

Educator for an Hour



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Learning Environments Australasia (LEA)
New South Wales Chapter Awards
Winner, An Innovative Education Initiative



Research and exploration are at the heart of the practice, and enable the design and production of Hayball's fine body of built work.

Justine Clark - Justine Clark is an architectural editor, writer, critic and researcher.

Participants

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Fiona Young	Sydney Studio Director	WWC0837185E
Katherine Luu	Architectural Student	WWC1518848E
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Adriana Haindl	Interior Designer	

All Hayball participants who attended sessions at IGS obtained a Working with Children Check to participate in this experience.

Educator for an Hour



Carey Baptist Grammar School, Centre for Learning and Innovation - Designed by Hayball

In creating successful learning spaces, it is important to understand potential activities and behaviours of students and teachers. As architects and designers, we rarely get the opportunity to interface directly with students within their spaces, and to genuinely experience life within the classroom. This paper reports on an initiative led by the Sydney Education team to gain insights on how environments are experienced by users in the course of action.

01 Introduction

In November 2017 nine members of the Hayball Sydney team took part in an immersive professional development experience with kindergarten students and their teachers at International Grammar School (IGS).

Critically, it was an opportunity for architects and education designers to see through the lens of the educators, with first-hand experience working with children in maths, reading and science. In turn, the teachers and students benefited from additional adult helpers to supplement parent volunteers during the week.

Over a period of four weeks, the variety of sessions gave the architects opportunities to see how students approach different tasks, interact and learn, and also how the environment supports or hinders these learning activities.

Reading sessions were one-to-one with several students a session, illustrating how differently children of a similar age learn to read, with vastly differing abilities. Maths sessions were run through a range of stations in which small groups of students circulated around various tasks from puzzles to

games and iPad activities. The science session was a one-off day-long event based around designing and building a Rube Goldberg machine.

At the end of the four week period, the Hayball designers shared their reflections and various insights from the experience. They discussed how the learning space was used, issues observed and initial thoughts around how it might be improved. They further developed their understanding through a collection of precedent images and the loan and testing of sample children's furniture.

The analysis culminated in a meeting with the kindergarten lead teacher to share our ideas on how the learning environment could be improved and to get her feedback. This session was open to the entire Sydney studio, including those who had been unable to participate in sessions at the school.



Oswaldo works with students analysing structures with building blocks



Kat's group explores concepts of volume through measuring and building



Students learn numbers by connecting words with pictures

Some students find it overwhelming when things get too loud or when conflict between children arises. Withdrawal spaces should be available for a child to go into to calm down and feel safe from their external environment.

— Katherine Luu, Architectural Student

02 What We Observed

Reading 1:1

Reading took place outside the classroom. Three to four adults each paired with a child for a session one to one.

It was eye-opening to observe children approach reading in different ways from those who struggled with simple and repeating words, to those who read with fluidity at a high level. The space as currently laid out acted as a thoroughfare for older students going to their lockers adjacent to this space, or for students going to and from music areas. The movement of others through this space tended to distract the kindergarten students while reading, particularly those that struggled more in the task.

Other distractions observed:

- Music students from the adjacent classroom occasionally worked in the circulation space. When this involved playing instruments it could be quite noisy.
- Sometimes children from the kindergarten class came out to access their bags often interacting unproductively with the readers.

Visual movements and distractions seemed to grab the attention of the students, perhaps more so than noise? It certainly wasn't a quiet space outside the classroom, however the students that were reading seemed to be a lot more distracted when someone walked past in the corridor.

— Michael Diedricks, Architectural Student



Student engaged in 1:1 reading session with Fiona

Maths Groups

Maths groups were located in stations both inside the classroom and in the space outside the classroom (also used for Reading sessions). Inside, students worked on the tables and on the floor at the front of the class.

Many of our architects found this an intense experience with significant levels of noise, and sometimes difficulties of keeping children on task with the need for teachers to help discipline behaviour.

Other distractions observed:

- Some children who got overwhelmed during this session went to spaces in the room to retreat. One space was a narrow gap between the bookshelf and wall. The other was behind a column.
- The tables were quite deep which accommodated shared pencils in the centre which the children tended not to access.
- The size of the tables made the room feel densely packed without much breathing space between groups.



