The Independent Learning Centre -
Teaching our students to love again...learning that is.

Patricia Carmichael
Teacher librarian
Concordia Lutheran College
Australia

The teaching and learning undertaken in the Independent Learning Centre (ILC) as an integral part of the school library, offers unlimited opportunities to students as part of the secondary curriculum that reflects the change in pedagogy of the 21st century. This has resulted in a paradigm shift to a truly student centred approach to education. The pedagogy of the ILC supports the Standards for the 21st - Century Learner as recently released by the American Association of School Librarians (2007). Of special interest from this set of standards is the fourth area concerning individual interest: How learners use skills, resources and tools to pursue personal and aesthetic growth. It is in this area of student personal interest that the success of the ILC program rests and how the inter-connection with the library has improved the whole school use and understanding of the importance of Information Literacy skills which are a vital component of the ILC program. This includes both teachers and students. This paper discusses how the ILC program motivates and manages student interest and can be adapted to provide a model to teach how learners use skills, resources and tools to pursue personal and aesthetic growth.

Keywords: Interest, Independent Learning, School Library

‘When working well, it is like a hive of busy-ness … the noise is that of people with a common goal to learn – to produce – a great atmosphere!’ (Hellen Weber, Head of Science ILC coach)

The school library and the teacher librarian’s role in the student centred curriculum.

Teacher librarians are constantly defending their right to exist. The main goal of research in the field of school libraries and the role of the teacher librarian is to prove that
both of these - a well resourced school library and a dynamic, technology-literate teacher librarian - are necessary and invaluable for student academic success. There is no denying this fact and the International Association of School Librarianship site contains extensive information to support this (http://www.iasl-online.org/advocacy/make-a-difference.html).

But perhaps a two pronged approach is needed to revitalize the whole culture of learning in school libraries: one that addresses the need for school libraries to enhance student achievement, (which is well underway) and one that addresses a much more important issue concerning the 21st century learner: to cultivate curiosity and nurture a love of learning. The school library and the role of the teacher librarian must show that they can play a direct role in a child’s learning-life in school and make a difference for the future. As stated by an Independent Learning Centre coach, “The students involved in the ILC program are motivated to learn about something important to them and consequently have developed self-guided learning skills that will form a solid foundation for life long learning.” That is, teacher librarians need to teach and encourage our students to love learning, to be interested in the incredible world around them, and in the words of Kipling (1902) encourage our children to be “full of ‘satiable curiosity”. It is a privileged position, as one ILC coach responded, when asked, “What advice would you give to teachers who plan to teach in the ILC?”

“Enjoy the journey. Try to inspire and direct. Don’t limit students by imposing your expected outcomes.”

This is the pan-curricular role of the teacher librarian, to inspire and direct. The establishment of an independent learning centre as an integral function of a school library places the teacher and the student at the centre of teaching and learning in the school and much can be accomplished to encourage students to be interested in the world in which they live and return to interests which have been buried under the mounting assessment tasks prescribed by the curriculum. Unfortunately many students have their “‘satiable curiosity” not only buried, but well and truly laid to rest as they struggle up Mt Assessment. It could also be contested that the longer students are involved in learning in schools the less likely they are to be interested in learning. There is a wide chasm of difference between the excitement, anticipation and “‘satiable curiosity” of a Year 7 student who is about to engage in a new research assignment and that of a Year 10 student. In this cause, of teaching our students to love learning, the pedagogy of Standards for the 21st Century Learner and the pedagogy of Independent Learning Centre (ILC) seem to be allies. It is the fourth standard, that of teaching our students how to use skills, resources and tools to pursue personal and aesthetic growth which is of interest in this paper.

The qualitative and quantitative data presented in this paper are taken from previous studies (Carmichael, 2007, 2008) and responses from ILC coaches presently teaching in the ILC.
The development of the Independent Learning Centre Project – a centralised learning space.

Background to the ILCP - supporting the vision and mission of the College

A full school community audit was undertaken at Concordia Lutheran College in 2004 which revealed parents, teachers and students felt that the school produced independent learners. It was this positive outcome that prompted the Administration to investigate how independent learning could be developed further through the school’s curriculum structure. As a result of this, the initial purpose of the Independent Learning Centre Project (ILCP) was to facilitate flexible, autonomous independent learning and to encourage and teach our students, both junior and senior, how to become confident independent learners. This concept was guided and directed by the vision and mission of the College for each child which is as follows:

