

Understanding Year 9 Students: Implications for Policy and Practice

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Front Cover Image

Peer mentoring students from Hampton Park Secondary College and Lynbrook Primary School students.

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Background

This is the second of two papers exploring issues associated with Year 9 students. In this second paper on the learning needs of Year 9 students, *Understanding Year 9 Students – Implications for Policy and Practice*, the goal is to provide suggestions about ways to make young people's schooling at Year 9 more challenging, engaging and rewarding based on the evidence collected from the first paper. Additionally, case studies from selected schools are provided to show how the Victorian education system is responding in imaginative and practical ways to the challenges of Year 9 students.

Implications for policy and practice

The following suggestions are provided as a basis for discussion in schools that wish to explore ways of translating theory into practice.

Adolescent behaviour

Suggestion 1: Provide structures and procedures that deliver timetable flexibility and enable a strong bond to be developed between staff and students

Schools could advance this suggestion by:

- adopting a teacher allotment policy within the school that results in a team of teachers with a range of teaching and extra-curricular skills and interests working exclusively or for extended periods of time with the Year 9 student cohort
- adopting the practice of the Year 9 teaching team working cooperatively to plan and deliver Year 9 curriculum programs and learning experiences – giving due recognition to the diverse learning, social and emotional needs of young adolescents
- adopting the practice of designating an area or identifying classrooms within the school as the Year 9 area and whenever possible giving priority to timetabling Year 9 classes within this area.

Suggestion 2: Provide classroom organisation and teaching and learning practices that are responsive to the diverse learning, social and emotional needs of young adolescents

Schools could advance this suggestion by:

- establishing timetabling and classroom conditions that give students with an inadequate mastery of basic literacy and numeracy skills every opportunity to build mastery of these fundamental learning skills
- adopting student grouping arrangements within classes and between classes that enables teachers to better target the specific learning needs of sub-groups of students whilst optimising the overall conditions for promoting student learning
- planning and delivering curriculum in a more integrated fashion and enhancing understanding of key concepts

- presenting stimulating and authentic tasks that require complex thought and allow sufficient time for students to fully engage with the task presented
- adopting approaches specifically designed to enable students to exercise responsibility, develop decision-making skills, engage with their community and experience work situations
- engaging in direct teaching about thinking and learning and developing students' meta-cognition skills
- providing programs, either within or beyond the school, that have been specifically designed to meet the needs of students exhibiting learning, social or emotional needs that are impeding their progress in 'regular' school
- supporting students to share in determining the directions of their learning, conceiving learning as primarily a cooperative rather than an individualistic or competitive endeavour.

Learning and teaching characteristics

Suggestion 3: Provide a curriculum program structure that facilitates deep engagement with learning

Schools could advance this suggestion by:

- basing the majority of the Year 9 curriculum on a few key themes
- organising the learning day into a few broad areas of focus (e.g. core skills, personal challenges, group projects)
- incorporating into the school week a number of special focus mornings or days
- devoting one or more weeks within the term to a specific theme, focus or activity.

Suggestion 4: Provide learning opportunities that support students to engage with and provide practical support to their community

Schools could advance this suggestion by:

- establishing joint initiatives with community agencies (e.g. local government and welfare groups) and assisting students to become involved in community based projects
- assisting students to conduct social research and engage in problem-solving tasks and present research findings on matters of interest and importance to them and their community
- making community volunteering by students a component of the (assessed) curriculum
- supporting students to be involved in youth action programs and youth development programs sponsored by community service groups (e.g. the VYDP that links students with police, the CFA and other community agencies/services and supports them to perform work within the community)

- establishing a philanthropic trust managed by students and supported by student fundraising efforts and dedicated to assisting with the funding of worthy projects within the local community.

Suggestion 5: Provide opportunities for students to experience adult-like roles and responsibilities

Schools could advance this suggestion by:

- establishing and training students to meet the role requirements for positions such as school ambassadors, lunch-time sport coordinators, student mentors, student counsellors, student tutors, sports coaches, safety investigators, social activities coordinator, and so on
- encouraging students to initiate their own service-oriented projects (e.g. reading or providing services to or company for elderly people, doing voluntary work for a welfare services agency)
- engaging students in the decision-making processes of the classroom and school
- supporting students to run school assemblies and school events (e.g. the school social or fundraising events) requiring presentation and organisational skills and commitment.

Suggestion 6: Provide opportunities for students to participate in special events or programs that are of substantial interest and/or challenge to them

Schools could advance this suggestion by:

- sponsoring a range of events and programs such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award, Adventure Camps, Work Shadowing, Mini enterprise activities, the teaching of music, dance and drama performances, gymnastic and circus skills, inter-school sports and debating, and so on
- providing students with opportunities to be involved with projects that enable them to work with or develop computer software and film or multi-media products
- organising or participating in events where individuals (e.g. singers, musicians and television, radio or sporting personalities, the Young Australian of the Year, etc.) who are significant within youth and popular culture are in attendance
- engaging experts (e.g. an artist in residence, a choir leader, a skilled crafts-person, a landscaper, a builder or a gardener) from the community to work with students on special projects that enable students to engage in practical activities and/or skill development and that result in the production of a valued service or product
- providing students with the opportunity to engage in a learning challenge that requires intensive effort and support (e.g. mastering the basics of a second language or the fundamentals of playing an instrument or repairing a piece of equipment).

Suggestion 7: Provide opportunities for students to celebrate and be recognised for their contributions, efforts and achievements

Schools could advance this suggestion by:

- regularly acknowledging and celebrating students' contributions to the school (e.g. good school citizen award), student effort (e.g. diligence award) and student achievements, including contributions and achievements to and within the broader community
- devising and issuing certificates of student accomplishment.

Suggestion 8: Provide opportunities for students to develop a special relationship with an adult from within or beyond the school community

Schools could advance this suggestion by:

- organising an adult advocacy or mentoring program that results in matching a student with a adult advocate from the school community (e.g. a teacher, support staff person or administrator)
- organising an adult mentoring program that results in students being matched with an appropriate adult within the community who is willing to engage with and offer advice to the student and to assist him/her expand his/her networks within the community.

Learning and teaching environment

Suggestion 9: Provide a distinct physical environment dedicated to Year 9

Schools could advance this suggestion by:

- identifying a distinct physical location within the existing school facilities for Year 9, constructing a separate but co-located Year 9 learning centre or establishing a purpose built Year 9 campus away from the mainstream school
- supporting students to decorate or landscape their learning areas.

Suggestion 10: Provide opportunities for intensive off-campus learning experiences

Schools could advance this suggestion by:

- relocating students to a city or rural camp, or to an interstate or overseas location for up to a term and developing a program that fully engages the students with the learning opportunities presented by this new location.