Large, deep tables take up a considerable amount of floor space



View toward teacher desk and column



Music students playing instruments in the corridor

The crossover of students from K-12 in the hallways was particularly interesting to observe. It gives the older students a sense of responsibility, and younger ones perhaps someone to look up to. Both looked comfortable in this environment.

— Robert Chan, Project Leader

- 01 One of the spaces students retreat to when overwhelmed was between the bookshelf and the wall.
- 02 Another retreat space behind the column.
- 03 Music students and their teachers tend to walk between the columns and lockers and therefore through the kindergarten learning space to classes.

03 How The Space Might Be Improved To Support Learning

Key points which design can address:

- The space outside the classroom provides valuable learning opportunities; however, the current layout encourages its use as a thoroughfare for other students.
- Inside the classroom lacks diversity of learning settings, including both collaborative, intimate and individual spaces.

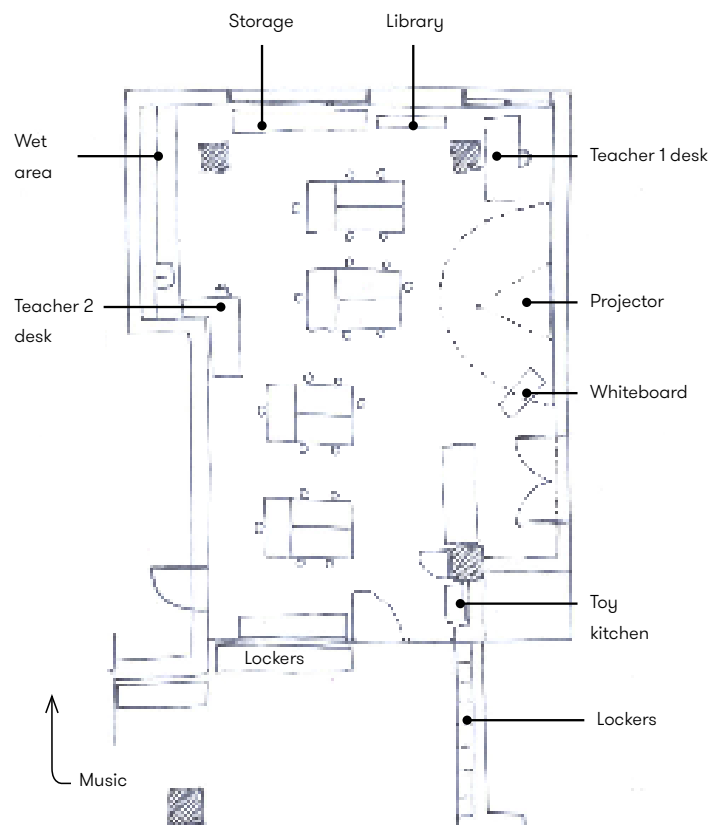
Opportunities we considered:

- Reconfigure the lockers outside the room to define a more contained learning space which prevents use as a thoroughfare and offers some protection from visual distraction. Create new storage/seating units which bounds the learning zone and provides reading nooks that are inward facing rather than towards the corridor.
- Define two smaller nooks within the front corners of the classroom for between 1-3 students. Relocate teachers work benches to the far wall between columns to enable nooks.
- Create an open storage wall along the back of the classroom. This could also provide standing height workstations or spaces for independent desk work.