*At Concordia each individual is valued ... we seek to develop the whole person ... through a broad range of educational opportunities and unique learning environments. Our vision is that students would become life-long learners and proactive citizens of the global community, utilizing their God-given talents for the benefit of others ...*  
*We encourage students to become:*  
- Self-directed and insightful  
- Discerning and resourceful  
- Adaptive and creative  
- Open and responsive  
- Principled and resilient  
- Confident and caring

Since its inception in 2005, the pedagogical practice of the ILC has resulted in a paradigm shift to a truly student centred approach to education that promotes life-long learning. The establishment of the ILC is a natural extension of the Library. The new learning space which is the ILC provides a ‘unique learning environment’ and has created a physical focus for personalized teaching and learning within the College. This supports the College’s vision and purpose for ‘each student’ as outlined above in terms of providing a, ‘broad range of educational opportunities and unique learning environments’. As well as developing the pedagogy that supports the ‘vision that students would become life-long learners’.

The development of the Independent Learning Centre Project (ILCP) was directed by the teacher librarian as Independent Learning Centre Manager and involved an enthusiastic and dedicated core of curriculum specialists who drove the project by studying the skills and strategies necessary to produce independent learners (Hiemstra & Sisco, 1990; Knowles, 1975; Long, 2007; Oxford Centre for Staff & Learning Development, 2007; Paris & Paris, 2001; Paris & Winograd, 1990; Savoie & Hughes, 1994). From this research the following principles were developed further to build a scaffold for the teaching and learning of independent skills and strategies. This scaffold is called the Negotiated Independent Learning Unit and all students in the junior school must cover at least one NILU in the course of their studies in the junior curriculum. Independent learning becomes a subject area without
content. It is the skills, strategies and processes of information literacy and independent learning that are taught.

Students should be able to:

• set their own learning aims;

• make choices over learning modes;

• plan and organise work;

• decide when best to work alone, collaboratively and when to seek advice;

• learn through experience;

• identify and solve problems;

• think creatively;

• effectively communicate both orally and in writing; and,

• assess their own progress in respect of their aims.

Collaboration is the key to curriculum change: Benefits for the teacher librarian and school library

These principles provided a firm foundation on which to build the pedagogy of the ILC program of teaching and learning. The amalgamation of the library, the ILC and Learner Support serves as a physical focus for a centralized learning space within the school and this has increased the numbers of students and teachers who visit the library. For the school library, it presents an innovative curriculum design and a way to renew the image of the library as the centre of learning for the school. This is especially important in the face of the “Google coup”. For the teacher librarian, this concept and resulting facility offers an exciting and refreshing way to engage all staff in the appreciation of the inclusion of information literacy skills and independent learning skills in their teaching areas, but from an entirely different angle. In fact it is from an entirely appropriate angle and is in keeping with the College’s vision for each child. The teacher librarian’s role in this venture is as Independent Learning Centre Manager and teacher, directing the teaching and learning in the facility. It is a leadership role, but successful leadership is a result of positive collaborative enterprise.

The success of the ILC program rests on the back of all teaching staff. This program and the resulting facility, forces the sharing of responsibility, so the support of the Principal, Administration, Heads of Departments the teacher librarian and a team of ILC coaches ensures that independent learning skills and information literacy skills are a major school focus. By establishing the library, the ILC and the Learner Support facility in one central area and by involving the teaching staff in the teaching and learning in the ILC, both teachers and students are exposed to the workings of the school library every day and searching for information in the school library becomes common place.

Since 2005 each one of the following teaching staff has taken on the mantle of an ILC coach. This means that each one of these teachers has taught the ILC program and has been exposed to teaching information literacy skills out of their curriculum area.
• Drama teacher and the Head of Curriculum
• Head of the English Department
• Head of the Science Department
• Head of the Mathematics Department
• Head of Physical Education
• Legal Studies teacher and the Head of Information Technology
• Head of LOTE (Languages other than English)
• Music teacher;
• Two Manual Arts teachers
• Graphics teacher
• Business and Information Technology teacher
• English and Art teacher, a Teacher Librarian
• Science and Mathematics teacher
• Legal Studies and Geography teacher
• Home Economics and Hospitality teacher

The Negotiated Independent Learning Unit is an elective that students in both the junior and senior school choose as part of the negotiated unitised curriculum. It is an assessed subject and the student’s progress is included in formal reporting procedure to parents as any other subject. Teachers are timetabled on each line of the curriculum to teach in the ILC and it is approached as any other teaching and learning subject. At any time, teaching and learning maybe in progress in the library, in the ILC and in Learner Support. There is a flow and buzz as students and teachers move and work together in the whole facility to access resources, use technology, discuss ideas and learn collaboratively yet learn independently. Surprisingly there is no chaos, only collaboration and a sharing of learning. But the shift to this concept and the resulting facility does not happen overnight. To sustain this paradigm shift requires on-going professional development for all staff and regular evaluative research. Students also must be taught how to behave and respond to the new learning environment. Research in this area has led to a whole new understanding of student perceptions and responses to the traditional classroom, post ILC (Carmichael 2008). Students and teachers gain so much from this teaching and learning experience.