Translating theory into practice

The following section shows how the Victorian education system is responding in imaginative and practical ways to the challenges of Year 9 students.

Ballarat High School *Year 9 program - ARCH*

Background

Ballarat High School is a traditionally organised school with approximately 1450 students on one campus. Each year there are 250-260 Year 9 students. Due to its size the school is able to offer a wide range of VCE subjects, as well as having some VET and VCAL offerings. Years 7-9 run on a core basis with a wide range of electives.

Need for change

Data such as VCE scores and AIM results suggested the school was performing reasonably well, but stagnating. Other data such as 'Students Attitudes to School Surveys' suggested over a number of years that students did not feel safe at school, and they were not connecting to the school, teachers and each other. The most worrying results were at the Years 8 and 9. Absenteeism at these year levels was also a cause for concern. Staff observation and 'gut feeling' also indicated that the students experience wasn't as good as it should be.

How it happened

Although the need for change had been identified, there was not a lot of momentum. Four staff members being granted Teacher Professional Leave (TPL) provided the necessary momentum. The focus of this TPL was to investigate and implement a Year 9 program. The seven weeks leave gave the staff members the opportunity to investigate and visit other school settings, the time to digest information and clarify thoughts and the time to meet with and discuss issues with staff and students at Ballarat High School.

The key issues

The focus was to create a change that would address the issues of student safety and student connection with school and teachers. This had to be done in a way that was sustainable and within the campus. Existing staff would be used and the program would have to be attractive to them. Once we had decided on the type of program we wanted, there would be no progress without staff support. One area where the students indicated a negative for the staff was teacher enthusiasm, and we needed ten staff to devote themselves to Year 9, take risks and be enthusiastic.

What we have

The intention of the program is to have staff and students who have ARCH (Active, Resilient, Connected, Happy) attributes (Next to the school is a large war memorial called 'The Arch of Victory'). This will be achieved by breaking down the size of the school with the students having a dramatic drop in the number of teachers they have and the staff will have a dramatic drop in the number of students that they teach.

The program is built around a core and elective structure. The core structure has the potential to be flexible and presents the opportunity for larger and more flexible teaching time. One of the key elements of the program is that the staff that teach the core have their entire load allocated to the program. This gives the program enormous flexibility, as the core time does not have any impact on the rest of the school's timetable.

The year level is divided into traditional forms, but each form group belongs with another form group, which form a core. Each core staff member teaches those 50 students only. Each student has two core teachers who are responsible for Number and Logic (Maths and Science) and Communication and Culture (English and Humanities). They also take a subject called TLC (Thinking Learning and Connecting), which has a pastoral care base and has a physical component as well as investigating the way the brain works (learning about learning). The core teacher also takes the role of Year Level Co-ordinator for their core.

Wednesday, the Big Day (I've got 6 on, they're all Year 9!)

Wednesday is the day where the students notice the most difference; they only have their core teachers on that day. This provides great flexibility within the program. It means that students can be taken out of the school for part, or all of the day. So far that has meant things like a core picnic, where the 5 cores went to 5 different locations (some within walking distance) for a picnic, leaving around 11.00am. Besides being a fun day and a connecting experience, the students also had to bring a share lunch in groups of three and the lunch had to involve the five food groups. We are trying to connect learning experiences from the classroom, to outside the classroom. For the last Wednesday of term one, the teachers set the challenge of everyone walking to Kirks reservoir, which is 14km from the school. Although it took some time for the students to realise that we were serious and there was some initial negative feedback, when the day arrived the largest absence from any form was three. Everyone arrived and enjoyed a BBQ lunch; there were plenty of ARCH principles shown.

For the remainder of the year, having Wednesdays organised this way means that projects can be undertaken that need time out of the school, it means that students can be broken up along gender lines, it could allow for immersion in a particular subject, it could allow core teachers to offer their own electives, there are many possibilities.

Within these possibilities, there are no disruptions to any other classes within the School.

The students also have an extensive elective program to select from. These electives are undertaken for two, 100-minute periods per term to try and increase the connections between students and teachers. The elective teachers come from outside the core program, but they will be retained in the elective blocks for the whole year.

How it's going so far



The most surprising thing to happen this year was that my locker was moved inside a classroom.

Samantha

For the teachers it's a massive change. We've all gone from teaching across the school in different areas to devoting all our attention to 52 students and two rooms. It means that we certainly know our students well and we can get down to tin tacks with them. Perhaps the biggest change is that we are truly working in a team environment. The 10 teachers all have the same timetable (which means we have planning time together) and we all have similar challenges. Most importantly, it means that we can support each other, as each team member knows exactly what everyone else is going through.



Students are taking ownership of their rooms in creative ways.

For the students, it's also a cultural change. 'It's like primary school' is the most frequent comment and some resent the fact that they don't get to go from one place to another between periods (core classes are always in the same room) but the teachers see this as a positive. (It cuts out the opportunity for lateness, going to the toilet, lingering at lockers, competing for places in the room, bullying etc.) However, students are starting to take ownership of these rooms, which was the intention to create connection. The students are beginning to become involved in the decision making process and rooms have been decorated with student handprints, scribbles, furniture, fridges, playstations and there are further plans ahead. The last period on Friday is TLC for everyone and each student has a reflective journal where they record their thoughts and the teacher usually writes back to them. There are lots of comments (which are confidential) that suggest we are on the right track, certainly the turn up of 230+ students to walk the 14km to Kirks Reservoir suggests that our students are becoming active, resilient, connected and after 6 weeks, the jury is out on happy, but the signs are promising.

Interview with John Bourke, teacher and TPL participant

Is this the first year of the ARCH program?

Yes. Our professional leave started in August 2005, so we had limited preparation time. The tight timeline meant that being flexible and adaptive were very important if we were to get a program up and running in 2006.

How did the school work through the process of getting from an idea into reality?

Professional leave was a critical factor for us in that it allowed us to explore a range of issues and have time to reflect on our observations and findings. Schools are such busy places and as teachers, we often lack the time to do all the things we would like to do. The Teacher Professional Leave (TPL) program provided us with the time and space to achieve our goals.

The school data was indicating that things weren't great and that action was required. The TPL group's credibility within the school was a significant factor in working with students, staff and parents to achieve good outcomes.

The initial student responses were garnered through an Art activity – students were asked to draw what it felt like to be in Year 9. Their responses allowed us to view Year 9 from a student's perspective and this provided the catalyst for the kind of program we thought was needed to address their issues.

We followed this activity up with a survey of staff attitudes to Year 9. We wanted to find out if teachers had asked to teach Year 9, what they believed were the strengths and weaknesses of the current program and what they believed was 'untouchable'.