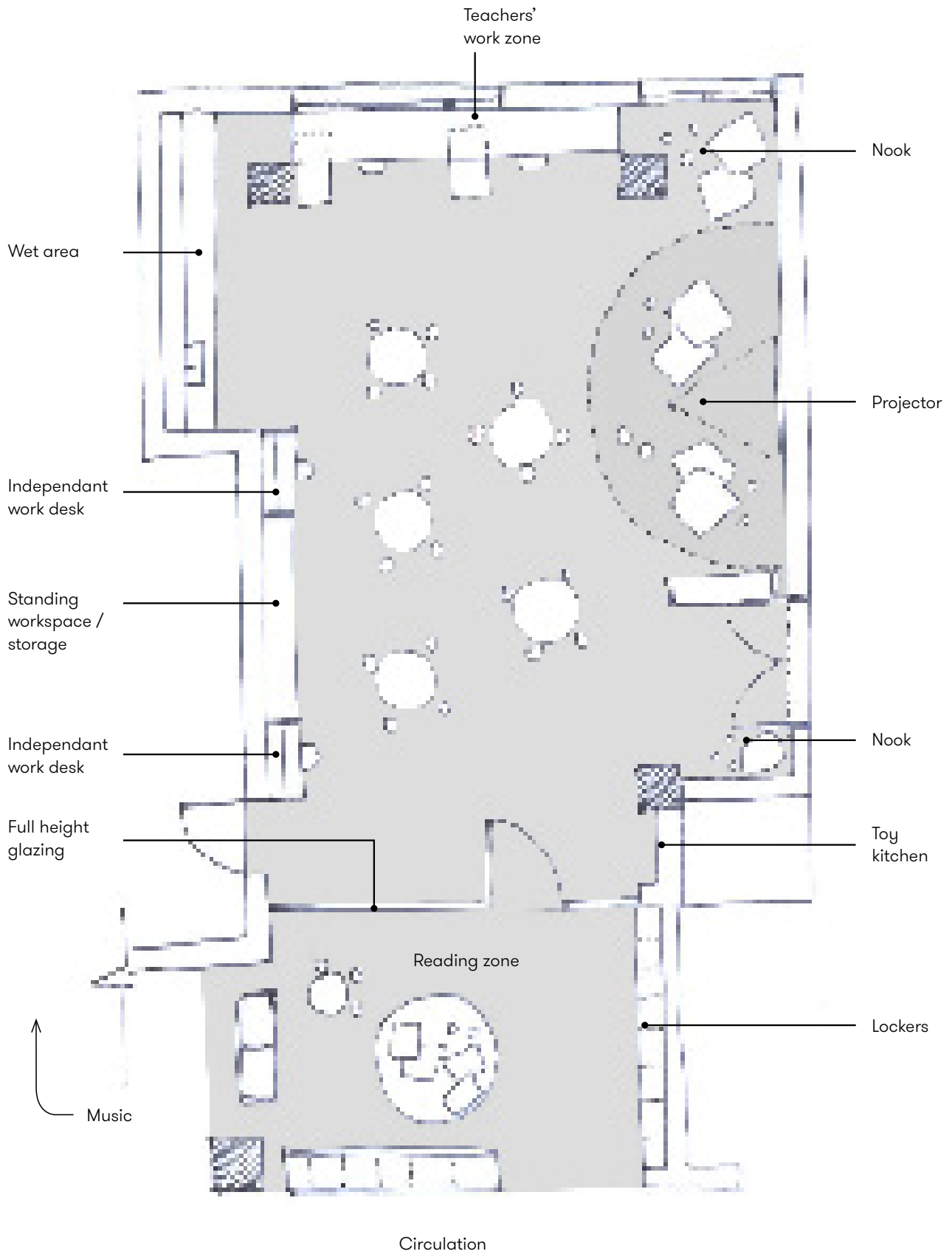
- Introduce furniture which empowers children to have choices in how they need to work, and to enable reconfiguration of settings.
- Vary the furniture to include mobile round tables at either seat or kneeling height to foster collaborative work. These tables could have a whiteboard surface to test spelling and other concepts before transferring to paper.
- Use beanbags in the nooks, or other unique furniture, e.g. Rocking Dodo, to give students more choice of seating.
- Use of Lego panels on columns.
- Install a fixed or sliding glazed wall between the classroom and outside learning zone to provide visual connection between the spaces and opportunities for supervision.
- Increase acoustic insulation in room - this could be an initiative which involves the students both in research and production. For example, using upside-down umbrellas which hold acoustic insulating material - see link: www.pinterest.com.au/pin/229472543493790859 Refer to link under 'Sound volume and rhythms' for how to enable students to monitor acoustic levels and learn about decibels: rubble.heppell.net/learnometer/remedy.html



Natalia playing snakes and ladders with students on the floor



Existing Learning Space



Proposed plan: diagram showing ideas of how the space could be reconfigured to better support learning activities

04 Feedback From The Teacher

We presented these ideas to Alex Davis, the lead teacher, who provided the following feedback:

- Likes defining the space outside the classroom for better learning purposes with new lockers and built-in reading nooks. Noted that original idea to define one edge with a couch may attract senior students to inhabit this area which wouldn't be desirable; hence, two perpendicular joinery units better.
- Likes the two nooks in corners on the inside. Suggested that one nook could have book display on the walls to effectively become a reading corner.
- Noted the area behind the column would need to be infilled in some way; if a child goes there they can't be seen by the teacher.
- Likes the rear wall storage/standing unit. Also the opportunity to incorporate single work desks for students who come from other rooms to do Time Out.
- Likes new teacher work desk configuration. We noted that depending on distance between columns, this could even incorporate other things, e.g. the Time Out desk, or more storage.
- Is keen to remove or reduce the amount of current rectangular tables as they are too big. Likes the idea of incorporating some of the round coffee tables, cushions.
- Likes the reduction of furniture and more mobile furniture to increase amount of floor space to work.
- Did not think items like the Rocking Dodo would support learning as it would be more of a play thing.



