

Yarram Secondary College - Year 9 Community Program

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Aims

In an effort to improve engagement in our students, Yarram Secondary College has implemented a Community Program for all Year 9 students which is now in its third year. The program was designed to develop students who are both academic achievers and positive contributors to our community. We have based our curriculum development on four key points:

- Greater emphasis on student-centred learning
- Establishing close links with organisations external to the school
- Increased use of off campus learning resources
- Developing and sustaining a committed community of learners
- Pathways development links to Post Compulsory Education

Our intention for the program was to create a learning environment that encourages students to become independent, self-motivated learners and communicators. This program has been very successful, and has encouraged initiatives in other areas of the school.

Resources

Where possible we have tried to maintain these classes with smaller numbers (approximately 15). Some of the costs are funded through the Youth Advance Program, with other activities funded through the Student Resource Package. Assistance through the generosity of community organisations such as the Yarram CFA, Yarram SES, Woodside Beach SLSC and Yarram Regent Theatre greatly aid this program. Attempts are made to avoid student contributions, but these are sometimes necessary.

Description of project

- [School Profile and relevant background](#)
- [Influences and reasons for establishing the project](#)
- [Scope and Sequence of Activities](#)

School Profile and relevant background

History/Location

Yarram Secondary College serves an isolated, 7-12 rural community 220 kilometres east of Melbourne. The township has a population of 1,800 and the College has existed for over 50 years. It is situated between South and East Gippsland and is close to the coast. Its relative isolation is compounded by poor access to public transport. The nearest large towns are Traralgon and Morwell to the north and Sale to the east, all approximately a one hour drive. Most post-secondary training and education opportunities involve leaving Yarram.

Demographics

The student population is predominantly from English speaking backgrounds, and is fairly stable at 420.

Curriculum

In 2003 the college changed the curriculum structure, moving to a year level approach, replacing the middle school Vertical Modular Grouping system that had served the college for over 10 years. The extensive curriculum review involved in this change enabled the development of visionary initiatives such as Innovation and Excellence (Phase 1), Leading Schools Program (Phase 1), the implementation of PreCAL and consolidation of VCAL.

The new structure incorporates a team approach to teaching in Years 7 and 8 with fewer teachers delivering the students program, an integrated curriculum, class work groups and a team approach to student management and well being. In Year 9, a community based curriculum offers students extensive opportunities outside of the college to participate in community service, environmental programs, outdoor education and emergency services. This program has wide endorsement from the community and members of our college community. The year 10 program has been closely aligned with the Year 11 and 12 program to better prepare students for the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) and VCAL and to enable more extension opportunities for year 10 students. It also allows the college to maximise its post compulsory offerings. The college offers the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) and a strong range of Vocational Education Training (VET) subjects.

Influences and reasons for establishing the project

A review of our Student Attitudes to School Survey, Staff Opinion Survey, and Parent Opinion Survey highlighted a need to develop a program which increased the engagement of students and staff. A catalyst for change occurred in 2001 when our school developed a Middle Years Reform Action Plan. Once the action plan was completed, our staff were quite willing to follow through with the recommendations because the need for change was evident.

The Year 9 Community Program developed from dissatisfaction with the vertically integrated Middle School system that operated until 2002.

The college made a commitment to change and entered into a long series of discussions that began in 2001 and continued well into 2002, before the following four principles were established to redevelop the year 7 to 10 program at the college.

1. Strengthening relationships between primary and secondary schools to improve tracking of students.
2. Curriculum review and re-design to promote powerful learning and improve student engagement.
3. School re-organisation to support transforming teaching and learning.
4. Pathways for young people, and tracking of progress and student movements.

On the basis of these principles, three goals were established for new curriculum within the college to promote

- engagement, leading to successfully achieving adolescents
- more effective curriculum, teaching and organisational practice
- genuine partnerships and long term support for teachers.

Further discussions established the following broad guidelines for curriculum Years 7 - 10.