When asked what knowledge had been transferred into their own subject areas, teacher comments included: “a greater use of library resources in Legal Studies”, “I have learned more about learning styles which has helped me plan lessons”, “my subjects now
model these strategies to support this process (of research), “I have a better understanding of effective research and assignment teaching strategies.”

The teaching and learning in the ILC has been a two way exchange of ideas and knowledge by teachers and students. The benefits are obvious for the whole school teaching and learning program. Collaboration and enthusiasm resulted in:

- The establishment of policy and management procedures for staff and students who undertake autonomous learning at the College. This involved both senior and junior students.

- The development of pedagogical framework for Negotiated Independent Learning Units (NILU).

- The establishment and ongoing development of an Independent Flexible Learning Program. This accommodates all students in the school.

- The establishment of an ILC student database which tracks and records student results (Carmichael, 2007).

**Cultivating individual interest, motivation and independent learning – freedom from the constraints of the curriculum.**

The teacher librarian still supports each Key Learning Area (KLA) in the curriculum in regards to co-operatively teaching information literacy skills in the library, but the pedagogy of the ILC program frees both the student and the teacher or teacher librarian from the constraints of the curriculum. Instead the student and their personal interests become the focus for the teaching and learning that takes place and the relationship with the student takes on a completely new focus. An interesting positive outcome of the ILC program has been that the relationships between students and teachers are enhanced in such an environment because the teacher is no longer the centre of the teaching process; instead the teacher supports, encourages and guides the student to achieve their goals. Teaching staff involved in the ILC program provided feedback to support this positive outcome regarding relationships between teachers and students. One teacher comments: “the time spent with each student enhances trust and respect for one another building constructive relationships”. As well as this, the teacher librarian also learns much about the interests of the students and can consider these interests when stocking the library. This builds further positive relationships with the students.

Schiefele (1991, p.299) defines individual interest as “a content-specific motivational characteristic composed of intrinsic feeling-related and value-related valences”. It is this definition that most closely describes the term “interest” in the context of the ILC program. The student’s personal interest becomes the motivating factor in the teaching and learning process. In this sense the common beliefs of the Standards for the 21st-Century Learner and the pedagogy of the ILC become one in the quest to teach learners how to use skills, resources and tools to pursue personal and aesthetic growth. In this way teacher librarians are instrumental in developing independent learners and further to this, “Interest should be thought of not only as an independent factor in the process of learning, but also a desired outcome” (Schiefele, 1991). In other words, the process teaches students that they can be interested in learning, that they can achieve and can enjoy learning and there is value in this.
for their future. The following comment by a teacher supports this, “Students achieve success through individual research and teacher guidance on a topic which is of interest to them. Synthesis of research data prepares students for senior and tertiary study requirements.” But more than this the ILC program builds and restores confidence in learners in their own efforts to achieve. One student stated,

“I believe this was a great unit as I was working independently at my own pace. I was so happy at the end when I presented my assignment. I had a great feeling of self satisfaction.”

The idea of individual interest being a motivating factor is not a new one and there are many studies related to the importance of interest and motivation in the learning process (Ainley, 2006; Alexander, 2003; Dewey, 1913; Hidi & Harackiewicz, 2000; Hunter & Csikszentmihalyi, 2003; Krapp, 2007; Paris & Paris, 2001; Pintrich & De Groot, 1990; Schiefele, 1991). These writings relate the importance and necessity of the interrelatedness of interest and motivation in the learning process. An important comment by a student sums up these feelings: “working in the ILC was a good experience. I think it is important for everyone to choose something that they enjoy because it helps you do well because you are interested in it”.

The Self-determination theory, outlined in Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, and Ryan (1991) follows this precept. Their study shows that when a student’s “natural curiosity” (the intrinsic motivation for learning) is supported by teachers and parents in an autonomy-supportive way, that is by “offering choice, minimizing controls, acknowledging feelings and making available information that is needed for decision making and for performing the target task….” then…. “it has become more apparent that self-determination, in the forms of intrinsic motivation and autonomous internalisation, leads to the types of outcomes that are beneficial to both individuals and to society” (Deci et al., 1991, p.342) This also is the goal of the Standards for the 21st Century Learner. We are educating our students for their place in society, and this in turn, will dictate the kind of society we live in.

