

Australian Journal of Middle Schooling

Special Edition



Australian Journal of Middle Years of Schooling

Supported by the New Zealand Association of Intermediate and Middle Schooling

Leadership

9:00 Keynote Address
10:00 Practitioner Session
10:30 Practitioner Session

2 hours
\$85

Pedagogy

11:00 Keynote Address
12:00 Practitioner Session
12:30 Practitioner Session

2 hours
\$85

Wellbeing

13:00 Keynote Address
14:00 Staff Wellbeing
14:30 Student Wellbeing

2 hours
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What did our previous participants say about this event:

"It was great, good speakers, time to think and helpful people around to bounce ideas off."

"Getting the summaries of every presentation as a PDF was really helpful when I reported back to my school, I also contacted some of the speakers so I can visit their school".

"I went to every session and learnt so much".

"This was the networking I've been missing."

Editorial

According to Hibajene Shandomo (2010), *"Reflection is a process of self-examination and self-evaluation in which effective educators regularly engage to improve their professional practices."* It is a process that allows us the time to consider how and why, to make meaning by drawing connections to what we know and allows us the freedom to choose a new path. Reflection enables us to grow, as we look to what might assist us to "do it better next time". We engage the high-level and complex deep thinking of evaluative practices to test our thinking and develop future pathways that may better align with our learners or ourselves. And yet, when we are too busy, it is frequently the thing that drops off our radar first.

In this Special Edition, a number of middle years practitioners are not just reflecting on their practice, they are sharing these reflections. They have seen the power in considering their practice and have decided to share. With great enthusiasm and pride, they are making themselves vulnerable to share with you what has worked, what they would do differently and what they may wish to develop further.

In the first half of this Special Edition, a number of practitioners share their reflections on significant projects in their professional lives. Chalwell and Fell share their hybrid model for Year 7 camp, as they

navigate the complexities of the continued impact of the pandemic. The necessity for change has led them to consider whether they have discovered a better future for their program. Curtis provides a very heartfelt account of the journey of a non-indigenous Australian working to embed Indigenous perspectives into curriculum planning and teaching practice. Stower explores methods that have been used to develop a community of readers amongst teens, and McLean provides insights and wisdom via a reflection on a successful career in school leadership positions in New Zealand.

The second half of this Special Edition is dedicated to the 20 passionate middle years practitioners who were willing to stand up and share at the recent Adolescent Success *Meet You In the Middle Conference*, held on 30th April 2021. These practitioners from all across Australia represent teachers, curriculum leaders and pastoral leaders supporting middle years learners. Their reflections on the work they are doing in their schools provides an incredible array of projects and perspectives that stem from middle years philosophy. To you all we say thank you. You bravely shared, not just here, but in a very public forum and provided reflections of what you have been doing to support your learners, and in turn we learnt so much from you.

I am hopeful that the practitioners that you read about in this Special Edition will inspire you. I hope they encourage you, when the school year is at a peak and we begin to wrap up the term, I hope they encourage you to ensure reflection does not fall off the "to do" list. Take the time to invest in you, the leader of learning for your students. I also hope that it will inspire you to consider sharing your journeys too. My sincere thanks to the contributors to this Special Edition, your time and effort is motivation for us.

A defining condition of being human is that we have to understand the meaning of our experience. —Jack Mezirow

Dr Emily Ross
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Book Review



Balancing Challenge with Belonging: The Case for a Hybrid Model of Year 7 Camps

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Introduction

Abbotsleigh has traditionally run a full outdoor education experience for Year 7 girls in Term 1 underpinned by a 'challenge by choice' philosophy. Unfortunately, COVID-19 staffing issues meant that we were unable to provide this type of program in 2021, something that we learned less than a week from the commencement of camp. We were faced with a choice: do we cancel the camp, or can we plan something suitable to take its place? We went with the second option and ended with a hybrid model that balanced two approaches to school camps.

In this article, we briefly outline these approaches, give insight into why we had to shift from our traditional format, and ultimately make a case for school camps that blend authentic outdoor experience run by qualified instructors with low-key activities designed to create a space for connection and belonging.

Two approaches to school camp

In our experience in the Australian independent school sector, there are, broadly speaking, two conventional approaches to camps for Year 7. The first approach is to run a retreat-style camp early in the year, sometimes even in the first or second week of Term 1. On these camps, activities are designed to foster meaningful connections between students and teachers, an important protective factor for wellbeing (Neville, 2010). This sense of belonging and connectedness has been particularly significant during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has had a pronounced and disheartening impact on people's wellbeing (Edwards, Biddle, Gray & Sollis, 2020). A recent study by Magson et al. suggests that young people in NSW aged 13-16 years have not been spared from this, and the impact on girls has been particularly pronounced (2021). While Year 7 students are clearly younger than the sample studied, the results are encouragement enough to tailor programs to boost wellbeing.

The second approach is to run an outdoor education camp, encouraging students to build resilience through exposure to 'appropriate levels of challenge' (Kelly, 2019, p. 264), to develop an awareness of the natural world, to hone the affective and interpersonal capabilities that will serve them well in Year 7 and beyond (ACARA, 2021). From our school's perspective, outdoor education programs like these give students opportunities to develop interpersonal skills and build their capability to respond to new environments in a courageous and empathic manner. These skills are particularly significant given the changing nature of the Australian



workforce: 'soft skill intensive occupations will make up almost two thirds of the workforce by 2030' (Deloitte, 2017, p. 8). While this is an important consideration as we want Abbotsleigh students to leave school prepared for the demands of the modern workforce, we were motivated more by helping the girls to 'flourish' in keeping with the language of our Wellbeing Framework as well as a desire to give the girls every opportunity to recognise and demonstrate the Abbotsleigh school values: respect, perseverance, integrity, courage, and compassion.

Year 7 Camp 2021

While we originally planned for an outdoor education camp as outlined above in the second approach, we learned only a few days before camp that it would not progress. COVID-19 meant that the usual outdoor education leaders were not available, as many international instructors were understandably unable to enter Australia due to the strict travel restrictions. Our outdoor education provider told us that they could lead an expedition style hike for one night per group, run a slimmed down activities program,

and provide accommodation and some logistics staff. If we wanted to proceed, we would have to plan activities for the significant amount of time remaining, and these would need to be facilitated by teachers.

Did we want to still try to run the camp for Year 7? Though we anticipated that this would be a significant amount of additional work, we decided to proceed. This reflects the value that we place on the school camp and feedback from the current girls in Year 8 who felt that they had missed out in 2020. Last year, all camps were cancelled due to COVID-19; we did not want to repeat this in 2021.

To run the camp, we would have to supplement the outdoor experiences with activities run by Abbotsleigh staff. We wanted to avoid filler activities and instead design a program that promoted greater connections between the girls. With four days before camp, we went into planning mode. We wanted to build a program that attempted to take into account the needs of both girls and staff, particularly the role teachers they would play as they participate as well as the role that they would play during the week.

The Hybrid Program

The program that we developed blended traditional features of outdoor education camps with activities to meet the needs of our particular cohort of girls. Some of these activities focused on soft skills 'associated with collaboration such as teamwork, communication and problem solving' (Deloitte, 2017, p. 33); other activities provided space for interaction and connection.

