



RESEARCH REPORT 1:

Schoolgrounds for Learning



Dr Amy Cutter-Mackenzie

Faculty of Education

Monash University

Peninsula Campus

McMahons Road Frankston Victoria 3199 Australia

Telephone: (03) 990 44638 Fax: (03) 990 44027

Email Address: amy.cuttermackenzie@education.monash.edu.au

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to acknowledge the many persons and organisations that contributed to the evaluation of the Schoolgrounds for Learning program and in turn the production of this publication. The Gould Group and the funding agencies, Victorian Department of Education and Training and The Helen Macpherson Smith Trust, are especially thanked for their invaluable support.

Special thanks to:

| | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|
| <i>Jeff Su</i> | Gould Group |
| <i>Ann-Maree Colborne</i> | Gould Group |
| <i>Helen Widdop-Quinton</i> | Gould Group |
| <i>Anita Kosterlitz</i> | Gould Group |
| <i>Tiffany Mosqueira</i> | Monash University |
| <i>Simone Bartrum</i> | Monash University |
| <i>Wendy May</i> | Monash University |
| <i>Kate Eastwood</i> | Monash University |

Publications Details

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Publication Citation

Cutter-Mackenzie, A. (2007) Research Report 1: *Schoolgrounds for Learning*. Melbourne: Gould Group and Monash University.

Notation

This research was conceptualised and undertaken by Dr Amy Cutter-Mackenzie, Faculty of Education, Monash University. Kate Eastwood and Tiffany Mosqueira assisted in the collection of data.

Refereed Publication

This research report was reviewed by the Gould Group.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report contains the findings of the Schoolgrounds for Learning project evaluation (2006). The project is ongoing and finishes in 2008. Like the project, the research process is also ongoing. The primary purpose of the evaluation is to measure the impact of the program against its stated objectives.

In 2006, 12 teachers, from different Victorian schools, undertook in the program. 7 primary, 2 secondary and 3 P-12 school teachers participated. The Eastern, Southern, Hume and Loddon-Mallee education districts were represented.

The 2006 research shows that the Schoolgrounds for Learning project is having great success in working toward meeting its stated objectives. Although not comprehensive, both the case studies and survey analysis identified key success factors, including:

- ✧ Schoolgrounds for Learning program as a mode of environmental education professional (teacher) development and learning;
- ✧ springboard leading to other sustainability initiatives;
- ✧ significant driver for teacher enthusiasm, commitment and change in adopting environmental education / sustainability teaching and learning pedagogies;
- ✧ Gould Group support both in a face-to-face capacity and online environment;
- ✧ contribution to whole-school environmental education through staff development and student involvement;
- ✧ improvement to physical school grounds and sustainable building practices;
- ✧ impetus for outdoor learning or play spaces/scapes; and
- ✧ community engagement and partnerships, particularly through parent input.

The identified barriers or challenges were:

- ✧ ongoing crowded curriculum and other school and teacher priorities and commitments;
- ✧ Australian climate issues, particularly drought;
- ✧ timeframe for the program identified as too short; and
- ✧ technology challenges such as saving resources and teacher confidence in using tools.

Specially designed for busy teachers, Schoolgrounds for Learning breaks down the process of schoolgrounds planning and transformation into easily managed and achievable steps.

WHAT'S INVOLVED?

Schoolgrounds for Learning includes:

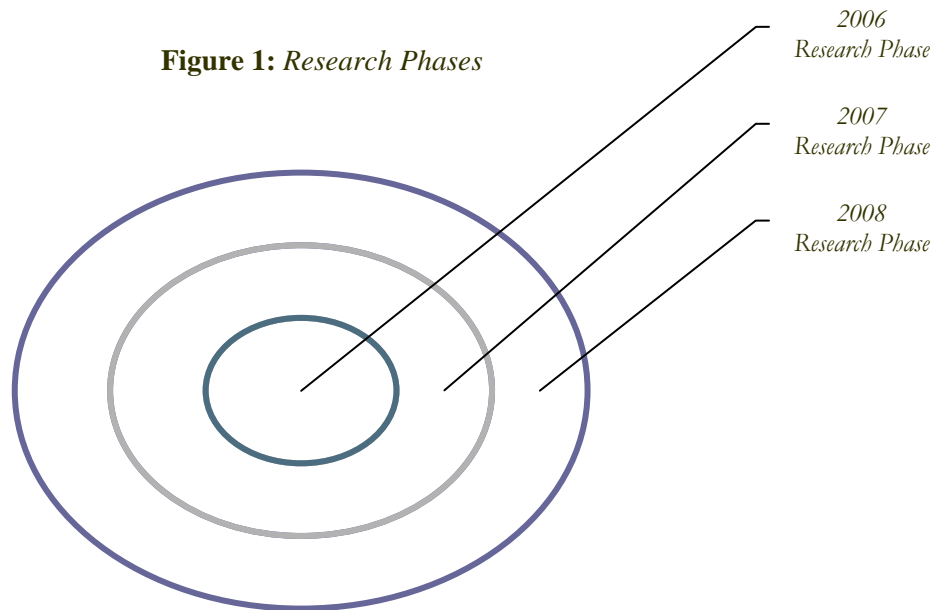
- Two terms (20 weeks) of easily managed and achievable steps - to help harness the energy and enthusiasm of the students, teachers and parents
- Guidance and support from experienced teacher facilitators
- Involving the whole school community to avoid reliance on one committed teacher
- Predominately online delivery mode - so time and location flexible
- Online tools for producing a schoolgrounds masterplan, action plans and student projects
- Two half day (afternoon) workshops
- Interaction with other schools
- Time commitment of approximately one hour per week, plus an optional weekly online chat time