The group then visited other schools and built on our observations and experiences with some middle years research. This led us to developing a plan we felt would address issues of student connectedness and engagement. We wanted to have meaningful discussions with members of the school community so we instigated a series of lunches where we would present our ideas in an informal and conversational way. This worked really well as we received great feedback and enthusiasm for the new structures we wanted to put in place. We knew that there would also be negative feedback coming through and we knew that this is part of any reform or change within an organisation.

Once we had completed this part of the program we organised presentations for parents and friends groups and the School Council.

Our final presentation was to the staff. We knew that staff involvement was crucial to making a new program work so we decided not to make the meeting a formal one. Instead staff were invited to come along and the response was terrific – with over forty staff turning up.

What were some of the challenges for the group?

The major focus of the program was electives – which was what students had indicated they liked the most. The inclusion of new elective choices was a difficult task with the group in conjunction with teachers working extremely hard to develop a program that would meet everyone's needs and interests.

Also trying to put theory in practice is challenging. Resiliency is an important attribute for students, and we were keen to develop a program that would not only be interesting and enjoyable for them, but would also help students experience a sense of belonging – to teachers and the school. Being connected to the community is also an important factor in building student resiliency so our program also challenges our students to undertake activities that will benefit their community.

We also felt at times we could have done things differently or better, but I think that is part of the learning process. The knowledge and experience gained from this project – both the positives and negatives - will help us in future planning.

How is all this impacting on the staff?

For the teachers it's a massive change. In some ways it sounds as though the change for teachers is bigger than that for students. The teachers know how significant it is to build relationships with students and the importance of working through problems with them rather than perhaps avoiding or ignoring them. They now know the kids much better than in the past and this means we can all be more adaptable in teaching and learning through our knowledge. We also have more contact with the home than before – and this is also an important aspect in enhancing home-school relationships.

Any advice for other schools contemplating doing something like this – top five tips?

1. Pursue Teacher Professional Leave. Being a reflective practitioner means that you have the time and space to think, learn and consult.
2. If you have a team, set protocols for how you'll operate. This will help the communication process, builds good collaboration and assists in the development of a shared vision.
3. Involve all key stakeholders – staff, students, parents, community groups, etc. It's important to do this at the start to gain a range of views and opinions, and throughout the process.
4. Use evidence-based research to build knowledge and to inform and guide your work. Using quality research is very important when you are working with staff, particularly when there may be sensitivities around what you are proposing. Objective research can help to alleviate such issues.
5. Have a clear objective on what you want to achieve. For example, if your objective is for students to have positive learning experiences in Year 9, then test each proposal against your objective.

Student quotes

What have you noticed that is different about Year 9 compared with Year 8?

The way the timetable is and the amount of responsibility we as students have.

If you could design your 'dream' homeroom, what would it look like and what would it have in it?

It would be painted in all the ARCH colours instead of just one colour. All the seats would sit evenly and there would be like a 'relax' zone {with couches and food}. It would be cool if we had our own computer to work on too.

Samantha



Hampton Park Secondary College *Year 9 Mentoring*

Introduction

I like it when you are teaching them (stuff) and at first they don't 'get it' but in the end they work it out and are so happy when they do finally 'get it'.

Stacey, a Year 9 student from Hampton Park Secondary College, describes her delight with Grades 1 and 2 children as they experience the 'light bulb' effect during the literacy mentoring sessions at a local primary school.



Rhoda, Shruti, Jake, Stacey and Kristina

As teachers we immediately recognise the significance of this breakthrough moment; that instance when teacher and student share a sense of mutual accomplishment. And it's clear from our interviews with Year 9 Hampton Park Secondary College students that they find this moment, indeed the whole experience of mentoring and teaching, a deeply rewarding one as well.

Stacey and a number of her Year 9 peers at Hampton Park Secondary College have opted to join in a semester-long Peer Mentoring elective that takes them out of their Year 9 'comfort zone' twice a week. They travel to local primary schools, very often their old primary schools, to undertake dedicated work with classroom teachers, improving the sports, literacy and numeracy skills of primary students.

To find out more about this initiative, Mark Landy and Catherine Herrick from the Research Unit, Department of Education & Training visited Hampton Park Secondary College to see the Peer Mentoring program in action.

Peer Mentoring - the background

To get the school leadership perspective we first spoke with Allison Towner, Assistant Principal at Hampton Park Secondary College. We began by asking her about the origins of the program.

Findings from the MYRAD data were instrumental in getting us to think about how we could improve levels of student engagement and student performance at Year 9. The students told us that they felt that they didn't have much choice, or the opportunity take control over their own learning. So we wanted to change this and make school a more enjoyable and rewarding experience for our Year 9s. And the story of the mentor program really began with this recognition and motivation to do something to address these issues.

Discussions then began with Coral Park Primary School and we looked in a fresh way at the Peer Mentoring-sports coaching –that was operating at Year 10, and we thought-could we try this at Year 9. The main aim of the program is to provide opportunities for real life learning for our Year 9 students.

The Peer Mentoring program for Year 9 is now in its fourth year and according to Allison,

It has proved to be an outstanding success and the students have responded magnificently.

Why is it successful? Allison believes Peer Mentoring provides opportunities for Year 9 students to develop leadership, cognitive and reflective skills, experience teaching as a career option and build better self-image and self-esteem. In return the secondary students involved in Peer Mentoring interact with appreciative primary students, help to develop their sports, literacy and numeracy skills and further enhance inter-school/community relationships.

What's involved?

An overhauled timetable with an emphasis on student choice means that at least 50% of Year 9 can participate in the Peer Mentoring program.

Participating students can choose to work in one of the Hampton Park's feeder primary schools on Literacy Support, Numeracy Support or Sports Coaching and placements last for one semester. The students, mentor for a double lesson a week (72 minutes), and everyone keeps a journal to record thoughts and reflect on any difficulties they may have faced.

Evaluation of the program, including reporting on each student's performance, is comprehensive and based on a model of continuous improvement. Primary school staff write reports in consultation with the secondary teacher who is responsible for that particular Peer Monitoring group.

And what advice can Allison give to schools thinking about doing something similar?

Her Golden Rules for a successful program include the following:

- Start small and begin with one school.
- Build on existing relationships and community partnerships.
- Choose your liaison staff very carefully - you have got to get this right, or it can put a relationship with your neighboring primary school under great strain. For instance the primary school has got to come on board willingly and see that there is value in it for them as well as for the secondary school students.
- Impress upon the students that they are 'ambassadors' for the school and all that this entails.
- Everyone participating in the program, principals, co-coordinators, teachers, and importantly the students, have to have a shared sense of purpose and feel supported.