Alongside high ropes, mountain biking, and the overnight camping expedition, activities included:

- Jigsaw puzzles (Groups of 3 completed a 500-piece jigsaw puzzle as fast as possible.)
- Art and craft (Girls made friendship bracelets and did origami.)
- Initiative activities (Girls completed a number of outside activities that required collaboration.)
- Reading (Girls had access to 90 books provided by our library or could just read what they had brought themselves.)
- Puzzles (Girls worked on a variety of lateral thinking puzzles, wordles, crosswords, sudokus and mazes)

- Board games (Girls had access to over 20 different board games.)
- Trivia (A teacher led the girls in each group through a trivia competition.)
- Mindfulness (Girls had access to mindful colouring sheets, coloured pencils and drawing pencils.)
- Film ('Inside Out' was shown to groups over the data projector.)

During the camp, students spent approximately one third of their time participating in activities such as these, one third of their time out on the hiking and camping expedition, and one third of their time engaged in outdoor activities led by qualified instructors.

Strengths

One of the key strengths of the hybrid model is that it recognises that the two conventional approaches to camp are entirely compatible and complementary, rather than mutually exclusive. Authentic outdoor experiences 'provide opportunities for the connection of individuals with nature (the natural environment), direct connection with other people (interpersonal), and importantly, with themselves (personal)' (Dickson et al., 2008, p. iv).

All of these are, in our view, complemented with and reinforced by the retreat-style activities designed to build connections. In other words, both approaches brought together in a hybrid camp are focused on student wellbeing by appealing to the human needs identified by Deci and Ryan (2000): the hybrid model cultivates a sense of autonomy and feelings of competence through the outdoor education aspects and provides space for a sense of belonging and connectedness to group.

A further strength of the model is that it recognises that student wellbeing is a collaborative activity (Timperley, 2005). Teachers at Abbotsleigh recognise the important role that they play in student wellbeing, especially in developing and maintaining strong, appropriate connections with students (O'Brien, 2008). The hybrid model better reflects this mentality, by reminding us that student wellbeing cannot be outsourced or subcontracted. The outdoor educators that we have used do an amazing job at foregrounding interpersonal skills and encouraging reflection. The hybrid model gives teachers an opportunity to build on this.



Finally, we were pleasantly surprised by the response from the students. Most of the girls enjoyed the blend of outdoor activities (camping, mountain biking, low and high ropes) and the following more sedate activities run by teachers. Overall, feedback from students was very positive.

Areas of improvement

Moving forward, we need to carefully communicate the role and responsibility of teachers on camps that blend aspects of outdoor education with retreat-style camps. This will allow teachers to opt-in in an informed manner, and to decide to participate in more conventional outdoor education camps run for other year groups if that is their preference.

Further to this, communication with teachers during the week of camp could have been clearer. This

was made difficult by the fact that one third of teachers were away each night on the outdoor expedition. In the future, we would also provide teachers with a comprehensive guidebook to outline the purpose and vision of a hybrid camp. This was not possible in 2021 due to the timeframe.

We will also work harder to support teacher wellbeing and honour the time and energy put into camps. This may involve organising activities to maximise teacher breaks, or by providing opportunities before camp for appropriate professional learning to increase a sense of self-autonomy and competence (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Finally, some girls noted that they would have liked a more physical camp. In the future, a hybrid model could allow for differentiated activities to better accommodate all our girls.

Conclusion

What have we learned from our 2021 camp experience? Primarily, we have learned that we do not have to choose between outdoor education experiences and retreat-style camps. We propose that blending the best aspects of both approaches can lead to enriching experiences for Year 7 students.

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Aboriginal Perspectives in the Classroom: An Opportunity for Deep Learning

Acknowledgement of Country

We respect and honour Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past, present and future. We acknowledge the stories, traditions and living cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on this land and commit to building a brighter future together.

We respect their culture, heritage, beliefs and relationship with the land.

We acknowledge and value the unique contribution they have made and continue to make to the life of this country. We respect elders past, present and future ...

Introduction - Synergy

When I look at Jandamarra Cadd's beautiful image "Mates", it reminds me that we need to bridge a cultural divide between Aboriginal and Non-Indigenous Australians. As a teacher, I can only hope that this will one day also reflect our education system. Cadd's "synergy of styles" holds a purity which is called "truth". Synergy, by definition, means "a combined effect greater than the sum of their separate effects" (Wider, 2017). This Aboriginal artist of Yorta Yorta descent expresses his ancestral storytelling through colour and pure emotional connection, presenting the human condition which hopes to transform his generation. I see it as a representation of the power of education to close the gap between First Nations Peoples and non-Indigenous Australians. This will only come through the synergy, the combined effects created from Aboriginal and Non-Indigenous educators.

As a non-Indigenous Australian educator, (born in Britain), I have a fear, also held by some of my colleagues, that I may offend Aboriginal people or appear ignorant to those far more knowledgeable than myself while attempting to teach Aboriginal Perspectives in my classroom. I teach in a school where most students are Non-Indigenous. The relevance and appropriateness of the content that I teach, connected to my Aboriginal Perspectives tasks are complex in nature. For example, the diversity of Aboriginal nations is not always clear, and I struggle to understand which Country and



Artwork: "Mates" by Jandamarra Cadd: Australian Aboriginal Artist of the Yorta Yorta.

which Peoples' beliefs, cultural practices, histories and stories they connect with. Nevertheless, I believe that as long I am sensitive to the truth of the history of this country, both ancient and colonial, and develop my own knowledge around the richness of the oldest continued-living civilisation on this planet, it is well worth taking some risks. I am confident that I am going in the right direction if I am aware and sensitive to the impact that colonisation had, and continues to have, on the lives of First Nations Peoples and their cultures.

A journey in Aboriginal Education.

There is an early scene from the epic film, *The Fellowship of the Rings* (Osborne, et al. 2002) where Frodo, a humble Hobbit, sets off with his steadfast companion, Sam. Frodo, rather reluctantly, is on a *hero's journey* with “the desire to do good” in his quest for the destruction of human sinfulness. When Frodo and Sam take the first steps of their journey, Sam abruptly stops and shares a thought with his admired friend, “*This is it. If I take one more step, it will be the furthest away from home that I've ever been*”. Frodo reassures, “*Come on, Sam, remember what Bilbo used to say, 'It's a dangerous business, Frodo, going out your door. You step out onto the road. If you don't lift your feet, there's no knowing where you might be swept off to.'*”

My journey towards Aboriginal Education began with a two-day professional development course in 2019, run by *Australians Together*, a not-for-profit organisation, which aims to create a “shared history” through a more truthful understanding of and respect for Aboriginal Australian culture (see www.australianstogether.org.au). *Australians Together* targets educational, workplaces and church communities. For educational communities, they build the capacity of teachers so that they can purposefully and more accurately teach elements of the Australian Curriculum, focusing on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures. *Australians Together* also provides useful resources for the educational sector and supports teachers in implementing Aboriginal Perspectives into task design. The two-day workshop was an educational yet confronting

experience as we were presented with stories and personal testimonies from Aboriginal Peoples about their experiences of many social injustices referred to as “The Wound”. I was encouraged by the responsive efforts being made by this team of dedicated people who work to present the truthful picture of the undignified and dehumanising treatment which has devastated First Nations People's cultures and civilisations.

The *Australians Together* website, includes testimony from a teacher (Australians Together, n.d.) obviously embarking on a journey of her own when she states, “*We really wanted to have an authentic experience... so we made sure that we were doing it right because this is not our area of expertise.*” I am also a teacher who is about to set off. I am no longer dragging my heels. I, and other teachers like me, cannot call ourselves heroes in the classical sense, but we are answering a call. It would be easier to refuse it, but instinctively I know that there is something transformational in the distance. I certainly require my mentors along the way if I am to ever reach my journey's end.

Our National Wound: Our troubled and brutal history.

