

“L’Arte” at Alphington Primary School: Discovering a new way in a Discovery Centre

Alphington Primary School situated in the riverside pocket of Alphington, has 380 students with a lively, supportive and committed staff team, School Council and community. Our student cohort includes high achievers, mixed ability and special needs students.

Thanks to the vision of a previous, educationally supportive State Government, Alphington Primary School gained a new Visual Arts, Language and a Junior Library facility with open and flexible learning spaces in 2010. Teaming the language and visual art program evolved due to growing enrolments and creative problem solving by the specialist team.

With the support and encouragement of Principal, Cheryl McCashney, the opportunity arose to develop an integrated Art/Language program utilising the expertise of three specialist staff, Deborah Luciani- Italian, Virginia Harding- Visual Art and Diane Danscuk- Library and culture. The new learning space provided an ideal location for a new and different way of delivering these two specialist disciplines. The integration of Art/Language- Italian was formalised and extended from previous years. After vigorous planning sessions during the 2011/2012 summer break, a program outline was created and subsequently implemented throughout 2012. In terms of timetabling, year groups are ‘blocked’ together for 1.5 to 2 hour sessions, to meet and learn collaboratively in the new space.

Known affectionally as “L’Arte” or “Artalian” by students and staff, the program has been developed in such a way that Art is a driver for the delivery of the target Language ‘Italian’, and Italian culture/art is a driver for the Visual Arts program. The study of Italian language through Visual Art projects becomes a study of Italians, and the pathway for the understanding of; language, communication, culture, country and historical context.

Alphington’s program focuses on four main areas of content and is taught over two years. Key movements in art and culture, interest and resources, made our selection of the Roman era, Renaissance, Italian Modernism and Italian Melbourne key themes on which to base our curriculum. In the first year, students explored “Roma e i Romani” and “ il Rinascimento”. This year, we began with Modernismo Italiano; L’Arte e Cultura, and then we will focus on Gli Italiani a Melbourne; Adesso, l’infusione culturale e la migrazione.

Setting the scene:

Beyond the usual set up expected in Art, Italian and Library learning spaces, different artefacts were included in the spaces to inspire curiosity and questioning, providing a ‘hook’ for student exploration. It is vital for our teaching of subject specific skills to elaborate on the context, to make the learning real and insightful in order to promote student understanding of culture and foster skills to assist their future exploration of any culture.

Major stimuli displayed in the learning space became a key focus. A large timeline across eras noting key events, artworks and cultural elements in the Roman Era through to the Renaissance period, was a resource constantly embellished with information by students as the learning evolved. Male and female shop mannequins were clothed and accessorised by students to represent Minerva, Marcus Antonius and then Catherine de Medici and Michelangelo as 2012 progressed. These figures were subsequently used for observational drawing exercises, discussions on symbolism and vocabulary development (labelled in Italian). A series of five working clocks are displayed on one wall to depict the different time

zones in Italy and across Australia to encourage discussion about time, seasons and distance. A large map depicts world colonisation of the Roman Empire through the reign of different Emperors. This inspired discussion of power, invasion and geographical regions, related to our students perception of the world then and now. Art posters on loan from COASIT and a 3metre cardboard cylinder, transformed into Trajan's Column by the year three students, further enriched the 'Italian' environment.

Structure:

Group rotation and fluid student transition is supported by a visual task board. Students know where and when to move at a glance. Trolleys with base supplies, labelled in Italian, are located in each space; our students share a work book 'quaderno' across subjects so that documented information is always linked, Italian/Culture/Art. Nothing is lost in transition (or translation) for reference across the three areas. Students have autonomy to move between spaces and make choices about their learning.

Children are greeted in Italian by all three team members, and given instructions in both languages; the area is filled with signage in the target language. Verbal Italian instruction has become an enjoyable language process, including charades and gestures, enabling the students to use prior knowledge, analysis and prediction to deconstruct instruction. Real connections are made between the Language and the Art activity/ies leading to purposeful learning.

Target Language:

Work in the target language compliments and reflects the activity in Art, as well as learning greetings, numbers and colours. Senior students write procedural texts annotating the artwork they create, such as 'Roman sandals' (i sandali Romani) and jewellery or roman accessories (la gioielleria e gli accessori Romani). Students present the procedural text in digital form using a program of their choice; (audacity or movie maker). This forms an assessment of the oral component. Younger year levels annotate their work, for example year one and two worked on Arcimboldo creating a collage of 'La mia faccia fatta della frutta e delle verdure' (my face made from fruit and vegetables).

Students are supported, with flash cards and visual aids, to make simple requests in the target language, for example 'May I use the bathroom?' and 'May I get a drink?.'

Wider opportunities to use the target language within the school are been promoted. During the annual Art Show senior students officiated in Italian; the traditional Welcome to Country is said in both Italian and in English at weekly school assemblies, the annual concert included Italian themes and singing. Italian Day is yet another occasion for students to show case what they learn in Italian.

Visual Arts:

In order to promote and inspire creativity, a variety of collaborative projects run in conjunction with individual tasks. The scale, complexity and materials made available are varied. Contemporary techniques and materials are utilized as well as those more era

specific, depending on the planned learning intention. Pace and perseverance is student driven and fostered with the flexibility of our tailored program.

Learning is visible! This is a wonderful thing; students see, observe others working across the areas and spring into action. Our learners have confidence to share ideas with staff and their peers across subject areas, learning is celebrated and feedback, immediate.

Half way there:

L'Arte at Alphington has been an exciting and energising program to lead. Working with colleagues with a shared vision, challenges and discoveries, in both content and pedagogy, is professionally rewarding. Often only a footprint or in step with our students, we have learned and explored together with laughter and enthusiasm. Our work has been shared at the 2012 Gifted Education Symposium – Differentiation Does Make a Difference, CEOM Gifted Think Tank and will be presented at the VATI Conference 2013.

Virginia Harding and Deborah Luciani