The student experience

Year 9 students, Jake, Kristina, Zoe, Owen, Alex, Stacey, Rhoda and Shruti, proved to be a reflective group of interviewees who willingly shared their experiences to date.

According to the students, emerging outcomes seem to be improved confidence, skill development and shared enjoyment of the work for the Year 9 mentors and the primary students.

First we asked them why they volunteered

Zoe opted for sports coaching and teaching games and makes this observation:

I like to teach little kids - it's fun. They are fairly well behaved and listen.

Alex and Owen both have older siblings who were peer mentors previously and passed on good accounts of the experience. Alex has enjoyed the experience so far but mentions that:

Some of them are a little restless and run around.

Owen likes the variety offered by the program and sharing his skills with the younger children. He says:

I mentor in sports, soccer and fishing... (And learn more about fishing at the same time!)

What is it like teaching someone?

Rhoda was a bit nervous at first when she realised she would have to work with the classroom teacher and a whole class! She soon relaxed with the guidance and support of the Grade 5 teacher. Rhoda mentions the ‘enthusiasm’ of the younger children, their responsiveness to her leadership and the way they greet her when she arrives at the school.

Shruti was not all that ‘nervous’ with her Grade 5 students but remarks:

I didn't know anyone but I was well prepared. I chose numeracy (mentoring) because it's fun and I don't like sport!

At first Owen found his Prep students a bit nervous (older students could seem a bit awesome at first) but he soon mastered the skill of putting them at ease by sharing jokes and making them laugh – a sure way of getting them to relax and ready for learning.



Hampton Park SC Students Christine, Ashleigh, Shawnee and Heaven with Bill Hains Coral Park PS.

What have you learnt?

Kristina mentors at a local kindergarten. She points out the different approaches and levels of learning at preschool and primary school and notices that preschoolers may be a little harder to coordinate when at play:

If the kids all want to get on the swing at the same time, I need to coordinate this... and make them go one at a time. Sometimes I need help from the teacher.

Kristina thinks that the successful mentoring of preschoolers requires *patience* in abundance.

Stacey observes that,

...It's harder to boost kids who don't [yet] know how to read.

So, after consulting with the classroom teacher, she adopts a guidance approach with a Grade 1 literacy group, letting the students *do it themselves*, as much as possible in sounding out words. She is very encouraging and the children know she's there to assist with any challenges along the way.

What do you most enjoy about it?

Jake enjoys his mentoring role in literacy. He's taken the challenge on board and notes that peer mentoring has been a confidence builder and has developed his understanding of responsibility. When asked what he has enjoyed the most about the experience he says:

...Being able to move around the room, helping the students. I like talking to the students, asking questions and getting good answers.

Year 9s like to get out and about for some 'hands-on' learning experiences – so here's a typical remark from Alex:

You get out of class but then learn to enjoy the activity too.

Kristina said that at the kindergarten...*the kids recognise you and greet you.*

What was the most surprising thing to happen to you in this program?

Some of the students return to mentor at their old primary schools. Stacey, who mentors Grades 1 and 2, was surprised at the changes in early years' learning since she was in Grade 1 and notes:

It's good to see how learning has changed - how the kids learn differently now. When I was in Grade 1, I did colouring. Now they're writing in diaries!

Jake is also impressed by the use of journals in primary schools. He has seen this at first-hand since he's begun mentoring in literacy.

Shruti doesn't find the increased responsibility onerous. She remarks:

I like the way the children look up to you.

Thoughts from the Coordinator

Ciro Ferra, Student Involvement Coordinator at Hampton Park Secondary College, together with supporting school staff, encourages and organises student engagement across the school in co-curricular programs with a leadership focus.

Year 9 Peer Mentoring is a significant component of the whole school program. With 50 students out every week, the logistics involved are considerable. Students make their way to their host schools on foot, by bike, or in a car shuttle from school. To minimise disruption the mentor classes are scheduled for either first thing in the morning or last thing in the afternoon. Upon arrival at the school the students 'sign-in' and then go to their respective classes. Like their adult counterparts, they are expected to be at their classes on time.

We asked Ciro to respond to a few questions on the impact of Peer Mentoring.

What are some of the benefits the Peer Mentoring program has brought to the students and the whole school community?

Ciro notes that experiences in the local community fosters student leadership skills and, in turn, bring rewards back to the school. He observes students,

...bringing something back into the school, once they've developed their leadership skills with their camps and programs.

Students can hone leadership skills working in school-related programs run outside the school environment. Ciro sees student engagement with the community as *a great publicity tool that promotes a positive image of the college in the community*. Furthermore, he believes that,

Some of the increases of enrolments in Year 7 have to do with the programs we have run across at the primary schools.

One very noticeable result of well-planned interaction with local primary schools has been the significant amount of requests for engagement with other music and sports programs, as well as lunchtime and after-school coaching activities.

In the Coordinator's opinion, it's uplifting' for staff and students to experience a sense of connectedness to the primary schools. He cites the example of Hampton Park SC student volunteers responding to an SOS from River Gum Primary School to coach inter-school sporting teams.

How has the Peer Mentoring program particularly benefited participating students?

Ciro responds:

I've seen the students who have had exposure to the Peer Mentoring program in Year 9 develop further when later exposed to Year 10 leadership programs and Year 11 peer support programs. I've certainly seen the level of maturity increase. Often those kids who have had a go at these sorts of programs will take on future opportunities within the school. So, yes, definitely, I've noticed that improvement.

Each Peer Mentoring student is encouraged to keep a reflective journal and to take a responsible, analytical approach to the work with its rewards and challenges. Ciro recommends an open and honest approach to journal entries and remarks on the process,

These journal responses can be powerful for revisiting issues and experiences and thinking about them.

Final impressions

The visit left us with the strong sense of a school acting on its belief in the capacities of its young people; and undoubtedly the local school community shares this conviction as well.

For more information on the Peer Mentoring program please contact:

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Mansfield Secondary College

The old way

Teachers are used to 20th century teaching: one teacher for a group of students who meet and work upon the same learning activities concurrently.

The challenge

The 21st century needs teachers who can understand and respond to the demands of the real world of work and the need for the skills of lifelong learning to be imparted to our students.

We must enable teachers to operate effectively outside the walls of a classroom, without the structure of a timetable and beyond the traditional concept of a school

The intent

Mansfield Secondary College will further develop its move away from the classroom, using the community and the workplace, to develop student skills, attitudes and values.

Here are some examples of how Mansfield College is working towards these goals.