There are obvious and well-known complexities when teaching to and about Aboriginal Australians. The truth of our nation's history challenges us and calls us to be responsive as teachers. It is time. We must acknowledge some truths which are essential to the healing of First Nation Peoples.

“There's a wound in our nation. It's an injustice towards Indigenous Australians that begun with

colonisation and is ongoing today. Despite this injustice, many Indigenous people around Australia are thriving and proudly reviving, protecting and celebrating their Indigenous culture and identity. The wound, however, is evident in the devastating statistics relating to Indigenous Australians across a range of life indicators.” (Australians Together, 2020).

It is true that we have come a long way since *Terra Nullius* and the *White Australia Policy*. However, there is more ground to cover because the gap between Aboriginal and Non-Indigenous Australians, still exists. There is an alarming rate of child mortality. Suicide rates in young Aboriginal men is over double that of Non-Indigenous Australians. Literacy and numeracy rates in Aboriginal children are still lower than those of Non-Aboriginal children. School attendance and completion have picked up but only slightly. Employment and life expectancy remain low. Sadly, many of those who were “removed” still have not found their way home, and the impact and trauma of stolen generations policies are inter-generational. For Aboriginal Peoples, the land which holds their “lifeblood” and their “connection to ancestral beings” is still disappearing and yet, they have held custodianship over it for a millennium. They still suffer displacement from their country which gives them the very identity that they are seeking to restore.

With all of this in mind, why would any teacher in a classroom welcome such a complex and *problematic* expedition? Finding a pathway without causing offence can be difficult and presents us with a paradox in that in our quest to restore justice, we must be careful that such endeavours are

not tokenism. However, as narrow as our perspectives might be, this challenge does offer us something transformational through deep reflection.

Teachers do more than teach. We are backers for social change. We enable and provoke personal shifts in the perspectives and worldviews of our students to highlight the increasing importance of their advocacy in a future world. This is where our students' learning needs to go deep, and deeper still. There are some definite rewards as teachers take some risks and “relish the disruption of the status quo”. The implementation of Aboriginal Perspectives will give rise to transformative educational outcomes. This, in turn, creates more opportunities for restorative justice for Aboriginal peoples who have suffered a troubled and brutal history.

“Discrimination and prejudice towards Indigenous Australians seem hard-wired into our society's very DNA. So how did it start and what can we do about it?” (Australians Together, 2016)

Teachers are not alone in navigating their way around the twists and turns of intercultural understanding and reconciliation, but it is also incumbent upon our education system to remain committed towards exploring new frontiers. This provides the circuit-breaker needed to develop new attitudes through learning. If education does not respond, the next generation of Aboriginal and Non-Indigenous Australians will continue to live with the acceptance of this “hard wired” attitude, born through complacency and cynicism because we have not tried to learn our way out of it.

“The injustice experienced by many Indigenous people is at odds with our national values, the things that make us proud to be Australian. It affects everyone living on this land. Because of intolerance, mainstream Australian culture has missed many opportunities to inherit aspects of rich Indigenous cultures and deep knowledge of the land we all live on”

(Australians Together, 2020).

Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority and the curriculum

The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), is committed to reconciliation between First Nation Peoples and Non-Indigenous Australians. ACARA has developed *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures* as a *cross-curriculum priority* that is embedded across all learning areas (ACARA, n.d.). It is encouraging that ACARA has worked closely with Aboriginal educators and teachers, representatives from Aboriginal education consultation committees as well as community representatives to incorporate three *Key Concepts* around Aboriginal Perspectives in education:

- A study of special connections to country/place, celebrating their unique belief systems
- A study of diversity through language, ways of life and experiences – ways of being, knowing, thinking and doing
- A study of diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, examining kinship and contribution to society (ACARA, n.d.).

ACARA, through the general capability of Intercultural Understanding, gives another opportunity for the development of knowledge and understanding, and mutual respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (ACARA, 2017). Intercultural Understanding has three key ideas. They are:

- recognising culture and developing respect,
- reflecting on Intercultural Understanding in the learning areas,
- interacting and empathising with others.

The third element, (*Interacting and empathising with others*), encourages experience into various cultures which will enable students to identify differences and similarities as well as a truer understanding of how “identities are shaped”, (ACARA, 2017). The focus on building empathy “... encourages flexibility, adaptability and a willingness to try new cultural experiences” (ACARA, 2017). In this case, empathy assists students to develop a sense of solidarity with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples through imagining their perspectives and experiences as if they were their own. The definition of empathy encompasses imagining what it might be like to ‘walk with’ and identify with others’ feelings, situations and motivations.

Pedagogies of Aboriginal Australians: The 8 Ways of Learning Framework

The 8 Aboriginal Ways of Learning (Yunkaporta 2009) is a tool or framework for learning about and from Aboriginal perspectives, recognising and utilising Aboriginal learning techniques. Using Aboriginal processes for learning

is not about content but involves the understanding of Aboriginal processes and protocols (Yunkaporta 2009). This pedagogy has the potential to improve learning outcomes for all students as they build their capacity to focus on their learning and learn to articulate it. *The 8 Ways of Learning*, explains how Aboriginal knowledge systems are imbedded into land, language, people and the relationships between them.

"From our language and our land knowledge we know there are always connections between all things, places where different elements are no longer separate but mix together and become something else. This way of working gives us new innovations as well as bringing us together"

(Yunkaporta, 2009, p.2).

The 8 Ways of Learning
(Yunkaporta, 2009, p.21):

STORY SHARING:

"We connect through the stories we share"

LEARNNG MAPS:

"We picture our pathways of knowledge"

NON-VERBAL:

"We see, think, act, make and share without words"

SYMBOLS AND IMAGES:

"We keep and share knowledge with art and objects"

LAND LINKS:

"We work with lessons from land and nature"

NON-LINEAR:

"We put different ideas together and create new knowledge"

DECONSTRUCT/ RECONSTRUCT:

"watching and then doing"

COMMUNITY LINKS:

"We bring new knowledge home to help our "mob"."



Message Stick Task.

My efforts to implement Aboriginal perspectives into my lessons are small, but I am aware of the bigger picture and my aim is to let small things grow into the kind of deeper learning developed through empathy, which can be applied to new and real-world contexts. I am slowly and carefully learning to weave an Aboriginal narrative into the fabric of my lessons. For example, I designed a task for my Year 7 Language and Culture class to make their own Message Stick. The Message Stick was used as directional tool to record their journey into other Countries - (e.g., drawn symbols could mean instructions like 'Walk straight ahead until you see the red rock. If you reach the river, you've gone too far'). Examples of Message Sticks can be found through the Queensland Museum Network (2012).

My students created their own Message Stick as a visual map of their journey throughout their first year at Thomas More College. Coming to the end of the year, I thought that it was important to encourage my students to engage in a reflective process as they mapped how they had travelled, including six main events and what they had learnt from their positive and negative experiences along the way. I began by scaffolding the task, drawing a path with loops, twists and turns, including my six events, and making sure that I recorded what I had learnt from them on paper. In the construction of my Message Stick, I used natural objects such as an acorn, leaf, a flower, and feathers which symbolized various stages of my journey, crossing boundaries which promoted self-reflection and connection. I used nouns and adjectives to highlight important events and stages of learning which were written onto labels and attached to my Message Stick with string.