Years 7 and 8

To operate as a linked junior school with a core curriculum and fewer teachers- possibilities for curriculum offered across year 7 and 8 as a single course, or for teaching in teams. The maths/science and English/SOSE subject areas are combined, allowing a team of teachers to deliver at least 50% of the teaching time to each year 7 and 8 class. The curriculum is linked emphasising cooperation, pastoral care and partnerships.

Year 9

Activities-based curriculum with a significant amount of time spent outside the classroom (and school) on community, camp-based and/or alternative setting programs.

Year 10

To be established as preparation for senior secondary school certificates, to address the 'jump' between Middle School and VCE with increased possibilities for Year 10 students to begin VCE in some form. This is in tandem with an advocacy program (students/staff develop individual learning plans), work experience and Vocational Training Programs through TAFE, PreCAL (an introduction to VCAL in the post compulsory years), City Camp and timetable blocking to encourage students to undertake at least one VCE subject.

The focus on an activities-based curriculum with community links led to the development of the Community Program at Year 9.

Specific skills that are developed include organisation, resilience, independence and responsibility

For Year 11 and beyond, a broad range of classes are offered including VCE, VCAL, VET.

Scope and Sequence of Activities

The Community Program is semester based and incorporates three 75 minute periods of community involvement and one 75 minute period of activities per week. The program involves every Year 9 student, with a core feature being that the activities are delivered by passionate staff who volunteer their expertise in areas outside the traditional curriculum. After discussion with teachers it was felt important that they offer programs for which they have a personal interest and enthusiasm. This forms part of the teacher allotment.

The Community Program utilises three periods and includes working with local organisations in the Youth Advance (Woodside Beach Surf Life Saving Club), Lights and Sirens (Yarram CFA and SES), Bushcare (Landcare, DSE), Compro (Crossley House Hostel for the Aged, St. Elmo's Nursing Home, Mirridong Special School) and Community Theatre (Yarram Regent Theatre and primary schools).

Students choose their selections.

- The goal of the Bushcare program is for participants to improve local bushland. Activity revolves round the group investigating and protecting a local ecosystem while working with Landcare.
- The emergency services program ("Lights and Sirens") is designed to introduce students to the roles and tasks performed by the various emergency service organisations within our community. The program comprises both theoretical and practical "hands on" experiences.
- The Performing Arts program provides students with an opportunity to research local events and issues, presenting performances and public speaking to both school and wider community eg Anzac Day performance / National reconciliation week etc.
- The Compro is designed to make students aware of the unique aspects of the local community. This program also encourages students to become actively involved in the Yarram community, to develop skills in communication and to be aware of what the community has to offer.
- The Youth Advance program operates in partnership with the Woodside Beach Surf Life Saving Club (WBSLSC), enabling students to become qualified life savers. Students may also complete a Bronze Duke of Edinburgh Award involving service to the community, overnight excursions, and the development of specific skills and sports.

The activities focus on encouraging students to be active and take risks with optional units being Rock Climbing, Mountain Biking, Mind and Body, Fly Tying and A Taste of Asia. As staff volunteered to participate in this program, most already were involved with community groups (eg CFA, Surf Club, SES). Many of these groups already had established links to the school.

We strongly believe that our local community is one of our greatest educational assets and these programs give our students the opportunity to become involved and aware of all that Yarram has to offer.

Learning and Teaching

- [Teaching Styles](#)
- [Principles of Learning and Teaching P-12 \(PoLT\)](#)

Teaching Styles

A core principle of the Community Program is the voluntary involvement of teachers who have a passion for the activity or topic offered. Students are encouraged to participate in activities where that passion can be shared and developed. Essential to the success of the program is removing students from a classroom environment and placing them in the community. Expectations are clearly outlined and students consistently meet the standards of behaviour required in the wider community.

Teachers of the Community Program encourage students to leave their comfort zones and take sensible risks. Eg Bike Education - pushing through pain barriers to climb a hill, Drama - Public Speaking or overcoming performance anxiety, Bushcare - working hard to replant native vegetation.

