

VIT Video

THE BENEFITS OF SPECIAL NEEDS PD

The Hon. James Merlino

Deputy Premier/Minister for Education:

Hello. In the Education State we want every young person who comes through our doors to enjoy their time in our care, to leave our kindergartens and classrooms each day more confident prepared and optimistic than when they arrived. With the right support every child has the ability to thrive.

Special needs professional development is about making sure you're ready to help your students with additional needs to reach their full potential. The majority of your colleagues have completed this work and speak highly of the skills and strategies that it's given them.

This professional development will help you to understand the additional needs your students may have and it will give you practical advice on how to provide a positive environment that helps those students to do their best. These are critical skills for teachers in the Education State.

I'd like to thank the Victorian Institute of Teaching for providing you with this important professional development opportunity and I'd like to thank all of you for everything you do to help young Victorians look forward to a bright future. Thank you.

How many Victorian teachers consider themselves equipped to deal with Special Needs learners? To support the Victorian Government's Special Needs Plan to improve access to and participation in learning for children with special needs, VIT set up a Special Needs framework in 2015. As part of this framework we asked all teachers renewing their registration to undertake Special Needs professional development by the end of 2017.

86, 629, or 93% of renewing teachers completed this requirement in the first year, and 14, 730 in the second year. A group of teachers who completed the PD were also asked to write a 450 word professional reflection. The responses from the teachers in their professional reflections indicated just how much they learned and benefited from completing Special Needs PD.

Since completing the PD, Alice Fennessy said:

"I have begun to use more visual prompts within my practice. I have also begun to be more mindful of physical teaching environments and how to augment these to become more effective learning spaces for my ASD students."

Diane Aldred is also putting her learning into practice:

"I aim to keep a Journal of observations- listing the students' responses and behaviour and identifying the cause of their anxiety. Then I will take note of what strategies I tried and what worked best for each student."

Other teachers spoke to us about what they learned:

Lorene Kelly:

Learning more specific things, like getting real detail on how to use schedules and timers and you know, planning, using all these quiet zones, just different things like that, like really down to fine nitty gritty, that was really good, like there's not many places you can get that – you can go to a book, but having it in the course has made it so much easier, that was great.

Elizabeth Bradlow:

It was much broader than I thought and lots of things have happened and one should keep updated. You never know when you're going to have to deal with this in your very own life.

Ness Scoleri:

I would like to use a lot of the strategies that the PD suggested, like really understanding what the child needs, and looking at how they work at all different levels. So it might just be, it might be the way that I'm providing the lesson to them, it might be how they react to it, so, and by that, changing what I need to change so that the child gets the most out of their day in the classroom.

Ketaki Vaidya:

I discovered the importance of individualised education programs that cater for physical learning and developmental disabilities.

For these teachers, and no doubt for many of the thousands of teachers who had completed Special Needs PD previously, this has been really instructive, and a tremendous boost to their future teaching practice.

Lorene Kelly:

Learning about motivators, which is a term they used a lot, motivators around each student, special interest, things that would motivate an individual child, someone with Aspergers or on the spectrum, and learning what each individual motivator was. So that really helped me because of course every child and every teen's got a different one... So that's a great tool I've found. I never did that before and I do it now.

These examples show the benefits for teachers incorporating Special Needs PD in their professional learning

Elizabeth Bradlow:

I would advise people to do some updating. It didn't take me a long time but it rekindled thoughts which I think are valuable to all teachers.

Lorene Kelly:

I've got friends where their children have Autism and Aspergers and you just think "oh well, do I really need to do this extra study, but, oh yeah, it was a real eye opener for me. It was fantastic, I really enjoyed it. And learned so much with such a short course, really.