As the deepest knowledge of Aboriginal Peoples is not in words, but in observation and silence, I carefully scaffolded the construction of my Message Stick by firstly encouraging my students to sit without speaking to connect them in the process of an Aboriginal style of learning. We then moved outside the classroom, walking around to different sites without speaking to anyone, but to watch, reflect, do and share later. My students were keen to do this as they carefully chose the shape of their branches and independently selected the natural items which would best reflect the route of their journey. They recalled and realised the importance of "land links" by connecting experience with nature as "learning maps" where they were able to use natural objects to present an alternative way of visualising their "pathway of knowledge". Their level of engagement was excellent. Learning was more and more self-directed because they took ownership in the construction of their artefact through quiet observation. They were more than willing to share their "personal stories" with each other.

As part of their assessment, they were expected to articulate what they created by explaining to their parents the importance of the Message Stick to Aboriginal culture, how they are constructed as well as reflecting on their recorded events and what they had learnt from them. This component of the task also involved the parent in their child's learning as they were asked to provide feedback on their child's reflection. This aspect of the task establishes "community links", (although not in the truest sense that Aboriginal people connect to their community), but in this case, it fosters the development of learning relationships between parents, teachers and their child.

By this stage I had woven Aboriginal pedagogies for building knowledge into the fabric of my program design through careful negotiations with Aboriginal Elders and/or other community representatives. Certainly the next stage must be to weave into my teaching practice. It is important to mention here that in the primary focus of the construction of what might be considered an Aboriginal artefact, was not based solely on the finished product, but on the process and developing ways of knowing, being, doing, valuing and learning. It was also about quiet reflection and articulation of how they learned and why, which is further underpinned by *Deep Learning*.

"There is deep knowledge in our languages. There is a spirit of learning in our words. This is more than just knowledge of what to learn, but knowledge of how we learn it. This is our pedagogy, our way of learning. We find it in language words about thinking and communicating. We find it in language structure, in the way things are repeated and come around in a circle, showing us how we think and use information. The patterns in stories, phrases, songs, kinship and even in the land can show us the spirit of learning that lives in our cultures."

(Yunkaporta, 2009, p.2).

Deep Learning

Deep Learning, in my experience, was founded when my Principal, Corey Tavella, handed me his copy of *Deep Learning – Engage the World, Change the World* (Fullan, Quinn & McEachen, 2018). Through my reading, I realised the enormous potential in the links between *Deep Learning* and the implementation of Aboriginal Perspectives in my classroom. Moreover, *Deep*

Learning Capabilities when taught in conjunction with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures, offers opportunities for my students to form authentic connections with them.

"What gives humans meaning in life is a strong sense of identity around a purpose or passion, creativity and mastery in relation to a valued pursuit, and connectedness with the world and others."

(Fullan, Quinn & McEachen, 2018, p.5).

Fullan, Quinn and McEachen (2018) establish that *Deep Learning* is "good for all" (ibid). *Deep Learning* reminds us of the increasing need for human connectiveness which transcends cultural barriers, to the planet, and to the universe. It is a change in "learning culture" through school systems, collaborative inquiry, and expertise in order "... to release the powerful mindset that together students, teachers and families can transform learning." (Fullan, Quinn & McEachen, 2018, p.37).

Deep Learning is being considered as a "global partnership" which transforms the role of teachers. Fullan, Quinn and McEachen (2018) assert that we need to question our learning relationships and pedagogical practices. We must move further and further away from control-cantered classrooms and empower our students to engage in more purposeful and self-directed learning. Teachers become "activators" who design experiences which builds six *Global Competencies* such as *character, citizenship, collaboration, communication, creativity, and critical thinking* referred to as "the 6C's"

"These Competencies describe the increasing complexity of thinking and problem solving, sophistication

of collaborative skills, self-knowledge, and responsibility that underlies character and the ability to feel empathy and take action that makes one a global citizen."

(Fullan, Quinn & McEachen, 2018, p.35).

As our students face the challenging world which awaits them, the times where we see education as a re-hashing of content, is past its due date. It is the student, (the learner), who will become an "agent for change". If they are to achieve this, they must focus on a new set of outcomes, and, more importantly, apply what they have learnt to new constructs. Moreover, *Deep Learning* aims to develop deep knowledge, awareness, and appreciation of culture and cultural issues to build students' collective responsibilities and connectiveness. If the next generation is to function in a more challenging world, which yearns for equity and inclusivity, they will need to draw from their "ability to learn from and live with people from diverse backgrounds. *"Deep learning is about finding our way in a complex, indeed scary world. It is about transforming our reality through learning, both individually and with others"*. (Fullan, Quinn & McEachen, 2018, xvii).

A lesson in Empathy

Indigenous Australians experience some of the worst discrimination in the country. This includes unfair and negative stereotypes such as being "lazy", "violent", "disengaged", "alcoholic". I find it difficult to understand that there are still many Non- Indigenous Australians who presume that 'real' Aboriginal people only live in the desert due to their "primitive culture", when in fact a third of all First Nation People live in major cities, and have the most sophisticated cultural practices,

one being the sustainability of their ecosystems and natural environments where other societies are desperately failing.

"Instead of simply accepting what the media and society say, it's important to listen to Indigenous people about their identity as Indigenous Australians and what this means for them personally. Whilst being Indigenous means different things to different people, for many Indigenous people, it's about being connected to Country, community and culture. It has nothing to do with many of the myths and stereotypes about Indigenous Australians which perpetuate discrimination"

(Australians Together, 2020).

It is important to clarify that when teachers – including myself – have attempted to embed Aboriginal Perspectives into my lessons, it has not been done through working with Aboriginal Peoples. Although this may present us with another challenge, it offers an opportunity for teachers to see past our perspectives and adopt a shared lens with First Nation Peoples. In the past, my students have been listening to my meta-language, my way of framing Aboriginal experiences, and this is a reasonable place to start, but language and perspectives are powerful tools. I need to tread carefully as I sometimes, although unintentionally, risk presenting more stereotypes of Aboriginal Australians. I need to seriously consider engaging my students in a learning of culture which is authentic and rich. Quality pedagogy and quality teaching takes time and it also "takes a community to raise a child" (African Proverb). This is where developing partnerships and engaging in more professional development will build my knowledge where

I can the authentically present Aboriginal People's culture, heritage and history which will be more successful in breaking down dangerous stereotypes, through building connections. We need to seriously work in partnership with First Nation Peoples in order to "interrupt historical stereotypical discourse," and, more importantly that the new discourse we create must be ongoing (Harrison & Greenfield, 2011).

When I taught a unit on the history of the Sacrament of Reconciliation to my Year 9 Religious Education class, I wanted to provide an opportunity for *Deep Learning*. The unit's objective was to develop student outcomes such as *critical and creative thinking and empathy*. I used the films supplied to me by Australians Together, called *Our People's Stories*, (some of which are on the *Australians Together* website). My students viewed and witnessed the testimonies and perspectives from Aboriginal Australians about their experiences of forced removal, as well as hearing survival stories from survivors of the Stolen Generations. Firstly, students were engaged in a critical literacy study of various media texts to identify where Aboriginal Peoples have been misrepresented and negatively portrayed using language and other rhetorical devices which shapes the perspectives of the target audience. We replaced negative vocabulary and references that were derogatory with language which accurately described the past and present experiences, and cultures of Aboriginal Peoples to build authenticity. Implementing this unit into the Religious Education curriculum, the study based on Aboriginal Perspectives was underpinned by the knowledge that "all people are made in the image of God" which addressed the *Living Strand* in the *Crossways Curriculum*

Framework Learning Area suggesting that students should be able to use their critical thinking skills to recognise the causes of injustice, and build empathy to be the agents for change that we need. Through their writing of a reflection, the students were required to express the importance their connectivity through the careful selection of language which demonstrated empathy for First Nation people. Two samples of students' reflections appear below.