Student learning utilises students' knowledge and strengths wherever possible. Students are encouraged to be the experts. Emphasis is placed on students developing independence and empowerment.

Student learning aims to:

- To foster collaborative learning and team work.
- To promote awareness of self and others.
- To encourage independence, experimentation and risk-taking in learning behaviour and problem-solving.
- To celebrate excellence.

- To develop learners who can apply their knowledge beyond the classroom to new and different situations.

The Community Program aims to engage students through offering non-traditional learning opportunities in which literacy and numeracy skills are developed in conjunction with the program's physical, social, academic and community aims.

Principles of Learning and Teaching P-12 (PoLT)

1. The learning environment is supportive and productive.

- By working outside of classroom, students and teachers may develop a deeper level of understanding and connection. Individual interest can be recognised and accommodated within the program. Students gain recognition for skills they possess which may not be shown in the traditional school setting.
- Students are encouraged to develop and express their values and opinions through the Passports.
- Open inquiry and project based curriculum may be included in the curriculum. Students are encouraged to make choices, take risks and follow their interests.

2. The learning environment promotes independence, interdependence and self motivation.

- Students choose the community group which best meets their interests. Students are explicitly taught about their whole brain learning, and evaluate their skills in teamwork, goal setting, plans for the future etc. through the Passport. They are involved in goal setting at the beginning of the semester, and evaluate their learning on the school report.
- Collaboration skills are explicitly taught, and students are encouraged to test these skills in challenging settings such as bushwalks, lifesaving training, CFA skills and theatre productions.

3. Students' needs, backgrounds, perspectives and interests are reflected in the learning program.

- Interest is raised by developing a dynamic curriculum in which students have choice in selecting community and activity groups which extend their learning. Diversity in interest, backgrounds and abilities is accommodated through the use of the portfolio of learning (Passport).
- Choice over the expression of learning is provided. Other members of the community are used as models for learning. Open ended tasks encouraging multimedia use are presented using the Passport.
- Passport encourages a diverse expression of learning and the use of ICT.

4. Students are challenged and supported to develop deep levels of thinking and application.

- The Passport encourages students to consider and develop a set of skills which are then demonstrated in a range of settings, including in the traditional KLA areas and across the domains of the Victorian Essential Learning Standards. Students then choose how they wish to demonstrate these skills in their portfolio.
- As the outcomes of the community groups are clear (Production, Qualifications), the expectations are clear. High expectations for the portfolios are held by all teachers, and past students' work is used to demonstrate the expected outcome.
- Student engagement in this program, and the application of learning enable students to reach a deep level of understanding of themselves and the challenges they face.
- Hands-on activities encourage participation by many students. Students are encouraged to take risks, exercise decision-making and time management skills, and undertake peer and self assessment.
- Imagination and creativity is fostered through hands-on tasks with clear outcomes (theatre productions, Lifesaving patrol scenarios) and through the demonstration of learning through the Passport.

5. *Assessment practices are an integral part of teaching and learning.*

- Students choose what they include in the Passport, thus what is assessed. Skills and values are assessed.
- Feedback often comes from organisations outside of the school, including CFA, Woodside Beach SLSC, Elderly peoples homes, the Yarram kindergarten etc.
- Assessment is made clear at the start of the program, and examples of past student work is displayed.
- Students set their own goals, then reflect on their successes and effort.

6. *Learning connects strongly with communities and practice beyond the classroom.*

- All community groups have close links with the community. Planning also encourages students to consider future professions.
- All areas of the program strongly support this initiative.
- ICT is used appropriately throughout the programs and in the portfolios.

How has teacher pedagogy changed with the project?

Teachers working within the Community Program have improved relationships with students (Principles of Learning and Teaching) student surveys reinforce teacher anecdotal evidence) and behavioural issues (detentions, suspensions) have diminished noticeably. Teachers have been encouraged to utilise multiple intelligence thinking tools to cater to a wider range of students' learning styles and attributes. Teachers have independently sought PD and are more eager to include ICT in developing Passports and tasks for assessment.