Source: <http://www.gould.org.au/html/SchoolgroundsforLearningCourseOverview.asp>

INTRODUCTION

The evaluation of the Schoolgrounds for Learning project is ongoing. The primary purpose of the evaluation is to measure the impact of the program against its stated objectives.

As shown in Figure 1, the research will be completed over the course of three years or phases. This report constitutes the completion of Phase1 (2006).



In 2006, data was collected to enable answers to the broad issues and questions provided by the project manager. It is important to clarify that this report does not solely answer all of these questions; rather the 2006 evaluation commences this process which will be continued in 2007 and 2008. The questions are:

- How well did the project meet specific funding and project outcomes? (See below)
- Why did each school join the program?
- What has the school achieved with the program?
- Did the program:
 - a) give opportunity for student participation;
 - b) *enrich the curriculum;*
 - c) *stimulate creativity;*
 - d) *enable play;*
 - e) *contribute to student health and wellbeing;*
 - f) *create places where nature may thrive;*
 - g) *encourage responsibility and citizenship;*
 - h) *celebrate diversity;*
 - i) *look to the future with wise use of resources; and*
 - j) *place the school at the heart of the community?*

- What, if any, changes have occurred at the school in – behaviours of students, parents and teachers, operation, curriculum, whole-school engagement, school culture, links with the local community?
- What, if any, were the economic, social, environmental and educational outcomes of the program?
- How effective was the program with time (longitudinal study of the first and secondary year participants)
- What systems and structures have been implemented in the school as a result of the program (policies, etc.)?
- Was the program used to implement VELS? How?
- What is the current best practice online learning pedagogy and does this program address this?
- Is online learning an effective use of resources?
- How does this online learning *Schoolgrounds for Learning* program compare with the previous face-to-face version?
- Has participation in the program led to continued involvement with the Sustainability Wiz eLearning environment or other eLearning?
- What were the key success factors?
- What, if any, were the key barriers to success?
- What comments/criticisms were there about the process and support provided?
- Suggestions for future improvement.

In addition, the evaluation process will generate further questions; facilitating deeper thinking about the project processes and products. As a result, the evaluation captures and answers a wide range of other important questions.



Gould Group and Monash University working side-by-side at Carrum Primary School as part of the Schoolgrounds for Learning Program

RESEARCH METHODS

In 2006, the research was conducted using a suite of qualitative and quantitative methods¹. The research incorporated four phases (see Figure 2).

Progress and Post Survey

A progress survey was administered to all 12 participating teachers during the project, with a post survey administered at the beginning of 2007 (*refer to Appendix 1*). The survey data was analysed using the Statistical Software Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS Version 14.0) using univariate (descriptive), bivariate and multivariate techniques. Such methods allow for a comprehensive analysis of the data. It is important to clarify that data will be presented in lucid terms, making it accessible to numerous audiences including teachers, researchers, environmental educators and key stakeholders.

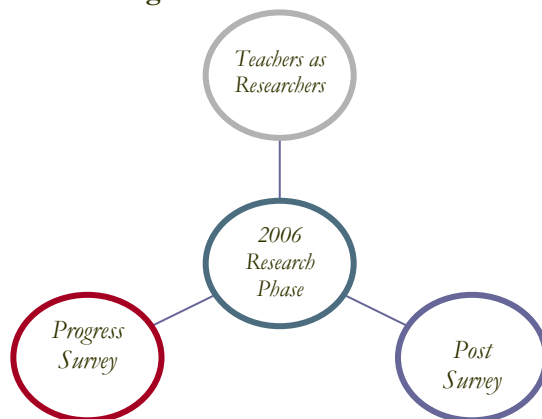
Teachers as Researchers

Following the progress survey, participating teachers were invited to be researchers. 5 teachers participated in this phase. Teachers were given a research pack containing a journal, SLR cameras (reusable) and research tips. All researchers were also supported by a Monash Researcher.

Monash Researcher

The Monash Researcher collected both photo and video footage of the Schoolgrounds for Learning Projects. The teacher research, together with the Monash Researcher data, will be used to produce a DVD at the end of the project. Snapshots are provided on the 2006 DVD.

Figure 2: 2006 Research Phases



¹ It is important to note that the research (evaluation) of the Schoolgrounds for Learning project is ongoing, such that further research outcomes are expected in 2007. In 2006, the opportunities for qualitative research were hindered by the delayed ethics approval process, in addition to the late commencement of Monash University's involvement in the project.