Reflection 1:

During the past lessons where we have investigated and learned about aboriginal and indigenous people culture, has changed my mind set. The aboriginal culture is very rich and has been around for thousands of years before the English people came and colonised the country. We learned about the stolen generation and the conditions that aboriginals were treated and the oppression that they suffered for many years. We also attended a little concert which had a singer and song writer named Scott Darlow who is very high in the aboriginal community. He answered many questions we had about the indigenous people and told us some stories. It really opened my eyes and gave me a little more understanding about what the aboriginals had to deal with daily. It was a very enriching experience learning about their culture. It was a very terrible thing what happened to them and it really impacted their population and it has hurt their culture in a big way. The Australian community is doing all they can to show them their apologies and maybe one day we can all live in peace together as one.

Year 9 Student

Reflection 2:

Indigenous people have suffered many atrocities since the colonisation of Australia and all of its reaches, including, vile acts against their own bodies, rights, beliefs and cultures.

A serious, yet common issue Indigenous Australians faced was the deprivation of their culture. After being stolen from their families and loved ones of all things, Indigenous Australians were not permitted to speak their native tongue, nor partake in any other indigenous traditions. This led to the near extinction of Indigenous culture as there was no effective solution around this deprivation of culture and no practical way to spread their knowledge, beliefs and sacred traditions.

If someone were to enter my home and take away my family I would feel tremendous loss, immense guilt, a deep, longing sadness and an emptiness of which could not be filled. This is because my family mean everything to me, and my home is the place I'm meant to feel most safe and free.

I believe there are a multitude of solutions for us to reconcile, the first being the most obvious: Apologise. I cannot stress the need to apologise enough, however, I believe Indigenous Australians need time to heal so another solution would not be to ignore them.

Year 9 Student

Meeting in the Middle

"That Aboriginal idea of balance between social support and self-direction is one (of the areas that Indigenous Peoples have in common). To use the Aboriginal concept of balance – if that is a part of our way, then it makes sense for us to find what pedagogy we have in common with non-Aboriginal ways too, balancing the two worlds. If we find the overlap between our best ways of learning and the mainstream's best ways of learning, then we will have an equal balance."

(Yunkaporta, 2010, p.38).

Aboriginal Peoples have diverse, distinct and deep cultural and world views — views that differ from those found in most Western education systems. There is a "cultural space" which holds the potential to draw on the rich histories, cultures and perspectives of Aboriginal Peoples. The middle ground or this "cultural space" represents a new way of working in partnership.

This brings us back to Janamarra's beautiful expression of a balanced "synergy" where we must not allow Aboriginal Australian voices to be excluded or left out of the synergy picture, when it involves the education of Australia's future generations. Although there has been some ground covered, and we are journeying closer towards bridging that gap, we need to understand, and – with patient ears attend – to the signs which are impeding our efforts and find a way to rectify them. "Closing the gap" is a very different analogy to "meeting in the middle". We need to listen to the voices of representatives from Aboriginal communities, with a clear purpose, and understand that there are other ways of seeing and hearing Australia and the world – to

find that place in our destination where we can all meet, learn and grow. Perhaps the success of closing the gap will rely on the emergence of *Deep Learning* in our schools which will transform learning in our classrooms, drive outcomes forward so that all of our students can build those fundamental connections to each other, to other cultures, and to the increasing complexity of their future world.

Finally, building *empathy* is a *Global Competency* which is essential for the sustainability of culture and our societal survival. Without empathy, we cannot join, we cannot be “one” and there will be no stillness of purpose where we can reflect and ponder. Most importantly, there will be no insights into healing and certainly no meeting in the middle.

“In our world the deepest knowledge is not in words. It is in the meaning behind the words, in the spaces between them, in gestures or looks, in meaningful silences, in the work of hands, in the learning from journeys, in quiet reflection, in Dreaming.”

(Yunkaporta, 2010, p.39).

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The Reading Village: A girl needs a community of readers (even in secondary school)

Helen Stower

Program Leader – iCentre, Mt Alvernia College

Colloquially, the proverb that ‘it takes a village to raise a child’ resonates with many people. Equally, it might be argued that it takes a community to value reading and literature in order to foster a love of books in young people. During the early childhood years, most people agree with this sentiment and are committed to contributing to reading outcomes. Many parents read aloud to their children, teachers record reading level progress, library bag ownership is common, and Book Week is a significant event in the school calendar. Yet, in high school the combined efforts of the community seem to fall by the wayside.

Since 2015, the library at Mount Alvernia College (Mt Alvernia

iCentre) has sought to counter this trend and establish a reading culture throughout the school community. This is a significant challenge given social trends in Australia that contribute to decreasing reading rates among adolescents in general and adolescent girls in particular (OECD, 2011; Scholastic, 2015; and Roy Morgan Research, 2016). This is the story of the what the iCentre team have learned since embarking on this challenge, the strategic approach taken through research and action and the establishment of a reading community at the college that has ultimately changed classroom practice, extra-curricular offerings and community engagement in literature.

Why do we insist young people must keep on reading books?

If you conduct a literature review on the research into reading books you will discover that reading makes us smarter and helps promote success in life. Such a review was undertaken by Mol & Bus in 2011. They interrogated 99 studies that focused on leisure time reading concluding that there is scientific support for the belief that frequent print exposure through reading books has a strong correlation to academic success, oral language development and general knowledge. Further to this, other researchers have concluded that reading has social and career benefits and positive impacts on wellbeing

(Brozo, Shiel & Topping, 2007; Centre for Youth Literature, 2009; Daley, 2019; Merga, 2019; Miller & Kelley, 2014; Whitten, Labby, & Sullivan, 2016). Meta-studies, longitudinal studies, national and international studies all conclude that positive correlations can be drawn between reading for leisure and life success. Examples of these conclusions have been outlined in the sections that follow.

Academic achievement

When examining the associations between print exposure and academic achievement, measured by IQ scores, grade point average, college testing scores and Scholastic Assessment Test Scores, researchers found that readers are more successful students at all ages (Mol & Bus, 2011).

The OECD found that on “average, students who read daily for enjoyment score the equivalent of one-and-a-half years of schooling better than those who do not.” (OECD, 2011, p.2).

In 2000, PISA found evidence that engagement in reading had a significantly positive impact on academic performance and can “compensate” for low family income and parents’ limited educational background (Kirsch et al., 2002, p.119).

A British longitudinal study found that reading behaviour is strongly linked to test scores in maths, spelling and vocabulary (Sullivan & Brown, 2013, p.37).

Brain health

Merga quotes a number of studies that demonstrate reading is good for our brains, including building resistance to cognitive issues, such as dementia in old age, and longevity (2019, p.7).

Preparedness for work

Data from the International Adult Literacy Survey shows connections between literacy and work opportunities. Higher literacy equated to increases in people’s ability to secure employment, participate in adult education and training, and earn higher incomes (OECD, 2002, p.162).

The Centre for Youth Literature also asserts that by “encouraging young people to read for pleasure, we are improving literacy levels, which will, in turn, better prepare school-leavers and college-leavers for the workplace – a good outcome for individuals and for the nation. Young Australians who read for pleasure are likely to be more employable and to contribute more to the nation’s economy” (2009, p.14).

Social outcomes

In 2016 the Journal of Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience published psychology research that demonstrated fiction readers possess stronger social-cognitive abilities than both non-readers and non-fiction readers (Tamir, Bricker, Dodell-Feder and Mitchell, 2016, p.222).

Several studies have found that readers have a higher capacity for empathy and understanding than other people (Tamir, Bricker, Dodell-Feder and Mitchell, 2016, p.221; Oatley & Mar, as cited in Paul, 2002, para. 9).