The team discusses lessons learnt and spatial opportunities with the teacher

While playing maths games with the smaller children, I noticed the importance of floor space in allowing the students to take small breaks to stretch on the floor, do a quick handstand or roll around. The ability for children to move around freely seemed to improve concentration and engagement.

— Natalia Krysiak, Architect

05 Implementation

Over the Term 4 break, Alex Davis made some changes to her classroom layout based on some of the ideas we suggested. This included:

- Relocating the teacher desk to allow for smaller nook spaces in the room;
- Creating a Library / reading nook by the window;
- Creating a smaller secondary nook next to the toy kitchen with Lego panels on the columns;
- Rearranging the tables to create more space as well as an L-shaped teacher facilitated learning setting.

IGS are currently working out how to implement the ideas for the space outside the classroom.



Secondary breakout space within classroom



Room overview showing new reading corner and relocation of teacher desk

06 Reflection of Experience

Hayball: Lessons Learnt

- Sometimes children get overwhelmed by the environment. Find opportunities to include small spaces for children to escape and regroup, however ensure these small spaces can be seen by teachers. Opportunities for smaller defined zones might be provided by existing columns or wall articulation.
- Consider ways for furniture to not take up too much space as floor space is important for students to gather, work in small groups and for independent movement as well.
- Consider ways to include a range of diverse learning settings even in traditional classroom settings.
- Drink bottles often leak – consider durable materials for bag storage joinery or use hooks on walls to hang bags.
- Look for opportunities adjacent /outside classroom spaces to extend learning opportunities.
- Making changes to spaces doesn't need to be complex or expensive. It can be done incrementally and may initially be a matter of just moving furniture around.

I know we always advocate for how students learn at a different pace from one another, however to experience it first hand was still quite an eye opener. I was part of the reading session and surprised by the huge differences between the strengths of each of the students. I think this only reinforces how important recognising each child as an individual is, and thus how important diverse learning settings are.

— Andrew Fong, Architect



Reflections from the Teacher, Alex Davis

The Educator for an Hour experience was quite eye-opening for me. I was so amazed at how eager Fiona's colleagues were to participate in hands-on learning with the kindergarten students, even though some had very little experience with young children. I know how daunting it can be coming into a classroom with very little insight into the students.

It was great to have other people look at your classroom with different eyes and from a design perspective, rather than a teaching one. As a teacher you can become so pre-occupied by the students and their learning that you miss some small changes you could make to the environment around those students to increase their learning success.

When I visited the team at the design studio, I was so surprised by how many different ideas and options could be made with the one space. The classroom drawings made it a lot easier to visualise how this would work in terms of teaching and learning in the space. I felt excited by the possibilities and change that could be done with the classroom. Having lots of different pictures and ideas to look at gave me lots of inspiration to try something different this year and I went home and researched all different kindergarten classroom spaces.

Just making some very simple changes, such as opening up a reading corner and utilising the window bench has created a lovely quiet space for my students to relax in and they really love it! Having lego boards and floating shelving has made my columns part of the room, whereas before they felt like a waste of space. The students enjoy having the corners of the room to play in and feel that there are now more areas in the room to have group activities. The changes have created more space and the classroom can be used in a more collaborative way for students.