The benefits of cultivating individual interest

Hunter and Csikszentmihalyi (2003, p.28) state that “school for most young people is a dull and uninspiring place to be in”. Their studies show that motivating and managing student interest is a vital factor for cognitive growth. Their study contends that “chronically interested adolescents” that is adolescents who are interested in their world around them “have positive feelings of self esteem, are more likely to believe they originate their actions, feel more hopeful about their future” (Hunter & Csikszentmihalyi, 2003 p.33) and are more likely to believe they could make a positive contribution to society. The inverse follows that “chronically bored adolescents” contribution to society may not be a positive one. “If interest provides the foundation for building skills that can be converted into enjoyable activity, boredom may be the results of the inability to cultivate such talents” (Hunter & Csikszentmihalyi, 2003 p.29). The cultivation of curiosity and interest, in children, for their own pleasure and enjoyment and for their place in the world around them, is a vital factor not just for each student’s well being but may also play a part in the future of society. As Larson (2000, p.171) observes, “a generation of bored and challenge-avoidant young adults is not going to be prepared to deal with the mounting complexity of life and take on the emerging challenges of the 21st century”.
The benefits of including individual interest in the learning process cannot be denied. Aspects such as “interest mediates the relationship between person and the world…provide motivation for developing skills and abilities…provides concentrative staying power in the face of difficulty…cultivates an internal milieu that optimises the acquisition of information…The cognitive boons of interest and its motivational power are also complemented by the fact that interest feels good” (Hunter & Csikszentmihalyi 2003, p.28) prove that individual interest and its positive powers are necessary in the learning process. It is the catalyst in the process of regenerating a love of learning.

When asked whether the ILC program had made any difference to student learning, teacher responses included: “I think it is very empowering for the students especially the ones who feel frustrated by the routines and constraints of routine day to day lessons”, “it has offered choice: catered for different learning styles”, “it has fostered student-teacher relationships and confidence in research tasks”, “students now make use of structured research notes” and “there is now an increased awareness of resources available.”

The quality of the learning experience is just as important (if not more) than the outcome in terms of academic achievement and is in many cases responsible for the outcome in achievement (Schiefele 1991, p.313). By removing the focus for learning as the measure of achievement and instead replacing this focus with a student’s individual interest, it is more likely to result in a positive learning experience for the student. It is hard for a student to say she is bored with the topic or it has no relevance in her life when it is her area of personal interest and choice. The student’s personal interest becomes the motivating factor in the ILC program.

There are of course, many other factors that come into play for each student, but generally the disinterested and disengaged student is far more difficult to motivate than the interested student, for obvious reasons. Martin (2003, p10) presents a simple but fairly accurate indication of student motivation categories shown in Table 1. Although it presents a general view it does have merit in that the chronically interested are easy to identify as are the chronically bored in any classroom situation. These characteristics are recognizable as accountable for the success or failure to achieve in any learning situation. But if the student has choice of the content and subject matter; the outcome and the mode of presentation and the ultimate goal of the learning project, then it is far more difficult for the Failure Avoider and Failure Acceptor to engage in learned characteristics.

### Table 1: student motivation categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MOTIVATION CATEGORY</th>
<th>CHARACTERISTICS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Success Striver</td>
<td>• High self-esteem&lt;br&gt;• Confident&lt;br&gt;• Succeeds by focusing on success&lt;br&gt;• Not overcome by setbacks&lt;br&gt;• Enjoys challenge&lt;br&gt;• Enjoys hard work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure Avoider</td>
<td>• High self-doubt&lt;br&gt;• Anxious&lt;br&gt;• Can succeed, but mainly to avoid failure&lt;br&gt;• Can be overcome by setbacks&lt;br&gt;• Is frightened of challenge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure Accepter</td>
<td>Does not enjoy hard work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Low self-esteem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Uninterested and disengaged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Pessimistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Accepts failure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Accepts setbacks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Does not accept challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Does not try</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Independent Learning Centre Program provides a model for Standards for the 21st Century Learner.

It may well be that the ILC program can provide a pedagogical model for the Standards for the 21st-Century Learner (hereafter termed the Standards). The NILU can be adapted to teach learners how to use skills, resources and tools to pursue personal and aesthetic growth and to cultivate curiosity in our students both in the school and for the future self-worth of our students.

The definition of “personal and aesthetic growth”, as exemplified through Sections 4.1 to 4.4 of the Standards, compares very closely if not exactly to the definition of individual interest as “a content-specific motivational characteristic composed of intrinsic feeling-related and value-related valences” (Schiefele 1991, p.299). This can also be said of the definition of individual interest in regards to the ILC program.