Clark & Rumbold cite evidence that reading for pleasure can increase general knowledge, decision making ability, the understanding of other cultures and community participation (2006, p. 10)

Why do tweens and teens stop reading books for recreation?

Research supports what most of us who parent or teach adolescents know, time spent reading for recreation declines during the secondary schooling years (Centre for Youth Literature, 2009; Manuel, & Carter, 2015; Merga, 2019; Scholastic, 2015). There are numerous causes of this including competing extracurricular interests, changing curriculum demands, increased screen time, cognitive and skill barriers, and limited parental and teacher knowledge about the importance of reading beyond the early years.

As students enter the adolescent years, their life gets busy. School work and homework increase in intensity and demand more time than they did in the primary years. Secondary schools provide an extraordinary and interesting range of extracurricular offerings including sport, music, public speaking, community outreach, and clubs. In these years, peers become all important and young people typically start socialising more. By Years 9 and 10, several students will take up part-time jobs that add another demand on their time. Reports also indicate as children grow older, reading competes with many screen-related activities (Scholastic, 2016, p.6). Accordingly, when students tell us they do not read because they don’t have time it is easy to agree. Yet, research tells us that “keen readers will always make the time for books, but it does deter reluctant or uncommitted readers” (Centre for Youth Literature, 2009, p.5). This indicates that it is motivation (reading “will”) and preference that have more impact on recreational reading than competing demands

on time. Many teens would prefer to spend their spare time doing activities other than reading (Merga, 2019, p. 33).

A second cause of reading decline in the secondary years is curriculum demands. One contention is that the crowded secondary curriculum results in class time and homework time being designated to curriculum task completion and broad learning opportunities such as reading for pleasure are not prioritised by teachers or students (Centre for Youth Literature, 2009, p.5). The problem of the curriculum, however, may be more entrenched than this. Research conducted by Merga and Gardiner in 2018, maintains that the issue is two-fold. On a macro level, the issue is resultant from the positioning of literacy in the Australian Curriculum as a General Capability relatively deficient in ideas and strategies that reflect the value of fostering reading engagement in our students. While on a micro level, there is a lack of whole-school literacy plans, policies and agreement documents that support reading engagement in secondary schools (p.46).

The problem is further exacerbated because many “parents and teachers do not fully understand the importance of reading beyond the early years, so their ability to share a valuing of the practice with their children and students can be limited” (Merga, 2019, p.2). Additionally, teachers report they need more information and strategies to motivate students to read (Brozo, Shiel & Topping, 2008, p.307). In the primary school years, the focus of literacy is learning to read. In the high school years, the focus changes and the concept of literacy is broadened to an ability to apply knowledge

and skill to analyse, reason and communicate effectively in a variety of situations (Brozo, Shiel & Topping, 2008, p.305). In other words, a shift from learning to read to reading to learn (Brozo, Shiel & Topping, 2008, p.306). Reading to learn involves students reading increasingly complex texts across all subjects (Merga, 2018, p.8). As such, improving learning means improving reading. To improve reading requires practice (Merga, 2018, p.4), that is, to read – and on this point fiction books offer greater literacy benefit than other text types (OECD, 2011, p.103). Merga argues that this tenet is not common knowledge among parents, teachers and students and needs to become so in order to influence young people to allocate more leisure time to reading (2018, p.4).

Finally, cognitive and skill barriers among some students are a cause for reading decline in the adolescent years. As texts become more complex, a student’s reading skills need to increase in sophistication. Some students who reached proficiency during the early years but have not maintained reading frequency, may find reading complex texts more difficult and time consuming than peers who are more able readers (Merga, 2019, p.32). Reports also indicate that concentration, even among able readers, can be a literacy barrier. Reading requires focus and multitasking, tiredness, noise and digital distractions can all interfere with concentration. The deep concentration required for book reading can be hard and this impacts young people’s preference for reading in their leisure time – given the choice, they will select an activity less cognitively demanding. Addressing this barrier requires promoting opportunities for

sustained silent reading to build reading stamina (Merga, 2019, p.97).

The Mount Alvernia College response

Australian research conducted by Scholastic in 2015/2016 found that the three largest predictors of reading frequency for children aged 12 – 17 are: parents who are frequent readers; a strong belief that reading books for fun is important, and the opportunity to read independently during the school day (p.22). Given this, the team from the Mount Alvernia iCentre set out to engage parents and the college community in reading initiatives, collect data to inform and finesse their literacy promotion program (Campfire), and offer extra-curricular opportunities to for girls to participate in the world of literature, instilling a foundation and love of reading.

Reaching out to the village

Research has shown that students are more likely to develop positive reading habits when they have enabling adults in their lives who provide access to books and stimulate, model and respond to reading. In essence, it is important that young people have adults in their lives who demonstrate by their own behaviour what a ‘good’ reader does (Chambers, cited in La Marca, 2004). In line with this research, the Mount Alvernia iCentre has developed the Book Chat Breakfast Program for staff and parents. The aims of this program are two-fold. Firstly, the program enables collaboration with all stakeholders in order to broaden the network of enabling adults to support students’ reading development. Secondly, the program aims to involve staff

and parents in the literary life of the college thus meeting the brief of building a reading culture throughout the school community.

What is a Book Chat?

A book chat consists of an expert-led book talk about great new reads published in Australia and Internationally. The book chats focus on new fiction, biographies and some non-fiction for the adults. We will also discuss some of the most popular titles for students for those staff and parents who are interested in the Young Adult (YA) fiction offered in the iCentre.

A book chat is recognised by those in the book industry as a way to learn more about books to read, to expand personal reading genres, to give as gifts to friends, family and colleagues or to receive advice about what might be suitable for the teens, children or babies in their lives (Riverbend Books, 2017). iCentre book chats are modelled on some popular book chats that you may have come across including the Riverbend Books Summer Reading book chats and the Chat 10 Looks 3 Podcast series by Leigh Sales and Annabel Crabb.

Parents are invited to attend book chats scheduled on a morning before school each term. The success of the Mount Alvernia iCentre book chats can be measured from the increased popularity with more parents attending each event.

Staff are also offered the opportunity to attend a book chat. These take place at the end of each semester during the Professional Learning Conferences held within the College. These sessions have become very popular with staff and are booked up very quickly.

Campfire Research Project: An evidence-based approach to establish more effective reading practices in the middle school girls at Mount Alvernia College

The Campfire Program is a fortnightly lesson for Years 7, 8 and 9 students at Mount Alvernia College. During these sessions, students are introduced to a wide range of books, loan books, and read. The goal of this program is to support all levels of readers and contribute to students' literacy development by connecting students to books and opportunities to read for pleasure.

Anecdotally, English teachers reported that the program was successful in its goals and borrowing statistics showed large increases in library loans since the inception of Campfire. However, there was no data to demonstrate that a book borrowed was a book read or had any real impact on literacy. To enhance the measurable impact of the program and to discover any areas where improvement could be made, the iCentre team embarked on an evidence-based project in 2018 under the mentorship of Dr. Lyn Hay.

The findings showed that this form of literature promotion and reading program holds much value for our girls' literacy development and academic outcomes. Significantly, of the students surveyed:

- 48.54% would not read beyond curriculum offerings without the Campfire program
- 49% would never visit a library without the Campfire program

- 97% have borrowed a book directly because of the teacher librarian book chats
- 70% have read a genre outside of their comfort zone
- 3 books out of every 6 borrowed were read from cover-to-cover, 2 books out of every six were partly read, while 1 book in every six was not read at all.

