Project THINK
Trafalgar High’s Inquiry into New Knowledge

Year 9 Program 2008 – (established in Term 3, 2006)
Time Allocation – Seven, 48 minute periods per week
Structure – Three double sessions/One single session
Venue – Bill Slater Learning Centre, Trafalgar High School
Staff – Nine teaching staff/One Integration Aide (part time)
Structure – Three Staff Teams with Three Student Groups of 45, 45, 24 students

Model and Philosophy
The program is based upon a Teaching Learning Centred model* not a Student Centred or Curriculum based model. The learning is scaffolded, aimed at the level of student proximal development, and abundant opportunities for learning are created by a team of teachers for the student in an inquiry environment – the BS Centre. Teachers act as facilitators of learning, providing a framework for students to develop an essential skill set that uses diverse curriculum as a vehicle for achievement and continuous improvement.

Students are encouraged to be ultimately responsible for their own learning using REM Folios (Reflection, Evaluation, Meta-cognition) as focal Formative Assessment tools for recognition of their individual developmental continuum.

Skill Set
A set of fundamental skills needed to increase engagement, enhance learning and support achievement, has been identified by staff at Trafalgar High for the Year 9 cohort. These can be categorised into 3 distinct areas – skills for Self-Motivation* (setting goals, reflecting upon and striving to enhance performance, recognising success, taking educated risks), Self Managers* (perseverance, making sound choices, recognising thinking as an effective tool, working in teams, problem solving), Self Appraisers* (can articulate their needs, reflect, create strategies and actions for improvement, adaptable, can clarify).

Curriculum
A series of Units of varying content and time length have been created by the THINK staff. Curriculum is integrated across all Essential Learning Domains although there is an emphasis with some Units upon one element/strand more so then others. The use of ICT is embedded within all Units as is Applied Learning practice and the type(s) of assessment. Units are sequentially situated in the school year, based upon the potential competency of students with the identified skill set eg; The ‘Brain/Thinking’ Unit is delivered in Term 1, is more teacher directed and more structured. Curriculum delivery is varied, dependent upon the teacher team and the student group.

Assessment
Assessment for, of and as learning is utilised by staff to allow for the development of a whole student profile. REM Folio’s enable ongoing information sharing between teachers, students and parents. POLT (Principles of Learning and Teaching) practice is encouraged to engage in reflection and discussion to improve student learning.

2009
Aim – Begin program at Year 7 and 8 within a limited time fraction to develop the student skill set from initial post-primary years. It has been identified that fundamental skills learnt at the Primary level are lost over these two consecutive years. To stop this drain and allow for a more comprehensive Year 9 program to develop, there is potential to capture and develop skills at an early time in student’s secondary learning.

Which of these skills have you developed and demonstrated during Year 9 THINK so far?
In order to be assessed at the expected standard for Year 9, you must have shown ALL of these skills throughout the year...

- Show respect for all others in the classroom
- Show empathy and understanding of other people (be able to put yourself in someone else’s situation and/or experiences)
- Be able to manage conflict and solve issues you may have with others
- Understand peer pressure and how others around you might encourage you to behave inappropriately or behave well
- Being a responsible team member by completing a fair share of the work
- Share information you have learned with others in the classroom
- Listen to other people’s ideas; consider and explore their way of thinking
- Be able to keep track of how you are going in class (are you completing all work and remaining up to date?), and write or talk about it
- Know your own strengths and weaknesses so you can focus on things you do well and improve on others
- Set goals for your own learning (what do you want to learn and achieve?)
- Set strategies for your own learning (how are you going to learn and achieve what you need to?)
- Listen to feedback from teachers and others in the class and try to use it for improvement in the future
- Work well as part of a team or group
- Be able to learn and think independently by knowing what you need to find out and where to get the information, without relying on others to give you all the answers
- Manage your time in each class to meet the set deadlines
- Make up your own criteria for what you think you need to be assessed on
- Complete a self-assessment of your performance in a task or skill
- Be able to make up a range of your own questions to research
- Be able to research information effectively, without wasting time on sources that are not reliable or relevant
- Be able to tell what an accurate and reliable source is, and what is not (especially when finding information on the internet)
- Be able to problem-solve in a challenging situation
- Be able to make effective decisions
- Think in a new or creative way about a topic or concept, and use lots of different thinking tools to do this
- Change some of your ideas over time as you learn more things
- Think back on the things you have done and learned to see where you have done a good job and where you can improve next time
Teacher information for REM Journals

REM stands for reflecting, evaluating and metacognition.

Students should be working on REM Journals once a week for each week of the year. Approximately 20 to 30 minutes should be provided to allow this to occur, probably in the single period of the seven each week.

The journals provide students with an opportunity to think about the skills they have been learning, where they will be able to use these skills in the future, things they have done well, and things they can improve on in. It also provides a space for students to stick in work they would like to keep, and keep a record of things they are enjoying or have disliked, if they choose.

Students have an instruction sheet to follow so that they know what to include, and also a list of skills that they should be demonstrating in THINK to remind them over the year. These skills will probably require a discussion initially, as it is very lengthy and there may be some that students are unsure of what such skills 'look like'.

Students will probably make very brief entries initially, but should aim to make them more detailed over time. It is really important that teachers collect the journals weekly and provide feedback to students (just short comments are sufficient) so that students know their work is being valued and is for a purpose. This will also allow teachers to give students pointers on where they can make their entries more detailed and where they can improve so that the journal is a useful and valuable exercise.

One suggestion might be that 'mentor groups' are reinstated so that the same teacher works with the same group of students continually over the year. This teacher would then be responsible for collecting, reading and commenting on his/her group’s REM Journals each week. However, this may not be suitable in some cohorts of students where mentor groups would be nightmarish(!) so teams may need to make other arrangements.

If the journals are maintained effectively through the year, students will actually be keeping an ongoing self-assessment that will align directly with VELS reporting points (and make life easier for us at report time!).
REM Journal

REM stands for reflecting, evaluating and metacognition.

This is a forum for you to reflect on the knowledge and skills you have learned in THINK; consider what you have done well and what you can improve on in the future; and try to think about your own thinking.

Every week you will have some time to make an entry into your REM Journal to do these things. It is expected that you will complete these entries regularly, and try to make them better throughout the year.

Listed here are some things you need to do every week, so you should stick this sheet into the front of your journal so that you can refer back to it.

1. State today's date and the unit you have been studying this week

2. Refer to your skills list and choose a few that you think you have demonstrated this week in THINK classes

3. For each skill you have listed, please indicate somewhere you think you will be able to use this skill in the future (this could be in school, or in your home or work life)

4. Explain (don't just list) some things that you have done well this week, and some you think you should improve on next week in THINK classes

Other than these, you can also add other things to your journal you feel are relevant. For example, you could stick in work you have completed through the week, write about things that you enjoyed or disliked, write about knowledge you have learned or found interesting, draw a picture, write a poem or song – the choice is yours!

Your journal is a portfolio of evidence of your effort in this subject, and will be continually assessed, so it needs to be well presented. Each week, your journal will be collected and a teacher will make some comments on your entry to provide feedback to you on how you are going.

Hopefully, over the course of the year you will have written about ALL the different skills you should demonstrate in THINK (see the skills list). This means that you should NOT write about the same ones every week, or you will not be able to do this!