Alpine School

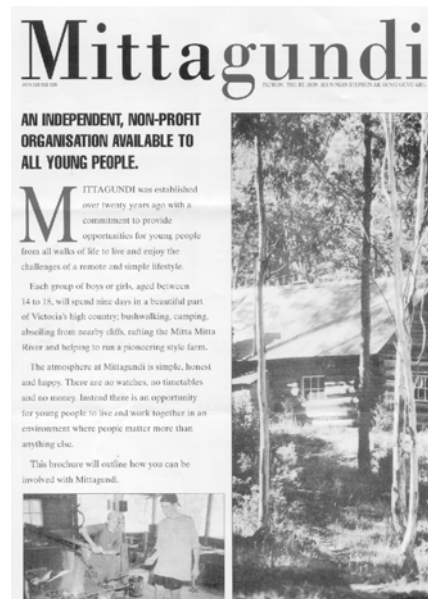
Six Year 9 students were selected to spend term 2 at the Alpine School. While there they will work on a range of projects. Currently they are planning their stay and fund raising.

Mittagundi

Year 9 students are given the opportunity to visit Mittagundi in groups of four to six. They live and work for ten days with students from around Victoria.

Interschool sport

The College has produced a number of elite athletes in football athletics and cycling. All students are encouraged to participate in intra and inter school sport. Recently a number of our year nine students were members of our successful regional swimming team.



Adventure challenge



A Middle School unit called Adventure Challenge, which allows students to obtain both the Duke of Edinburgh Award, CFA basic skills training as well as environment education is offered to Year 9 students. This semester, 8 students have selected the unit and have completed overnight walks in the Victorian Alps and at Wilsons Promontory.

Tech Crew

A group of 7 students from our Middle School are being trained to assist in the maintenance and development of our ICT resources. It is hoped that they will form the nucleus of a group of students who will provide a help desk facility to the college and ultimately the same service to the town on a commercial basis.



Instrumental music

Students are able to get instruction in a range of musical instruments and then hone their performance skills by joining one of the many performance groups run as part of our program.



SBNAs

The College at present has some 90 students enrolled in School Based New Apprenticeships (SBNAs). A number of our year 9 students have chosen to take up this option once they reach age 15. They spend one day a week working in local business.

Staff development

The staff is using Moodle, a course management system (CMS), to help create an effective online learning community.

A screenshot of the Moodle website homepage. The browser address bar shows 'http://moodle.org/'. The page features a yellow header with the Moodle logo and a navigation menu. The main content area includes a 'Welcome to Moodle!' section with a graduation cap icon, a 'Moodle Community' section with a group of people icon, and a 'Moodle Development' section with a tree icon. On the right side, there is a search box, a login form, and a 'moodle.com.au' logo with a kangaroo. The left sidebar contains a 'Main Menu' with links like 'Free Support', 'Documentation', and 'Downloads', and a 'Latest News' section with recent updates.

Stawell Secondary College

Stawell Secondary College has adopted an integrated curriculum approach to learning through the *Storm Water and Natural Solutions (SWAN)* project. The project has gained recognition in the community as demonstrated in the following media release: *Flood Protection, the Environment and the Community*.

Media Release: Storm Water and Natural Solutions (SWANS) Project

Stormwater will now be a new water resource for the Stawell community under the joint funding agreement between the State Government and the Northern Grampians Shire. \$500,000 from the Stormwater and Urban Water Conservation and the Northern Grampians Shire will be used to reduce flooding, provide water for sports field and Cato Park, and provide a series of environmental assets for Stawell.

Several sites around Stawell collect or concentrate water flows during intense rainfall periods. By slowing the water through environmental wetlands it reduces these peak flows and provides a new water resource for Stawell.

Stawell Secondary College is placed at the top end of the storm water catchment and is a key location in reducing flooding in Stawell.

Acting Principal Julie Dunn explains the significance of the project:

Not only will it reduce our own flooding problems, provide water for our sporting fields, but it is an opportunity to develop wetlands on our site as an educational resource. We have even dedicated a Year 9 class to work in partnership with the Northern Grampians Shire to develop the concept and be involved in all stages of this development.



FLOOD PROTECTION Media Release
2 Dec 05

Background Information

The following section provides further information on the SWANS project.

How did you link in with SWANS?

Two years ago the school had several flooding events that required the replacement (twice!!!!) of carpet in one of the Maths rooms as well as concerns about water permeating under the gymnasium.

A meeting was organised with the Northern Grampians Shire where it became apparent that our problems were not unique - Stawell has a problem with storm water during intense summer rain events.

Infrastructure Engineer Mark Goodes raised this issue at a Stawell Urban Landcare meeting and I requested the involvement of students in the research, planning and development of the school sites most likely to be part of the solution. Students had been working on a bushland area clearing Broom and developing it as an environmental study area.



What year level is taking part and how many students?

There is one class each semester between 18-22 students in each. Students choose this unit as part of the electives offered at Year 9. The class runs twice a week for 96 minutes. Students volunteer and are expected to be involved outside class time as required.

How is it part of students' curriculum?

This project integrates various curriculum areas from the Victorian Essential Learning Standards' three strands: discipline-based learning, interdisciplinary learning and physical, personal and social learning. The following provides examples of how the knowledge skills and behaviours are developed through this project.

Interpersonal development

Students work in diverse teams within and beyond school to complete complex tasks. Some of these tasks are self-managed by the team, with limited teacher input. This

allows students to take responsibility for selecting a team that is likely to function effectively, allocating tasks, assigning and taking leadership roles, determining timelines and action plans, and monitoring and evaluating task achievement. Where required, students initiate strategies to deal with any problems they encounter. They assess their own contribution to the team and provide useful feedback to peers. Students also reflect on the success of team management and learning in achieving agreed goals.

Students work collaboratively, negotiate roles and delegate tasks. Working with the strengths of a team they achieve agreed goals within set time frames. Students respect and build on the ideas and opinions of team members reflect on the effectiveness of learning in a team and develop strategies for improvement.

Civics and Citizenship

This dimension focuses on the development of skills and behaviours students need to interact with the community and to engage with organisations and groups.

Communication

Students regularly present information, ideas and opinions for a variety of purposes, to a range of audiences, in both formal and informal settings. They identify the key messages they wish to communicate and structure their ideas in a logical and coherent manner. They experiment with a range of presentation forms and seek feedback from their audience as to the effectiveness of their communication. Students work together to develop criteria, which can be used to evaluate their presentations.

Students use the communication conventions, forms and language appropriate to the subject to convey a clear message across a range of presentation formats to meet the needs of the context, purpose and audience. They provide and use constructive feedback and reflection to develop effective communication skills.

What does it mean in the long term for the school?

This is an environmental area that can be used by Science (and other) students and will become embedded in the curriculum.



The school will have taken responsibility for its land and fulfilled a stewardship obligation for an important natural reserve.

With the potential savings of water to irrigate the school oval we will have contributed to reducing the downstream flooding of Stawell.