The findings also highlighted some deficits in the program that needed to be addressed in order to better the literacy outcomes of the participating girls. Significantly, of the students surveyed:

- 57.77% only read for 0 – 1 hour per week
- 27% never consult with peers to identify a good book to read.

The outcomes of this research include:

- the establishment of a literacy committee to monitor and track reading engagement and literacy development in the college
- prioritising reading frequency as a goal of the Campfire program moving forward
- the extension of Campfire sessions to include Year 9 students (previously only Years 7 and 8 students attended campfire)
- sharing the data with students to involve them in identifying reading as important to their academic outcomes
- embedding a conferencing component into the Campfire program to individually track and mentor students toward building behaviours that lead to increased reading frequency, positive attitudes about the importance of reading, and improved technical reading skills

- an action-research cycle has been developed to continually monitor and analyse the impact of the Campfire program
- sharing the findings from this research with other school library professionals, such as presenting at The Australian School Library Association Biennial National Conference in April 2019.

Building a reading community: Extra-curricular opportunities to be involved in the world of literature and books

Longitudinal research conducted by Oxford University surveyed 17,200 people to investigate the link between extracurricular activities at age sixteen and career attainment at age thirty-three. The study found:

“reading books is the only out-of-school activity for 16-year-olds that is linked to getting a managerial or professional job in later life. Reading was linked to a higher chance of attending college too. No other activity, including sports, attending concerts, visiting museums, or practical activities like cooking and sewing, were found to have the same effect.” (in Miller, & Kelley, 2014).

To foster a reading culture and create a reading community, the iCentre team identified that opportunities beyond the classroom were needed to engage students in the world of books and literature. Along these lines, several initiatives have been established. One initiative in particular, The Read Like a Girl project, has produced numerous positive outcomes for girls' education at Mount Alvernia College.

Read Like a Girl - Background and project goals:

Read Like a Girl is a community partnership that was set up with the goal of literacy advancement of girls and is a combined endeavour led by Helen Stower of Mt Alvernia College and was initially a collaboration with Kathryn Schravemade of St Rita's College and Children's Literature Specialist, Pauline McLeod, of Riverbend Books, a valued community

partner. This project encapsulates a calendar of reading events aimed at instilling a foundation and love of reading in the college communities and more broadly among girls everywhere. The goal of this project was to provide girls with opportunities to attend book events, meet authors, participate in conversations about literature, reading and storytelling, purchase books, network with other girls, women and people who value reading and academic success, and develop knowledge of the possibilities literacy creates. More

recently, the project has been broadened to include writing workshops and opportunities.



To date, the Mt Alvernia College Read Like a Girl events have included:

- International Women's Day Literary Breakfasts in 2017, 2018 and 2019. This event invites students and the significant women in their lives as well as women from the broader College community to attend a literary breakfast that includes a keynote address by a popular author.

- Three book launches in partnership with Pantera Press Publishing. These events launched the books Draekora (2017), Graevale (2018), and Vadaesia (2019) respectively by author Lynette Noni.
- Literacy Week Festivals in 2017, 2018 and 2019. This event invites students to participate in a week-long festival that includes literary displays and artefacts, a book themed morning tea party, a living book presentation, and author talks.



- A Read Like a Girl with your Dad event in 2018 and 2019. This event invited students and their fathers or significant males in their life to purchase and read the set book and attend a pizza night with a presentation by the author of the book, Michael Gerard Bauer in 2018 and Tristan Bancks in 2019.
- MT A: Book in a Day is an invitational opportunity during Literacy Week for Years 9 and 10 students to collaboratively write a book in 6.5 hours. The final products have been published on the iCentre website, with all students able to participate in a People's Choice award through online voting.
- An annual Christmas in-store book fair. This event invites all members of the community to a launch evening followed by a weekend of shopping at Riverbend Books. A percentage of the sales from books purchased over the weekend is allocated to the College to spend on collection development.
- A "Welcome Campfire" held for Year 6 students who will start at Mt Alvernia College in the following year. This event invites students to the iCentre for an evening book chat or author talk and provides them the opportunity to borrow books over the Christmas holidays before they formally begin Year 7. It has become a valuable induction activity, allowing girls to feel part of the College community before their official first day of school.

- The Read Like a Girl Principal's Reading Challenge is a five-week inter-house competition requiring Home Rooms to record the combined time spent reading for recreation by students and teacher. The challenge culminates in Literacy Week when the winning Home Room is announced and rewarded with a pizza party. Book voucher prizes are also distributed for the Best Reader in the House – the student in the house who spent the most time reading throughout the challenge.

While each school in the Read Like a Girl project organises and manages its own events, the schools provides support for one another through a commitment to information sharing, event invitations and attendance, and marketing. For the school library teams, the project has involved collaborating, marketing, and event management. For the students from the colleges, the project has introduced them to wonderful local and international authors, seen them attend and help host literary events such as book launches, allowed them to buy books and engage with authors at book signing, attend writing workshops, network with like-minded readers, booksellers and publishers, and celebrate a love of reading.

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Reflections of a Recently Retired Middle School Educator

Douglas McLean
Recently retired Principal,
Whakatane Intermediate School

Clarence Beeby's 1938 student centred report, 'The Intermediate Schools of New Zealand,' argued that the early adolescent should be free to explore different subjects and experience a critical period of what he called 'socially integrative education.' Beeby was the Minister of Education at the time and is considered by many to be the father of the New Zealand education system. The report became the blueprint for intermediate schools for the next four decades, during which time around 100 were built to accommodate Years 7 and 8. In New Zealand, Year Seven students are generally 11 years of age and Year Eight generally 12 years of age.

The New Zealand education system is now predominantly bipartite, i.e. consists of mostly primary and secondary schools.

Only 117 intermediate schools in New Zealand remain (Years Seven and Eight). We also have a small number of middle and junior high schools. The Intermediate school system is sometimes criticised for its brevity. It was never intended that it would only cater for two age groups. The original intent was that it would provide four years of dedicated Middle Schooling.

In New Zealand, Intermediate Schools are staffed on a teacher pupil ratio of 1 to 29. This is higher than that of primary or secondary schools. As Principal, I struggled with the fact that this unique and vulnerable age group has the highest student teacher ratio in our system. This is the period when early adolescents undergo one of the greatest periods of change in the human lifespan.

I have worked with Dr Paul Deering from the University of Hawaii who describes the emerging adolescent as "acne, cliques, crushes, herd instinct, defiance, histrionics, growth spurts, feeding frenzies, roller coaster energy levels, flashes of brilliance, occasional empathy, childlike innocence, fierce dedication to causes, bursts of sweetness, rampant curiosity and duck like imprinting on caring adults." (P.Deering, personal communication). I feel that Paul's descriptive litany of characteristics paints a brilliant picture of the emerging adolescent.

However, Principals, with the support of staff, can make it "happen" for the middle schooler despite the obstacles. I believe, because of the lack of Government and Bureaucratic knowledge of this unique age group, Principals have to make decisions that are first and foremost in the best interests of the middle schooler. Basically, in many schools, Principals must create their own "Middle School culture". I have seen examples of schools where:

- modern learning environments compromise rather than support the student/teacher relationship.



- significant amounts of the teaching is carried out by relievers. While most middle schoolers say they hate routine, they often cannot do without it! They tend to imprint on their own teacher and do not always do well with disruption.
- students are seen as "data" for the sake of National Standards, and consequently teachers tended to move away from teaching students to teaching content.
- middle schoolers did not have access to spaces to exert physical energy. They need physical activity. We had a gymnasium built because of the needs of this age group even though it was not deemed an essential part of the building code for an intermediate.
- multiple learning and teaching approaches because of the diversity and learning styles of students.
- a curriculum that was relevant, challenging, integrative and exploratory
- high expectations for every member of the learning community
- a safe supportive school community
- assessment and evaluation programmes that not only told us how the student was going but also signposted future learning
- responsible and safe use of technology to enhance learning.