Assessment and reporting

Assessment

All students create a portfolio (Enterprise Passport) which covers various areas of personal development including beliefs and values, teamwork, leadership, thinking, enterprise skills and goal setting. All KLAs/Domains are encouraged to incorporate these tenets into their teaching and learning, and class time is made available for this. KLAs/Domains may use some parts of the Passport to assess student learning in their areas, while the complete task is used as a passport for entry into the senior school.

Assessment by exhibition is undertaken involving a member of the Principal class, a classroom teacher, parents/guardians and peers. Students self-assess, while demonstrating skills essential for success in the senior school such as organisation, resilience, independence, social competency and responsibility.

Reporting

Teachers are asked to report on each student. The reports include a statement of the student's goals set at the start of the semester, student self-reflection on their success and an overall comment completed by the teacher. Parental feedback on reporting has been very positive.

Victorian Essential Learning Standards

Yarram SC designed the Community Program in 2002 to better address the needs of students, teachers and the community in our area. The recent release of the Victorian Essential Learning Standards have endorsed the changes we have made, providing justifications for the time, effort and cost put into teaching the 'whole student'. In recently completing an audit of our Year 9 curriculum, we have found that all three strands of the VELS are reflected by the program and can be assessed within our current program structure. In particular, it has addressed the Strands of Physical, Personal and Social Learning, and Interdisciplinary Learning in a most gratifying way.

Physical, Personal and Social Learning

Health and Physical Education:

- Movement and Physical Activity (Level 6)- Movement skills through the activities program. Appropriate sporting behaviour and improved fitness levels through training in life saving, theatre activities etc.

Interpersonal Development:

- Building Social Relationships (Level 6)- values and beliefs examined through explicit teaching and assessment in the Passport. Managing project and working with others.
- Working in Teams (Level 6)-Activities and Community programs operate in team situations (theatre sports, CFA, SES, lifesaving patrols etc) and we also incorporate competitions, a year level camp including an overnight hike. These can be assessed through demonstration and the Passport.

Personal Learning:

- Individual Learner (Level 6)- Personal reflection and self assessment through the Passport. Skills such as goal setting, organisation, teamwork and leadership are explicitly taught. Students are introduced to the concept of Multiple Intelligences.
- Managing Personal Learning (Level 6)- Passport involves organisation. Project based activities incorporate these skills through student choice, planning and preparing to meet goals and achieve positive outcomes. Students reflect on their abilities and successes in the student section of the report.

Civics and Citizenship

- Community Engagement (Level 6)- Interact with members of the community through volunteers in community groups. Investigation of social issues from a variety of perspectives.

Discipline-based Learning

Many elements of the Discipline-based Learning Domains are included and assessed through the Community Program. For example, the Arts Creating and Making 6 and English Writing 6 etc.

This program complements the valuable learning which takes place in the traditional KLA areas at year 9.

Interdisciplinary Learning

Communication:

- Listening, viewing and responding- Provide and justify numerous points of view. Listen and present. Eg Passport exhibition, public speaking, oral presentations, group work and decision making etc.
- Presenting- Formal and Informal communication skills practiced in all areas and across different audiences. Theatre, Compro, Passport Exhibition, Multimedia presentations.

Information and Communications Technology:

- ICT for creating- Passport, multimedia presentations, movies etc.
- ICT for communicating-radios/email/multimedia presentations

Thinking Processes:

- Reasoning, processing and inquiry- problem solving (Passport), expeditions, understanding Multiple Intelligences and a variety of thinking tools eg. De Bono's Hats, Bloom's Taxonomy
- Creativity-Choice in project selection. Choice in demonstration of learning through the Passport. Calculated risk taking behaviour encouraged through activity blocks.
- Reflection, evaluation and metacognition- Self evaluation in reports, peer evaluation in Passport exhibition, problem solving using different skills and perspectives.