What other environmental projects has Stawell Secondary College been involved in?

Stawell Secondary College has been part of the following Environmental Projects:

- The Powercor funded ‘Past, Pleasant & Future’ Project: constructing a Bicycle/Walking Track from Stawell to Lake Lonsdale, which includes many environmental outcomes.
- Granites Groundwater Pumping Project, a major salinity reduction project run in a partnership with a local landowner, Wimmera Catchment Management Authority, a local landowner and the Grange Golf Club.
- Sisters Rocks Reserve Weed Management Plan: researched, planned and carried out by students with the support of Parks Victoria, experts in plant identification and Stawell Rural Fire Brigade.
- Annual tree planting events in collaboration with Department of Primary Industry and Project Platypus (umbrella group for 12 local Landcare groups).
- Stawell Secondary College Environmental Area: a 5-hectare bushland area on school land developed with the support of the Stawell Weeds Group, Stawell Gold Mines, Project Platypus and Powercor Australia.

Why do these projects?

These projects aim to transform learning for young people, solve local environmental issues and build new cooperative community relationships.

The project is more of a journey than an arrival with richness of experience and personal growth that is individual. For some students, using a telephone to communicate with ‘strangers’ is a substantive achievement. For another student delivering a speech to 2,000 people is their milestone.



This project allows students to bridge the gap between school and ‘the real world’, link with the broader community and make a substantive contribution to the local environment and community infrastructure.

Student responsibility and personal accountability are inherent features and delivered by allowing students to take charge of their part of the project. What they are doing is real, with a substantive budget, hands on and is highly regarded by the community.

Year 9 student testimonials - April 2006

I never really knew what the wetlands were until I came to ecology. I have learnt a lot in the last few weeks about the wetlands. They really do help our environment. I hope to learn more in the next few months.

Emily

I have learnt lots of interesting things about the wetlands: like they don't always have to be wet! I hired David de Clifford to come with his bobcat and help us pull out all the weeds.

Andrew

I enjoy doing the project. I have learnt heaps of things that can help with the school's wetland and I've also developed more people skills.

Sam

The Stawell flash flooding was captured on video by David Simmons, Storm Planet Video. The video clips can be viewed at <<http://www.stormplanet.com/videos.htm>>.

The City Centre

The City Centre Outreach Project: Supporting student research in local communities

In 2004 the Education Foundation opened the City Centre, a classroom without walls in the centre of Melbourne. The Centre offers a week-long program for Year 9-10 utilising the resources of the city through research activities and organised workshops. Students work in teams to research a hypothesis they have developed about something that interests or concerns them in the CBD.

The City Centre model emerged from a significant research on effective pedagogies for engaging adolescent learners. As Peter Cole, educationist and researcher says:

We know students respond positively to a curriculum that links to and is meaningful in their lives outside as well as inside the classroom, an authentic curriculum. They value opportunities to explore new ideas in depth and to do so in cooperative learning situations in which they feel secure and are able to take intellectual risks.

Hypothesis based action research provides a model of the kind of learning that gives learners a degree of independence in researching issues that matter to them. Two years down the track the message from teachers and students who have participated in the City Centre program is resoundingly positive.

In 2005, the Education Foundation gained funding for a two year period from the William Buckland Foundation to support schools in Neighbourhood Renewal areas to access the City Centre program and the pedagogies it models, with the view to integrating such approaches in the Year 9 curriculum in their schools. The aim of the project is to extend the principles of the City Centre model by tapping into the learning resources of local community. The funding provides full scholarships for 25 Year 9 students from each of the participating schools, over a two-year period.

Project aims

- Develop a model and implement strategies to engage eight disadvantaged Neighbourhood Renewal schools and their communities in a dynamic process to reform curriculum and pedagogy for Years 9 and 10.
- Provide mentoring support to teachers to assist them to maximise use of the City Centre program and the learning principles that support it.
- Develop and implement best practice evaluation and assessment strategies to track and measure outcomes over the two year period.
- Initiate strategies to communicate learning from the project to Victorian state schools and beyond.

The first step to achieving a process of dynamic curriculum reform at a local community level was to engage schools in the City Centre Program. In year one of the project the primary focus has been on maximising the learning potential of the City Centre program. Six schools from five different Neighbourhood Renewal areas participated in the project, supported by the Outreach Fellow. The experience of working closely with individual schools, students and teachers has provided valuable insights into the potential for curriculum reform at the Year 9 level.

The coaching/mentoring role of the Outreach Fellow has been constructed as a process whereby the Outreach Fellow models approaches to working with action research methodologies with Year 9 students, develops relevant resources, and provides opportunities for reflection and evaluation at each stage of participation in the program.

The evaluation and assessment strategy for the project overall, is an action research methodology in a 'plan, act, observe, and reflect' cycle. Such an approach ensures that insights gained from one classroom in one school can be used to guide future actions in another classroom in a different school. It also enables a more flexible and responsive approach that meets the distinct needs of individual schools. Emerging from this process is significant data that will be used to shape case studies of each of the participating schools. The case studies will tell the story of each individual school's journey in transforming the curriculum for Year 9, through a process of: reporting on activities, analysing teacher and student evaluations, describing the overall school philosophy and the middle years' reform agenda. The case studies will therefore grow and change over the two-year period.

As the project has evolved the concept of a multi layered action research process has emerged, so that not only are students engaged in a process of learning how to use action research models for learning, but so too are their teachers in facilitating that process, and in reflecting on their part in the explicit teaching of skills needed to conduct action research. On another level, the Outreach Fellow, in orchestrating and supporting the project, uses an action research model to develop and refine the models that might build teacher, student and community capacity in strengthening the relationship between students, teachers, the school community and the local area. Action learning and reflective practice are therefore emerging as powerful tools for not only engaging young people in learning, but also as a dynamic process for effecting real change in classroom pedagogy through teacher learning, and for building stronger communities that can facilitate that process.

Through this process of multi layered action research the Outreach Project will be able to gather valuable data which will inform the refinement of the City Centre program, teacher learning and the possibilities for extending the City Centre model into local communities.

The Outreach Project – Strategic directions for sustainable action research in local communities

The project commenced in May 2005 and is due to finish in April 2007. The aim of Integrating Best Practice principles across the Middle Years curriculum and Applying the City Centre model to doing action research in the local community is however a complex process and requires attention on a number of levels, namely on student learning, teacher learning and community capacity building, over an extended period of time. The project therefore hopes to establish sustainable approaches that can survive beyond the life of the project.

The following framework will inform the next phase:

Professional development: Action research requires a different approach to teaching. The teacher becomes a facilitator of student led research, but there is also an important role for the teacher to play in making explicit the skills required for doing action research in teams. There is considerable scope and need for direct teaching. Current directions in secondary school education, particularly Victorian Essential Learning Standards and Principle of Learning and Teaching P-12, support such action learning approaches. Teacher professional development is essential for these approaches to work.

