



Christ Church Grammar School

PERTH, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Using Learning Spaces to Build Student Agency

Reflections of a Year 5 teacher

My case study was developed as part a school research project into how learning spaces could be used to enhance learning outcomes for boys. The project was based around the idea that learning does not necessarily have to take place within the four walls of a classroom.

Over several months, I discovered that my boys liked learning in many different spaces within the classroom and I wanted to give them the opportunity to broaden their working area, to build their agency by giving them choices of work spaces that were both inside and outside of the classroom walls.

Using an ethnographic style of questioning to help me gain a better understanding of my students highlighted that the boys enjoyed, "time out of the classroom as it cleared their mind." Outdoor activities were also rated highly by the boys, when retelling their favourite school experiences. These, along with the idea that students learn better when they are in a comfortable space, inspired me to think about how I use spaces in helping my boys to learn.

The Blue Sky Club was developed from my curiosity about how we might think about space and time more creatively. I introduced this initiative to the class by simply putting up a poster in a central location where all boys would see it. I stimulated their interest by advertising an opportunity to join a prestigious club.

Boys gained membership to this club by consistently demonstrating appropriate behaviours in class. Membership of this club gave boys the privilege of selecting where around the Preparatory School they completed specific parts of their learning.

To prepare them for this experience and outline some clear expectations, we sat down for a period and discussed all the finer details about the club. I gave boys the opportunity to ask as many questions as they needed so that they understood why they were working outside of the classroom.

We started with basic lessons, beginning with a Soundwaves lesson out of the room. The boys already knew the expectations of the spelling lesson, so were focusing on the successful use of their new spaces.

This empowered the boys to not only make good choices about their behaviours, it also developed agency by empowering them to choose their own work space. I was able to monitor where the students were located by tracking each iPad using Apple Classroom.

Before leaving the classroom, each student had to write where they were going on the whiteboard. A condition that I set was that they had to have their iPad on them at all times, even if they are not using the iPad for their work. They could then communicate with me electronically throughout the lesson and when it is time to return to the classroom, I would lock their screens.

Why it worked?

The teacher began from a position of strength by providing all students with membership of the Blue Sky Club after outlining some clear behavioural expectations. High expectations were reinforced as once the privilege was lost, students then had to earn back the trust to regain their membership. This provided a well-defined structure within which the boys operated and still empowered them to select a learning environment that best suited them.