Table 2, below, compares how Sections 4.1 to 4.4 of the Standards can be interpreted and compared to the scaffolding of the NILU. This provides a model for classroom application of the Standards.

Table 2: Standards for the 21st Century Learner and independent learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STANDARDS Section</th>
<th>INDEPENDENT LEARNING CENTRE PROGRAM (ILCP)</th>
<th>NEGOTIATED INDEPENDENT LEARNING UNIT (NILU)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Skills</td>
<td>How learners use the ILCP to engage in student centred learning</td>
<td>Students follow the generic scaffolding of the NILU in a research journal which also is the learning contract.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Dispositions in Action</td>
<td>The Negotiated Independent Learning Unit (NILU)</td>
<td>Students are taught independent learning and information literacy skills and strategies that will help them in future studies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 Responsibilities</td>
<td>Students gain knowledge about their personal learning style/s</td>
<td>Students undertake personal research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4 Self-Assessment Strategies</td>
<td>Students gain knowledge about themselves as a learner</td>
<td>Students are responsible and accountable for their own learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1.1 Read View and listen for pleasure and personal growth.</td>
<td>Students should be able to set their own learning aims</td>
<td>Students are encouraged to use the subsequent results and recommendations to frame their research and outcomes and further study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1.4 Seek information for personal learning in a variety of formats and genres.</td>
<td>All students negotiate their own Negotiated Independent Learning Unit. It takes the form of a contract. They formulate their own goals. They organize their own learning journey in the given time scale to attain their goals. They choose their own topics for research. They think about their interests, read and research their interests as well as brainstorming with others to help decide on an area of personal research. Students explore a wide variety of modes of presentation, visual, read/write/, kinaesthetic.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.1 Display curiosity by pursuing interests through multiple resources.</td>
<td>Recognise and consider personal learning style</td>
<td>Our students complete the ‘VARK: A Guide to Learning Styles’ questionnaire (Fleming &amp; Bonwell, 2006). This is completed and submitted on-line. Students explore what learning preferences they may have. Students are encouraged to use the subsequent results and recommendations to frame their research and outcomes and further study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4.1 Identify own areas of interest.</td>
<td>Make choices over learning modes</td>
<td>They use this information about themselves to focus on all aspects of their personal learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4.3 Recognize how to focus efforts in personal learning.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1.2</td>
<td>Read widely and fluently to make connections with self, the world, and previous reading.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1.4</td>
<td>Connect ideas to own interests and previous knowledge and experience.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1.6</td>
<td>Organize personal knowledge in a way that can be called upon easily.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1.8</td>
<td>Use creative and artistic formats to express personal learning.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.2</td>
<td>Demonstrate motivation by seeking information to answer personal questions and interests, trying a variety of formats and genres, and displaying a willingness to go beyond academic requirements.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.3</td>
<td>Maintain openness to new ideas by considering</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4.2</td>
<td>Recognize the limits of own personal knowledge.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Recognise, contemplate and rank individual interest

#### Learn through experience

- Students build upon the knowledge they already have about a particular area of interest and develop this interest into a research project. This prior knowledge is useful when deciding and developing the hypothesis or challenge. The most successful research projects involve authentic inquiry topics and engage relevant “others” in the process.
- NILU research journal offers scaffolding and graphic organisers
- KND tables (what you know, need to know, don’t know about the topic)
- ‘Inspirations’ software concept mapping
- All information is recorded in a research log book and journal. Information is collected and stored either electronically or written in a journal.

#### Tune-in

- Students engage in initial research to connect with their topic and gain an understanding of the breadth and depth of information available. Questions posed refer to attainability of challenge and suitability of topic.

#### Plan and organise work

- Students state in their contracts the goals they have set for themselves, defining their research topic posed as a problem or challenge. This challenge must be attainable for the student, taking into account the abilities of the student. The ‘Inspirations’ program is modelled to aid concept mapping of ideas and so dictate their research pathways. Note taking strategies and how to select appropriate information is taught. This is recorded in a research journal.
- Students consider the final outcome in respect of their topic, their personal learning preferences and their goals. The idea of new learning is promoted as is the concept of accepting a personal challenge.

#### Decide when best to work alone, collaboratively and when to seek advice

- Students brainstorm with other students, staff and parents to explore ideas for their research. They may also tap into community groups, interest groups to seek advice and ideas. They follow the scaffolding for planning and designing their research topic with help if they feel they need help. Confusing issues are clarified at the outset. Attainable challenges are discussed and developed. Teachers must be prepared to be part of the journey.