The Outreach Fellow has designed a Teacher Professional Leave program that will provide teachers with the opportunity to explore the teaching and learning approaches necessary to effectively engage students in action learning. The proposal is based on a model of professional development that allows the teacher to adopt the role of professional learner, action researcher and reflective practitioner. It is an approach that draws on current thinking about effective professional learning. Using a blend of formal and informal adult learning methodologies the proposal will facilitate teams of teachers from 6 Neighbourhood Renewal schools in an action research process that enables them to learn, research, experiment and create new approaches to working with Year 9.

Curriculum Development: To effect real change in approaches to Year 9 the overall curriculum needs to be reviewed and assessed in terms of its capacity to engage students with active learning that involves them with their community, and gives them a sense of belonging. The Teacher Professional Learning proposal has at its core the concept of curriculum innovation. One of the outcomes of this project will be that teachers will develop materials and approaches, which can be shared with other teachers. A bank of resources will be made available which will make such approaches sustainable in the participating schools and beyond. This will be built into the dissemination strategies of the project.

Research: An important aspect of the Outreach Project is to draw on current initiatives and innovative practices in the local national and global arenas. The Outreach Fellow will explore models of best practice for action learning in Learning

Communities. Gathering data about Neighbourhood Renewal activities in four Neighbourhood Renewal areas will build a resource bank of 'Big Issues' for student research. The case studies of participating Neighbourhood Renewal will add to this body of research, providing models for other schools that may have similar issues but are not in designated Neighbourhood Renewal areas.

The research aspect of the project is important in terms of relevance to current contexts and to the sustainability of such approaches beyond the time frame of the Buckland project.

Building community capacity: Towards a learning community

Progress thus far suggests that Neighbourhood Renewal areas are well placed to develop the cross-sectoral networks necessary for developing learning communities. The Outreach Project will provide a focus for collaboration between possible stakeholders of a Learning Community. Whilst it is beyond the scope of this project to drive the creation of Learning Precincts in Neighbourhood Renewal area, the networks currently being established will certainly pave the way for such initiatives to flourish.

Student action research in the local community could be more easily affected if the connections between different government and community agencies concerned with education and community wellbeing were facilitated and networks developed. This process is already in train in Neighbourhood Renewal areas and will be strengthened through the strategies outlined for the next stage of this project.

Meetings with potential learning partners in three Neighbourhood Renewal areas: Doveton, Collingwood/ Richmond, Braybrook and Broadmeadows demonstrate the potential of such activities. There is considerable good will and enthusiasm in these communities to do this work. Also, two schools that have already participated in the City Centre Program in 2005 will join the project in 2006 as their areas have now been designated as Neighbourhood Renewal. Their inclusion will provide the opportunity to implement some of the learning from 2005 to direct the school participation in the Neighbourhood Renewal process.

Evaluation, review and dissemination

In keeping with the action research approach adopted in this project these strategies will be reviewed and evaluated at the end of each quarter to assess their effectiveness. This will be done through a qualitative action research process of gathering data including:

- Participating teacher journals and reflections
- A record of meetings
- A register of activities

- Student evaluations
- Community stakeholders feedback
- Case studies of participating schools

A research report will be compiled at the conclusion of the project detailing and evaluating the approaches adopted and will include case studies of the 9 participating schools over a two year period.

For more information on the City Centre, please visit our website:

<http://www.educationfoundation.org.au/>

Liz Suda, *Buckland Outreach Fellow, December 2005*

The Alpine School

Introduction

The Alpine School Program is a unique program, which has been designed to address adolescent needs and harness their energy in positive ways. It recognises that Year 9 Students are on the threshold to adulthood and need to be given the space and challenges to make the transition to the mature life and way of thinking they envisage for themselves as adults.



To visit The Alpine School website and learn more, click the logo above

Profile

Opened in April 2000 as an innovative specialist setting for leadership education, the Alpine School is unique within the Department of Education & Training. Situated at 1600m near Dinner Plain Village in the Victorian Alps, the school provides an intensive, high quality leadership and enterprise program for small teams of Year 9 students selected from Victorian government schools.



Mission and school charter

'The Alpine School will deliver innovative and high quality leadership and enterprise educational programs to school students, and actively promote enterprise and leadership behaviours in the Victorian School Community.'



Beliefs and values

How students learn

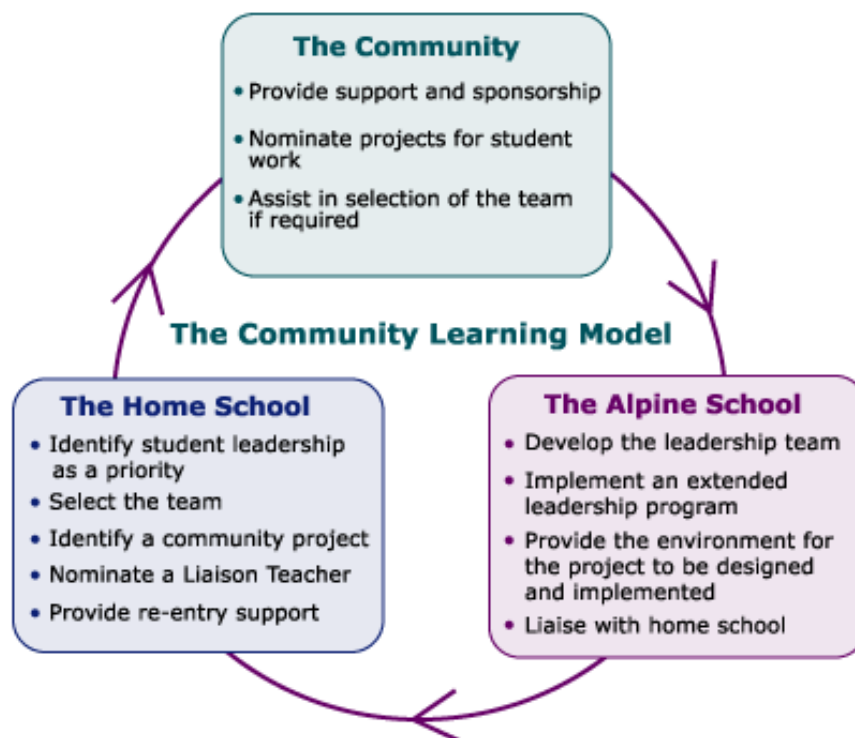
1. Students learn best:

- when they can see concrete outcomes for their learning and these are not too far away
- where they can take risks and make mistakes in a supportive environment
- where learning tasks are challenging but achievable
- when the learning activities address all senses

- when they are engaged in their learning
 - where they have responsibility for designing and directing their learning
 - by formally and informally reflecting on their experiences
 - from assessment, which is related to outcomes and is multi leveled
 - when they see a purpose to their learning and their learning has personal relevance.
2. Students have different ways of thinking and learning based on sensory preferences, learning styles and personality.
 3. Collaborative learning is valued for adolescents.
 4. Team learning supports the learning process.
 5. Students need to be given the opportunity to translate their experience into personal practical knowledge.
 6. Learning by doing is important in translating learning into personal practical knowledge.
 7. Self-appraisal assists in students learning from their experience.

