Health Service (CaFHS) to establish a playgroup just for babies. The playgroup began after feedback from parents indicated that they would like greater support in the first months of their baby’s life. So far the playgroup has been a huge success with regular high attendance every Wednesday morning.

Renmark Children’s Centre Family Services Coordinator, Louise Loder, led the way in starting the program. She says ‘Baby playgroups provide great opportunities to support babies and their parents. The playgroup helps to connect parents and break the social isolation often felt by parents of very young babies. It also provides babies with activities that support their social, cognitive and physical development.’

The Baby Playgroup is a true team effort with many different services working together to provide parents with support. CaFHS Nurses co-facilitate the group and share information about baby development, feeding, sleeping and settling. Parents can also have their babies weighed and measured by CaFHS Nurses and details recorded in their baby’s Blue Book. Renmark Children’s Centre Speech Pathologist, Belinda Binney also attends the sessions to share information about supporting children’s speech from birth. Staff at the Renmark Children’s Centre play a vital role in welcoming parents and babies who attend.

Since the program began feedback from participants has been incredibly positive. Louise says, ‘We know that experiences in the first few years of life lay the foundation for lifelong learning and success. The Baby Playgroup provides a supportive space for parents to enjoy relational activities with their baby and helps establish a lifetime of positive learning.’

The Girlwise program involves girls coming together to discuss issues and feel better about their time at school. Through this program, girls are realising that being themselves is the most important thing. Comments from participants in Girlwise include: ‘It’s helped me to make more friends.’ ‘It’s helping me to be a better person.’ ‘The program has helped me to step out of my comfort zone.’ ‘I now realise that it’s OK to be me.’ ‘It’s helped me to realise that I don’t have to change who I am to make friends.’

The program has been a great success with children looking out for each other more than ever. This is a fantastic result and a credit to all of the students involved.
Students encouraged to be brave every day

Renmark West Primary School is using the approach of ‘Play Is The Way’ to build the growth mindset of their students and encourage positive self talk. Play Is The Way is a practical way to teach social and emotional learning using guided play. Key concepts are embedded through classroom activities and empowering language.

Students at Renmark West Primary are learning that school is about stepping bravely into the unknown. Many students had the courage to take the risks to challenge themselves in their learning and how they behave. Teachers have been helping children accept that failure is part of the learning process and explaining the essential role failing plays in improvement. When a student does not achieve the result they were hoping for it’s not because they can’t do it, it’s just that they can’t do it yet. Taking this approach helps students at Renmark West adopt a growth mindset.

Presenting to the Governing Council

Year 6 student, Chelsea put her hand up to represent the SRC at a recent Governing Council meeting. At the meeting Chelsea described the many activities the SRC had been involved in during the term and outlined their goals for the rest of the year.

Forging ahead

We all face obstacles at some point in our lives and it was no exception for Year 7 student Rahmen. Throughout 2016 Rahmen has shown perseverance during literacy and numeracy. He accepted the challenge of NAPLAN testing and is starting to see improvement for his willingness to have a go.

Reflecting on their learning

It is important to take the time to reflect on our learning. Jade and Alice are using their weekly reflection journals to set learning goals, provide feedback to their teacher and celebrate their achievements during the week.
The Renmark High School Enterprise Academy is now in its second year with the number of students showing an interest expanding rapidly!

This unique program provides students with the opportunity to have hands-on experience in running a business. Students lead the way by coming up with the initial idea, sourcing investment, making decisions and producing marketing materials.

The Enterprise Academy is a sequence of business development programs which involves students developing their own real company.

Knowledge and understanding is gained through participation in Adelaide University’s E-Challenge. Teachers, industry specialists and a mentor work collaboratively with students to turn their idea into a successful enterprise that they own and can take with them when they finish at the Academy.

The success of the Enterprise Academy is undeniable. Students of the program have won state-wide awards, completed their Certificate III in Micro Business Operations and have a new found passion for their learning. Across the school there has been a real growth in entrepreneurial thinking with many students dreaming of one day owning their own business.

The Renmark Education Partnership is working together to instil entrepreneurial thinking in students from a young age. Renmark primary schools are undertaking enterprise activities which will provide a natural progression for students to begin the Enterprise Academy pathway from Year 8.

Support from the local community has been integral to the success of the Enterprise Academy. Local business people donate their time to mentor students and assist in helping them to build their resilience, commitment and emotional intelligence.

Renmark High School has a dream to create a Business Hub at the school for students from across the partnership to access. Judging by the passion and commitment shown by early adopters of the Enterprise Academy, it looks like the school will achieve this in 2017. Watch this space!
Science lessons lead the way for a modern approach to education

In an ever changing global environment, knowledge and skills in Science are vital for people to succeed. Staff and students at Renmark High School have recognised this trend and are working hard to design more engaging science lessons using inquiry based learning.

Current methods for measuring student success is based on how well a young person can answer questions in an isolated environment with a pen and paper. The answer we then give them is ‘You are clever or you are not.’ This one dimensional approach to learning and tracking student achievement is becoming increasingly irrelevant to the 21st century.

As a result, educators from across the Renmark Education Partnership are working together to create inspiration learning. They have listened to students and are adapting their approach to education in response.

Science lessons at Renmark High School are just the beginning. At the high school they are working on lessons where the investigations have a no hands up approach. Teachers are working on their questioning skills so that they ‘Pose, Pause, Pounce and Bounce,’ in other words, students and teachers work together to discover the answer.

It is early days and changing the way things have always been done takes time. However the definite buzz of shared excitement across the partnership is undeniable.
What’s On

October 19
Awards Presentation Ceremony
Renmark High School

October 24
Parent Teacher Interviews
Renmark High School

October 26
Little Day Out with Cool 4 Kids
Renmark Children’s Centre

October 31
School Assembly
Renmark Primary School

November 1
Preschool to school transition begins
Renmark Children’s Centre & Renmark Partnership Preschools

November 3
Music: Count Us In performance
Renmark West Primary School

November 4
Year 7 tour & transition visit
Renmark High School & all Renmark Partnership Schools

November 7
Year 12 exams begin
Renmark High School

November 10
Renmark Children’s Centre Partnership Meeting
Renmark Children’s Centre

November 14
Student Prom
Renmark High School

November 15
Parent meeting for new Reception students
Renmark Primary School

November 16
Year 7 camp
Renmark West Primary School

November 18
Continental
Renmark North Primary School

November 17
Just 2 Deadly Awards
Renmark Primary School

November 29
Presentation Night
Renmark High School

December 8
Let’s Celebrate School Concert
Renmark Primary School

December 12
Year 7 Graduation
Renmark Primary School

December 14
Year 7 Graduation Dinner
Renmark West Primary School

December 15
Year 7 Graduation Dinner
Renmark West Primary School

December 16
Final Assembly
Renmark North Primary School

TBA
End of Year Family Night
Renmark Children’s Centre

TBA
End of Year Graduation Celebrations
Renmark West Preschool