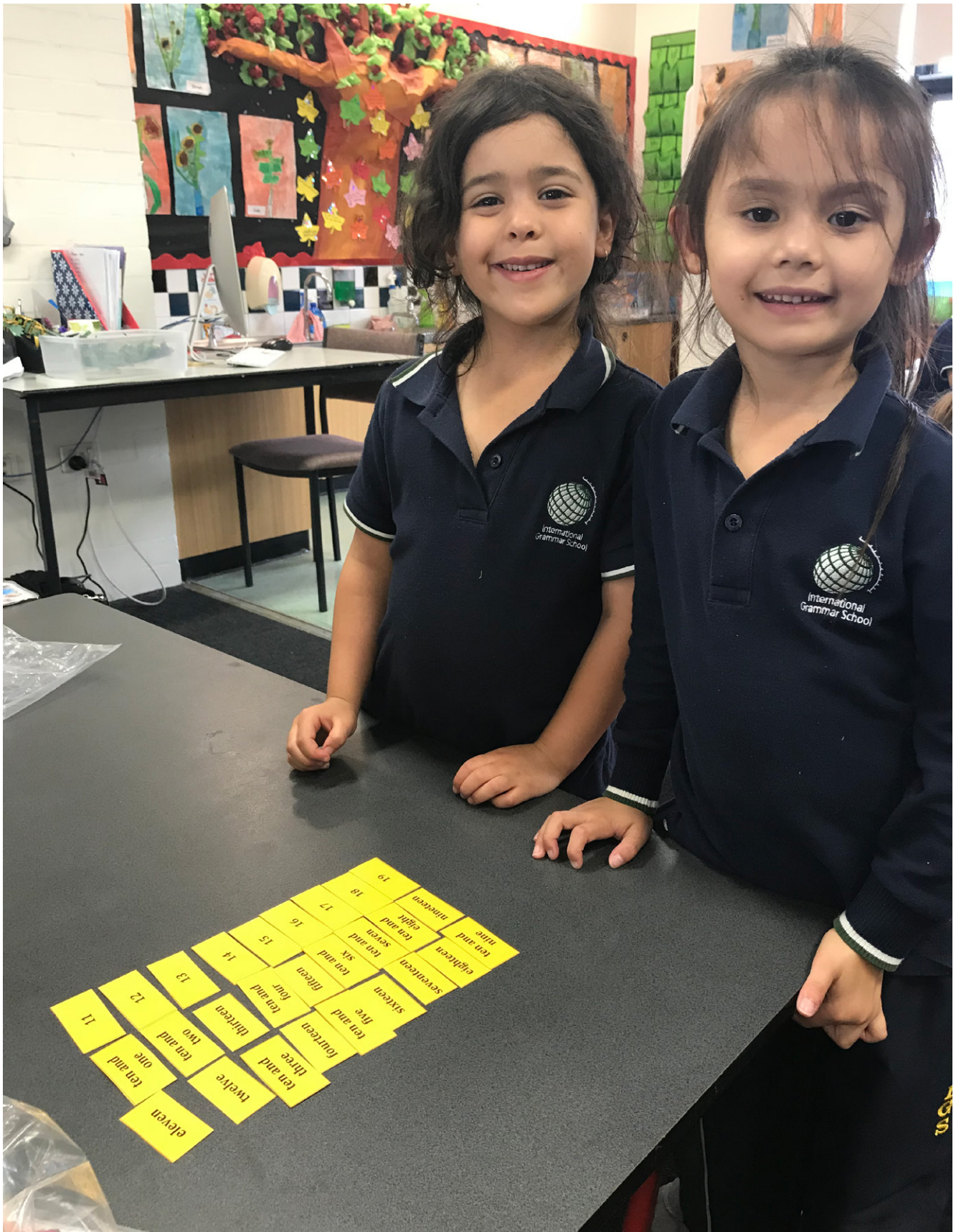
The whole experience has given me a new perspective on classrooms when I walk into them and has provoked an interest in keeping up with innovative school designs that are happening. I now look at my space and want to establish a learning environment that the students can own, which I feel is definitely beginning to happen.

Thank you so much for all your hard work and the amazing experience!

As a teacher you can become so pre-occupied by the students and their learning that you miss some small changes you could make to the environment around those students to increase their learning success.

— Alex Davis, Lead Teacher

06 Reflection of Experience



The experience was impactful for Hayball staff who were involved.

We noted from the photos of the experience that many look like peaceful idyllic interactions with children, yet we now know that these situations were loaded with action, discussion, distractions and sometimes fighting and distress which teachers need to deal with day in and day out. It is through these immersive experiences that we, as architects, view the environment through a different lens which shapes our responses.