Community Learning Model

Underpinning the approach taken at The Alpine School is a **Community Learning Model** that relates to the Alpine School, the Home School (or local school) and the Community (that is the Home Community where the students live).



One key feature of this Community Learning Model is that each team of students from a school is expected to develop a proposed Community project in consultation with their school and its community. This project is intended to form the basis of the teams' development task over the period of the term at the Alpine School. The home school's Liaison Teacher is also expected to be involved and aware of the project, its place and development and the follow-up for the project to be implemented. Project examples include planning a community playground for a local town in cooperation with the Local Council and planning the reception and progress of the Olympic Torch through a small rural community to involve local primary Schools and community members in this unique experience.

A Koorie-specific Alpine School program

A group of Year 9 Koorie students attended the Alpine School in Term 1 2006. Department staff from the Koorie Strategy Branch played an integral role in overseeing the Koorie-specific Alpine School Program. The program commenced in January with thirty-four Koorie students from across Victoria participating in the six-week residential program.



Students work in groups to build a raft. It's built from scratch, and then each team tests their rafts in the nearby lake.

Two Koorie Supervision Staff (KSS) were involved in the development and delivery of the program. The KSS were an integral part of the student health and wellbeing team at the Alpine School. These staff provided cultural knowledge and guidance for the Alpine teaching staff in the development of curriculum activities and acted as a conduit between students and their parents and families.



Students and staff are eagerly awaiting the arrival of parents and guardians on the first day of Parent Visiting Weekend.

The Alpine School program includes a Parent Visiting Weekend and this was held in February. Students were able to spend time with their families to share their experiences and catch up on home news. A community barbecue brought the students, families and staff together with students providing a cultural song and dance entertainment event.

The program culminated with a presentation night in March. The event was attended by school principals and Koorie staff, from all over Victoria and members of the Koorie Strategy Branch. The evening showcased the development and growth of the Koorie students as they demonstrated a range of skills they had attained. This included a culturally-specific song and dance performance. The Koorie-specific program for Year 9 Koorie students has been seen as a great success.

Dr Mark Rose attended on behalf of the Minister for Education and Training said,

...the Alpine School represents a teaching style that is closest to our traditional way of exchanging knowledge. If this is the communities' future leadership, we are in good hands.



One of the sessions at the Alpine School was Cultural Awareness, part of the program was for the students to paint egg shaped moulds, which represents their culture and beliefs.



Students were taken on an expedition to Falls Creek. With the assistance of the Alpine School teachers, students were required to organise, pack and do most of the work for the two-night expo. Students needed to decide what to take on the expo, who was in charge of first aid, in charge of the compass etc.

Knowledge Bank Case Studies

Maffra Secondary College

Sue Clancy, Loueen Smith, Karen Milner and Caroline Duck decided to improve attendance and learning outcomes of Year 9 students by totally redeveloping their Year 9 program. The journey the school took, together with details of the various models considered, including a map of the new Year 9 program, are captured in the PowerPoint presentation.

[Implementing change in the Year 9 program at Maffra Secondary College \(Teacher Professional Leave\)](#)

Lyndhurst Secondary College

Nicola Park, Tanya Blanch and Marc Butler used their Teacher Professional Leave (TPL) on The Real Thing. The Real Thing is a subject introduced to Year 9 at Lyndhurst Secondary College to better engage students in their learning. It focuses on providing students with an authentic curriculum based on real life and real student interests. The pedagogical approaches to The Real Thing are based on negotiated curriculum, constructive student-teacher relationships and catering for learning styles, learning preferences and mixed abilities

[A program for Pedagogical Change at Year 9 \(Teacher Professional Leave\)](#)

Heatherhill Secondary College

Robyn Hughes, Richard Hastings, Janette Peterson and Erin Rabot focused their TPL on student engagement and the development of curriculum and strategies that centred on Year 9 adolescents' learning about their own physical, social, emotional and intellectual development, with greater links to local community and real life. The notion of authentic learning was an important consideration. A thematic teaching approach, incorporating lots of group work, self managing behaviour, and learning situations that were gender specific and involved building relationships, was adopted.

[Year 9 - Personal Learning Journey \(Teacher Professional Leave\)](#)

Rosebud Secondary College

Access to Excellence funding allowed Rosebud College to completely restructure their Year 9 maths curriculum. It now includes short topics, investigative projects, problems solving and real-life examples. A numeracy team implemented the program, and both teachers and students are now much more engaged.

[Year 9 Maths at Rosebud Secondary College \(Exemplary\)](#)

Brighton Secondary College

Andrew Hill, Richard Minack, Brenda Welsh and Jane Whitman focused on the question: 'How can we best meet the specific learning needs of our Year 9 students?' The team gathered relevant information through correspondence with schools, on-site school visits and a literature review. This information has already influenced the Year 9 program in a number of ways and is also being considered in their Year 9 program for 2006, when it is expected that the new Year 9 Discovery Centre will commence.

[Learning Design for the Year 9 Discovery Centre \(Teacher Professional Leave\)](#)

Upwey High School

Malcolm Martin, Karen Davey, Ric Dooley, Ann-Maree Southern, Julie Evans and Glenys Hetherton focused on the Year 9 Review. The Team reviewed the curriculum at Year 9. The three focus areas for the research are directly relevant to the Blueprint: the proposal recognises the importance of innovation in delivering improved results and aims to support designing, implementing and evaluating programs to meet student needs; developing effective partnerships within the school and within the broader community; closely focussed on Flagship Strategy 1 - Student Learning and experience in innovation, creativity and problem-solving.

http://knowledge.education.vic.gov.au/sites/knowledgebank/Teacher%20Professional%20Leave/TPL_SL_UpweyHS_Year9Review_Team.doc

Suggested activities for schools:

1. Implications for policy and practice

Use this section of the paper to explore the suggestions and their relevance to your school.

Develop an action plan that responds to those suggestions that your school would like to implement.

2. Case studies

Read through the case studies and discuss how they might apply to the local context.

Make contact with the schools sharing their practice to discuss their work or to arrange a visit to see a particular program in action.