#### Think creatively

- Students brainstorm with other students in the ILC and the teacher. They consider their Learning Styles to frame and design their outcome in terms of presentation. They consider all genres of presentation mode, written, visual, electronic, film and so on.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4.1.3</th>
<th>4.1.5</th>
<th>4.2.1</th>
<th>4.3.2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recognize that resources are created for a variety of purposes.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 4.3.4 |
| Practise safe and ethical behaviours in personal electronic communication and interaction. |

| 4.4.4 |
| Interpret new information based on cultural and social context. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4.2.3</th>
<th>4.3.1</th>
<th>4.4.3</th>
<th>4.4.5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Develop personal criteria for gauging how effectively own ideas are expressed.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 4.4.6 |
| Evaluate own ability to select resources that are engaging and appropriate for personal interests and needs. |

| Identify and solve problems by research |
| Level of synthesis of student research and gathered information relies to some extent on the challenge the students set for themselves in regards to their goals and initial hypothesis. This should be attainable through their research. As students gather more information, their ideas may change and their hypothesis may need further development or change focus. This is a cyclic development in the research process and indicates the student is critically adapting and synthesising new information. The thinking process is in exercise mode. Information is gathered and recorded. Bibliographic data is recorded in Citation 4 a bibliographic program suitable for secondary school students. |

| Effectively communicate both orally and in writing |
| Assessment of the NILU is measured in many different ways to make sure the students are able to articulate their progress and present their research topic. All students must present a Power Point presentation to the class outlining their progress at mid semester. They must outline their goals and what they have done to reach those goals. The audience is asked to question the student on their progress and clarify any confusing aspect of their research. Metacognitive processes are continually encountered by the student to guide their thought processes and future directions. |

| Assess their own progress in respect of their aims |
| Daily Logbooks record the work completed each lesson. They can see their journey lesson by lesson. Students must be constantly aware of their goals. All students engage in self evaluation processes which include, progress reports presented to the class, self evaluation questionnaires and discussions with the teacher. At the final presentation students must assess their journey and state whether they have in fact achieved what they set out to do. It becomes an important event. |

The ILC program as outlined above has a generic application and could be applied across all four AASL Standards. The effectiveness of the program allows for all ability levels, learning styles and personal interests of the student to be a formulating structure for personal learning and can be adapted for both secondary and primary education settings.

**Students respond**

When students were asked to consider an individual interest for investigation many ideas were considered. Some students chose an area of interest that they enjoyed, for no other reason than that of it giving the student personal pleasure. Some chose an area of interest in
the sense of social awareness, for example the global warming crisis or the AIDS epidemic. Some chose an area of personal challenge, the quest of creating an artistic or literary work or perhaps building or designing an eco-sustainable house or designing a personalized surf board. For example:

“I have always wanted to make a short film or a video clip.”

“It has been a personal ambition of mine to make a guitar.”

And some chose an interest that the student felt was useful for the future in terms of skill building or occupation, for example, “I want to find out about feline diseases because I want to be a vet and specialize in cats”.

Many of the students indicated that it was a combination of the above. Fortunately their topics indicated that our students are socially aware and creative and the majority did have some personal interest. The chronically bored students were much more difficult to engage in terms of motivation and interest because many of them claimed they had no interests. Combine this fact with low ability in academic endeavours and a lack of creativity, which seems to be common in these students (Hunter & Csikszentmihalyi, 2003) and a NILU becomes hard work. But that is the role of every teacher, to strive to teach our students that they can achieve.

One teacher commented: “it’s full-on work…it is a continual movement of the teacher around the room, checking work and progress”. Another remarked: “be prepared to think creatively…be the ideas person”. Reluctant students need much reassurance from both teachers and their peers that their ideas are of value and worth. They need support from a number of different ‘significant others’. This is an example of where a teaching team can guide the reluctant student to an encouraging start to his or her research.

The majority of students were able to consider their interests and find a suitable topic to research. As another teacher noted: “My involvement in the ILC as a teacher has shown me that students are capable of creativity and self-directed engagement beyond what is normally possible in the ‘traditional’ classroom context”. For the majority this was very true. Their topics and their final presentations and products were truly inspirational. In this case it is the students who inspire the teacher. This is a wonderful feeling.

Students responded positively to the ILC program and both qualitative and quantitative results showed that on the whole students enjoyed themselves and gained skills and strategies for the future. One question, “Has the NILU been a waste of time?” resulted in fairly honest evaluation. As one student considered, “No, I don’t think the NILU has been a waste of time because, I learnt more about cricket which was my topic and how to make a web site about cricket and how to make my own cricket bat. I got to do what I wanted to do”.

