Shadowers of History
Commonwealth History Project
Moriac Primary School
Eureka Centre, Ballarat
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Background

Moriac Primary School is situated in the Barwon South region, approximately a half hour south west of Geelong. The school is set in a semi-rural environment and has an enrolment of 200 students.

In the past, the school community consisted of mainly farming families. However more recently, families are generally new to the area having moved from Geelong or inland from the coast to escape the rising property prices.

The school is structured into 9 grades, all composites. Specialist areas are covered by the Principal, Vice Principal and myself, balanced with my Literacy responsibilities. A rotation system is used across both Junior and Senior areas to cover other subject areas.

The school fosters an integrated approach with themes selected across the different year level groups. Until this year, our themes have been cyclical – Junior, three years and Middle Years, two years. However we are currently reviewing our themes and trialling new ones.

Our planning is done by teams using enquiry learning and thinking curriculum approaches. Professional development based on material from Kath Murdoch, Layne Clarke and Project Zero has been used to define and structure units of work.

The teaching of history has been approached through a variety of ways:
- as the main topic of a theme or as an element of a theme
- as part of our Kids’ Communities programs, a multi-age, interest-based program
- through specific projects, for example Artists in Schools
- through the celebration of significant events or commemorative events.

This year, themes which have a strong ‘history’ element have been:
- Change (Juniors and Years 5/6)
- Our Local Area & Geelong (Years 3/4)
- Land & Sea Explorers (Years 3/4)
- Making a Difference (Years 5/6).
About the host organisation

Our host organisation was The Eureka Centre at Ballarat. We spent the day with Education Officers, Robert Allan and Ross Adams.

As the name implies, the Eureka Centre has a focus on the events leading up to the uprising at the Eureka Stockade and its significance in the development of democracy in Victoria and Australia.

The Centre is located at the actual site of the rebellion and is well signposted and easy to locate. Architecturally, the Eureka Centre is eye catching and is designed to allow for a variety of multimedia presentations to students and the general public.

The Eureka Centre is owned and operated by the Ballarat Council. The educational programs are supported by a grant from the Department of Teaching and Training. Funding is reviewed every three years. Robert Allan, in the Education Officer’s position, is partly funded by the Ballarat Council.

The program offered at the Eureka Centre is very comprehensive and gives students the opportunity to learn through a variety of approaches and media. The program caters for a variety of age and grade levels and is linked to VELS.
About the experience

Upon arrival, we were greeted and given an overview of the Centre and an explanation of the educational programs. Both Bob and Ross were very keen to discuss our educational experiences relevant to history and how the Centre did and could enhance the students’ learning.

We were provided with an educational kit and given a tour through the facility. Fortunately, we could then see the program in action as two schools visited that day.

The introductory activity involved the students dividing into groups, representing the miners, troopers, government officials and local businessmen. The students then participated in a role-playing activity using prepared speeches for the main characters, historical artefacts and costumes. It provided an opportunity to find out about the students’ prior knowledge and set the scene. My immediate impression was of context and connections. The students were totally engaged and very responsive, asking lots of questions about the historical artefacts.

Ross then took the students through the interactive visual and audio displays, which included a stage coach, mining artefacts and Bentley’s Hotel. Again, there was lots of interaction.

In the Hall of Debate, the students were able represent the key figures that are associated with the Eureka Stockade uprising. Bob acted in the role of the judge and used carefully directed questioning to prompt awareness of social arguments and repercussions.

As a teacher, it was interesting to see how powerful this was as a strategy and an indicator of students’ understanding. Background artwork by Ross was a subtle, supportive means of helping the students identify with the historical identities.

In the theatrette, we were able to see the film, “Voices of Eureka”. We were also shown examples of students’ work on display and given access to the library and reference materials.

We then toured the facilities outside, including the Eureka Stockade Memorial and gardens, the playground and the very significant Eureka Circle artwork.

Our visit included visits to:
- the Ballarat Cemetery, where we viewed the commemorative sites of the miners and the soldiers
- the Ballarat Art Gallery, where we saw the actual Southern Cross Eureka flag.

Throughout the day, we were able to discuss and reflect on what we had seen at the Centre. Bob and Ross were not only generous with their time but very supportive. We discussed ways in which facilities such as the Eureka Centre can be further developed and how we as teachers could use these programs to develop best practice in the teaching of history.
New knowledge and practice

Throughout the day, I found myself thinking of how the teaching approaches and resources within the Centre could be shared or adapted to use at our school, both with current programs and in the planning and delivery of future themes.

I have already begun to incorporate ideas into my planning across all grade levels for the weeks ahead. I have also seen how history can be incorporated into other curriculum areas, art and Literacy being my two main areas.

Professional conversation with Bob, Ross and Heather was very positive, encouraging and supportive. Being able to exchange ideas on teaching practice and extend the range of contacts and resources and make links between school practice and our host organisation was a major benefit of the project.

Since commencing this report, I have been able to use the material as a starting point on “Discovering Democracy” with a Year 3/4 and 5/6 in their “Making a Difference” unit for next term.

A memorabilia chest and artefacts purchased in Ballarat are currently being used by the Preps-2s prior to an excursion to Sovereign Hill in early September.

My experiences during the visit have also been shared with the school community via the school newsletter.

My future plans include more detailed planning for integrated units across the school and extending resources to include material for the type of role playing and debating that I saw at the Eureka Centre.

The experience was extremely valuable and one which I hope continues to be offered to and supported by teachers.