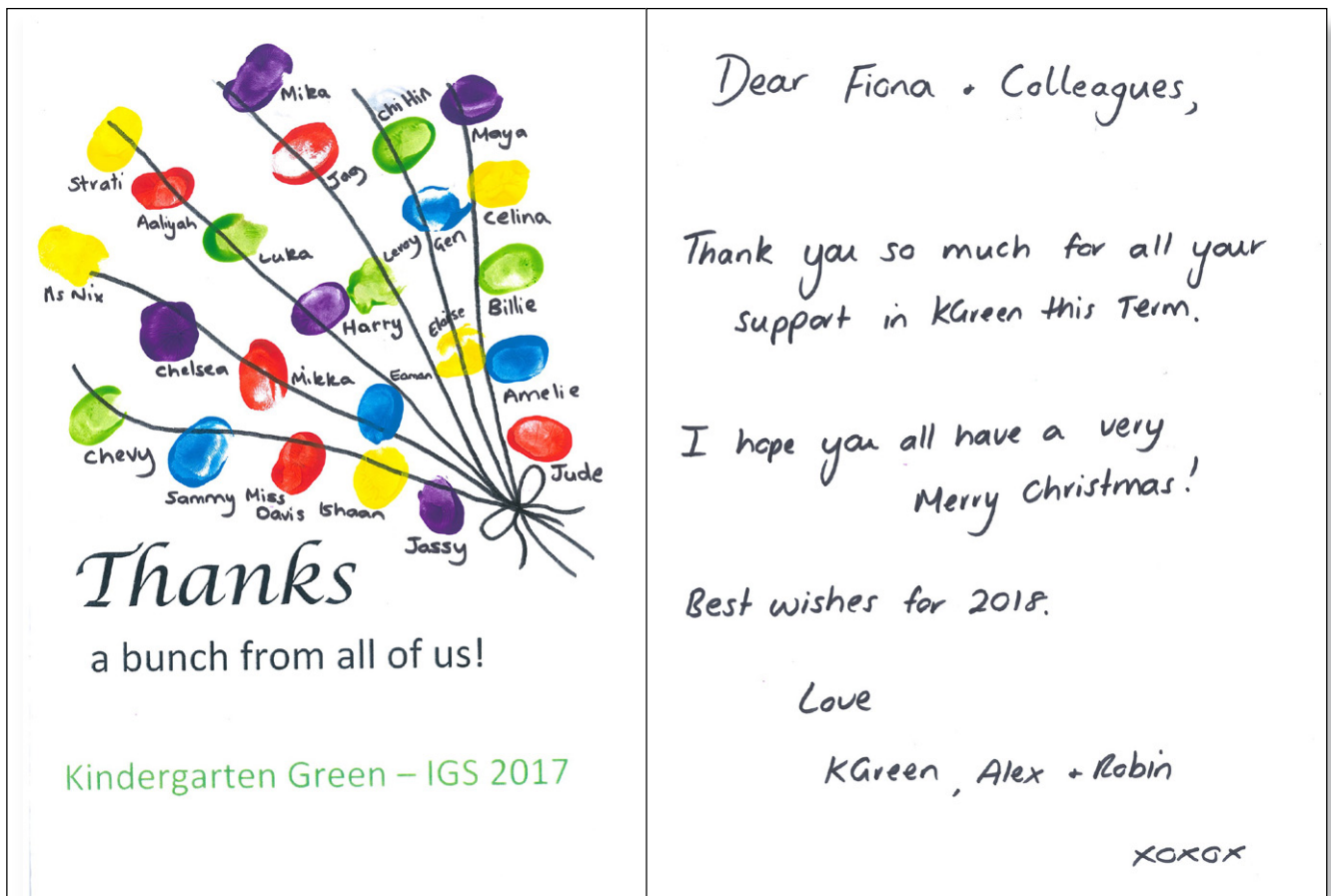
The meeting with the teacher was a valuable part of the experience. It allowed our designers who may not have had much client exposure to observe, join the discussion and learn this aspect of architectural practice. It also allowed those who haven't have much experience in learning environments to hear some of the considerations discussed.

Based on this experience, team members have expressed interest in engaging in a similar exercise with an older cohort of students. This may be with IGS or another school.

Our thanks to IGS, where Fiona Young is a parent and how the opportunity arose.

Immersive experiences like these in which you actively engage with life inside the classroom are vastly different than the typical architect's 'site visit' where you tour a school and merely glimpse into activities in various learning spaces.

— Fiona Young, Sydney Studio Director



Dear Fiona + Colleagues,

Thank you so much for all your support in KGreen this Term.

I hope you all have a very Merry Christmas!

Best wishes for 2018.

Love

KGreen, Alex + Robin

XOXOX

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