This comment, from a usually low achieving, disinterested student was a positive outcome. It is very hard work to achieve positive results with chronically bored students and the ILC program has much promise in this area. By the time a disengaged, disinterested fourteen year old student reaches the ILC they have often had at least seven years of negative learning experiences in schools. One semester in the ILC is not going to result in miracles, but for at least one semester the student was engaged in something of interest and value to them personally, and has some positive results for their efforts. In 82% of cases it inspired self confidence and pride in their efforts. Most students enjoyed the freedom to manage their
own learning but found it required a lot of effort, as one student remarked: “Well, it was hard work because we could make our own timetable”. And although students could see that it was important to have the power to organise and manage their own learning they could see that it took effort so some preferred a more teacher directed classroom: “I like having teachers tell me what to do.” It is a much easier option.

On the whole though there seemed to some positive aspects for the students for a variety of reasons particular to each student. Student comments included:

“I enjoyed being able to present my research and my topic to the class.”

“I have learnt that planning and managing my work and time is a good start to a good assignment.”

“I have learnt a lot more about the history of Claymation and how it all works. I have improved in my filming and creating skills and research skills.”

“The power to manage your own time and learning is important because when you go to UNI it will help with your organising and researching.”

Surveys (n=77) administered at the completion of the NILU provided student feedback regarding their perceptions of knowledge and skill changes. Eighty three percent of these students felt that their research skills were now better, and of these, 73% indicated an improvement in their knowledge of school library resources; 36% indicated an improvement in their knowledge of the library catalogue; 21% an improvement in their use of databases; 73% in bibliographies; 75% in organization skills; 60% in time management skills. Further, 55% felt that the ILC had helped them in other subjects. Most of these felt that this was in the area of improved research skills although 54% of the entire group indicated that their time spent in the ILC had provided motivation to study, complete work on time (Carmichael 2007, 2008). This was supported by an online test, “TRAILS: Tool for Real-time Assessment of Information Literacy Skills” (Kent State University Libraries & Media Services, 2007), that found of 44 respondents: 81% recognized how to use information responsibly ethically and legally; 69% were able to identify potential sources of information; and, 68% knew how to develop, use and revise search strategies.

In the affective domain, a large proportion of students (82%) also indicated that they were proud of their achievements (also a bit hard to answer no to this, although some did and felt that they could have done better) and 70% indicated that they had enjoyed learning about how they learn. Three quarters of students indicated that they now had a better knowledge of the kind of learner that they were and indicated that they had used that knowledge to frame their independent learning unit with almost two thirds indicating that they had used this knowledge to help their study practice (Carmichael 2007).

**Teacher responses: positive learning outcomes for students**

There has been a positive exchange of knowledge between students, teaching staff and ILC teaching staff to further shape the pedagogy, process and procedures for the benefit of our students. And so, the on-going development of the ILC is a collaborative project that will extend beyond the physical boundaries of the College in 2008. The ILC program will be offered to students on-line using the “Learning Activity Management System (LAMS)”
Lutheran Education Queensland is supporting this project, as they supported the ILCP.

That teaching colleagues, members of the ILC teaching staff, can share their comments, regarding the extent to which the ILC project and pedagogical program had supported the focus of promoting positive learning outcomes in the school only further supports the project. They responded in terms of the following contexts:

**In the ILC**

“The process of deciding, implementing and demonstrating a significant piece of work builds student confidence and models project management skills. Students have a more flexible approach to their learning – taking ownership and learning to prioritise activities; have the opportunity to learn skills and develop knowledge not available through our curriculum and the ILC is vertically timetabled allowing students the opportunity to meet students from other year levels who might share similar interests.”

**Across the curriculum**

“Skills learnt in the ILC for a particular topic of interest can be applied across all subject areas. By developing our students’ ability to independently plan their study, they feel more in charge of their own progress and this has a positive effect across their subject choices.”

“By providing a broad range of independent units, the ILC ensures that Concordia Lutheran College is offering students breadth, depth and flexibility to its students.”

“The skills taught in the ILC are utilised in other subject areas.”

**Teacher student relationships**

“The time spent with each student enhances trust and respect for one another building constructive relationships.”

“The ILC is always supervised by a qualified staff member enabling teachers to work in a much smaller environment with students than is often available in a standard classroom setting so there is opportunity for tutoring, advice and mentoring of students on a one-to-one basis.”

“Teachers looooove an independent learner so it’s all good.”

**Life long learning**

“Independence of thought and action is the definitive characteristic of an adult. ILC learners are well on the way to adulthood if they grasp the opportunity available to them.”

**Future employment prospects**

“Time management, self-guided learning, self-motivation, project management, communication and record keeping skills gained or enhanced by the ILC program are an asset to the student’s employability.”
“By completing a Negotiated Independent Learning Unit, students have demonstrated their ability to work independently.”

“Employees should display integrity in their relationships with employers. They must be able to work unsupervised and productively to contribute to the success of the business. The ILC provides supervision to assist the student to develop the necessary integrity to achieve future goals.”

The learner being central to the school and the work of the teacher

“My involvement in the ILC as a teacher has shown me that students are capable of creativity and self-directed engagement beyond what is normally possible in the “traditional” classroom context.”

Comments by teachers and students provided an insight to the strengths and weaknesses of the ILC program and so problems can be addressed to further enhance a positive learning experience for our students. To do this, an evaluation of “what went wrong” can prove more instructive than what went right, although it is nice to know you are doing something right. Here are some comments by teachers from their observations and student reflection:

“Immaturity level of some students is a problem, especially those who require more structure.” Some students found it difficult to be responsible for their own learning and accountable for their own learning journey. Some are not conditioned to work by themselves and are dependent upon the teacher for much direction. Some could not see the future worth or value of the pedagogy. Studies undertaken late in 2007 supported this (Carmichael 2008).

Persistence, discipline and the inability to sustain interest in their area of inquiry proved difficult for some, especially if they had not planned well at the outset. Students agreed with this comment. One student stated: “I think I would have worked harder if I had less time”. But another student stated: “I enjoyed being able to do my own thing and do my assignment at my speed and not worry about rushing it”. This self-direction and self-pacing was at the core of the project’s design.

Some do not have the cognitive ability to learn independently. These students need much support, from the ILC coach and Learner Support staff and parents. It is not impossible, but requires a great deal of patience, persistence, inspiration, perspiration and prayer. For these students a semester is not long enough.

Conclusion

‘A school without students? What the …? We teachers would wither if we had no students to guide and educate. Our aim is to have an ideal society.’ (Frau Keen, Head of Languages ILC coach)

That the ILC program could provide a model for the classroom application of the Standards for the 21st Century Learner and the remodelling of the school library as a shared learning space, opens the way for further development of this concept. There are limitless
opportunities here for teacher librarians. The positive outcomes of the NILU far outweighed the negative in terms of stimulating personal interest in learning and the acquisition of independent learning skills and information literacy skills. Student and teacher relationships were enhanced and the ILC provided a change from the traditional classroom situation, providing more autonomy for the pursuit of personal interests. Collaboration amongst teaching staff resulted in positive learning outcomes for our students. Even though teachers believed that they provided student autonomy and catered for different learning styles in the traditional classroom, some students were unable to make connections and or recognise this (Carmichael 2008). So there is room for further collaboration there. And although students found the student centred curriculum was much harder work than the traditional classroom situation, that students were able to realise this and their dependence on the teacher, provides all the more reason to offer this kind of instruction (Carmichael 2008). There is so much more to learn about this concept and how to use it to optimise the learning experiences of our students. Teachers also learn more about themselves as a classroom practitioner.

These realisations are not a bad thing. Life will not always present each day prepared by another person. Students will have to make decisions and accept challenges and find their own way in life, whatever their interests may be. It is far better that when our students pass through the school gate for the last time, and march up the next mountain of life, they are equipped with a satchel of independent learning tools, a lunch box full of self confidence and a pair of binoculars to see what the world has to offer them, and to seek out their place in it.

References


**Biographical Notes**

Patricia became a Teacher Librarian in 1980. She has taught a variety of subjects as a classroom teacher in both secondary and primary schools, in NSW and QLD, in both private and state schools in Australia. She has a Bachelor of Arts and a Graduate Diploma in Education and recently completed her Masters of Applied Science at Charles Sturt University. She was honoured to be the QLD nominee for the Australian Teacher Librarian of the Year Award 2006 and Patricia accepted an Excellence in Education Award 2006 from the Australian College of Educators (ACE) for the Independent Learning Centre Project on behalf of Concordia College (http://www.concordia.qld.edu.au/index.php/10). Patricia has presented papers at national and international level. Patricia can be contacted at pac@concordia.qld.edu.au

**Statement of Originality**

This statement certifies that the paper above is based upon original research undertaken by the author and that the paper was conceived and written by the author(s) alone and has not been published elsewhere. All information and ideas from others is referenced.