To successfully build this school culture, we ensured that we focused on staff and their development. We did this by:

- employing educators who valued working with this age group and were prepared to develop a shared vision that guided decisions
- encouraging colleagues to attend national and international conferences that can lead to a shared vision and sharing of professional knowledge
- employing educators who were leaders in middle schooling who would inspire staff through their passion and enthusiasm.

The central element in promoting high quality learning is promoting relationships. The relationship between the teacher or teachers, peers, mentors and role models is particularly crucial in the pedagogy of the middle schooler. To foster the development of these critical relationships, we also focussed on:

At Whakatane Intermediate School, 60% of our students were Maori so there was also a strong focus on cultural responsiveness. Involvement in Maori medium for all.

From my experiences as a principal and teacher in an Area School (Area schools are basically a primary, middle and secondary all in one) I found that the middle school students were being more and more subject-educated and therefore physically, as well as academically, moved from subject to subject six times a day. This resulted, often, in poor relationships with teachers and a loss of learning time as an hour of each day was spent moving from class to class. At Whakatane Intermediate, the students were home roomed with the same teacher for two years (where possible). Through this focus, strong relationships developed. Often these strong relationships incorporated the child's family, sometimes the teacher was treated like a third parent. The classroom teacher was responsible for teaching the core subjects plus physical

education, as the classroom teacher was responsible for the health and well being of the student.

I felt so privileged throughout my career to work with so many passionate educators and to also work with such a caring, responsive and appreciative age group. Through our sustained focus on this critical age group, I'm proud to say that our school became the school of choice for educating the emerging adolescent in the Eastern Bay of Plenty!



Author's details:

Douglas McLean

Teacher and Principal of 47 years (including Principal for 39 years with 21 years as Principal of Whakatane Intermediate School)

Woolf Fisher Fellowship recipient to Harvard University in 2009

Awarded life membership of NZAIMS (New Zealand Association of Middle Schooling)

President of NZAIMS 2015/2016

References

Beeby, C. E., & Bailey, C. L. (1938). *The Intermediate Schools of New Zealand*. New Zealand Council for Educational Research.

“Meet You In The Middle”

The 1st Hybrid Conference for Adolescent Success, 30 April 2021

Introduction

2020 for Adolescent Success was planned to be a year where we bought regional conferences to every state and regional area in Australia. We envisioned busy events with members attending locally and supporting the middle years of schooling in Australia by attending and participating in these conferences. We hoped to bring our style of conferences to regional areas and bring the opportunity for practitioners to present and celebrate the programs that have worked well in your schools and highlight the middle years journey of schools across the country.

As we now know, COVID had other plans for us all and unfortunately our regional conferences had to be cancelled. In response, we created a hybrid model of conference which has bought face to face and online experiences together in a way that allowed sharing, provided access to inspiring international speakers and the opportunity to network face to face.

The first hybrid conference “Meet You In The Middle” was held on 30th April this year. During the conference, presenters Phyllis

Fagell from the USA and Dr Michael Nagel from the University of Sunshine Coast delivered important and relevant messages to our delegates. Phyllis Fagell’s address “Middle School Matters” saw her explaining tips for teaching middle years students which were both practical and engaging. Her understanding of middle years pedagogy is outstanding and she passed on lots of valuable ideas for the classroom. Dr Nagel’s address “Everything is NOT awesome. Adolescents, Anxiety and Screens” was timely for those coming out of teaching in lockdown and really insightful for all teachers of young adolescents.

The highlight of the conference was the practitioner sessions, where teachers had the opportunity to share their practice and present to their regional group. We hope that you enjoy the summaries of these sessions that follow. In the summaries of the presentations you will find exciting, current practice and contact details for the presenters. We hope that take the opportunity to get in touch with them if their practice inspires you!

On the back of the success of this event, Adolescent Success is running another hybrid conference

on Friday 20th August 2021 called “Leading in the Middle Years”. This conference is aimed at all leaders and middle leaders in schools with students aged between 10-15 years old. Once again these will be held at venues around Australia where 20 delegates will get together face to face and share their practice, with the highlight being our keynote speaker Andy Hargreaves.

If you would like to host one of these events at your school, please get in touch with me and we will lock your venue into the growing list. We are also calling for presenters at this event, do you have inspiring story about your leadership journey? We’d love to read your ideas for this, get in touch via email and we will send you out the abstract submission link.

And finally, if you’d like to attend “Leading in the Middle Years” please check out our website where registration is now open. We look forward to seeing you on Friday 20th August 2021.

Angela White
Executive Officer
angela@adolescentsuccess.org.au



Meet You In The Middle Conference Presentation Summaries

Name: Corrine Townsend

School: Unity College, SA

Venue for Presentation: Hills Christian Community School, SA

Email: ctownsend@unitycollege.sa.edu.au

Title: A Safe and Grace Place!

Summary of presentation:

In Middle School, it is essential that all students feel safe and that they have a voice. At Unity College, we have focused on establishing a culture where broken relationships are restored through restorative practices.

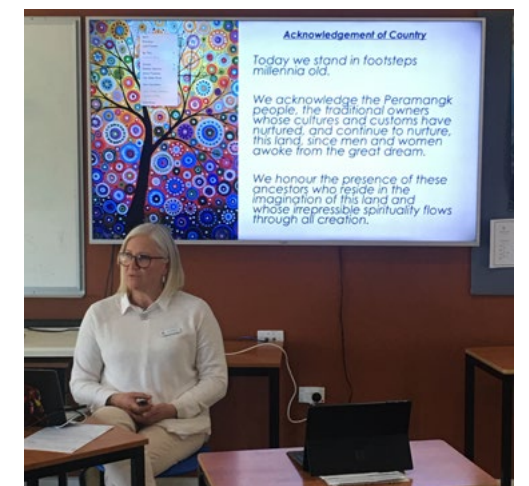
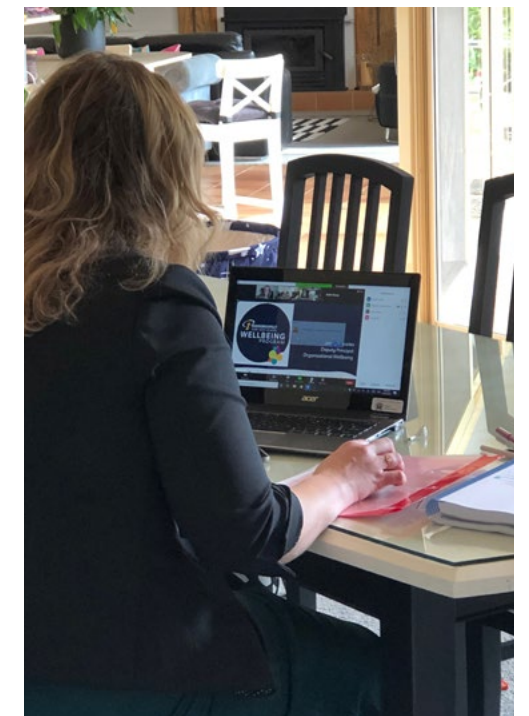
Every member of our community knows that there will need to be time invested in researching the facts related to any situation brought to us where there has been a breakdown in relationships. We ensure that both sides of the story are heard.

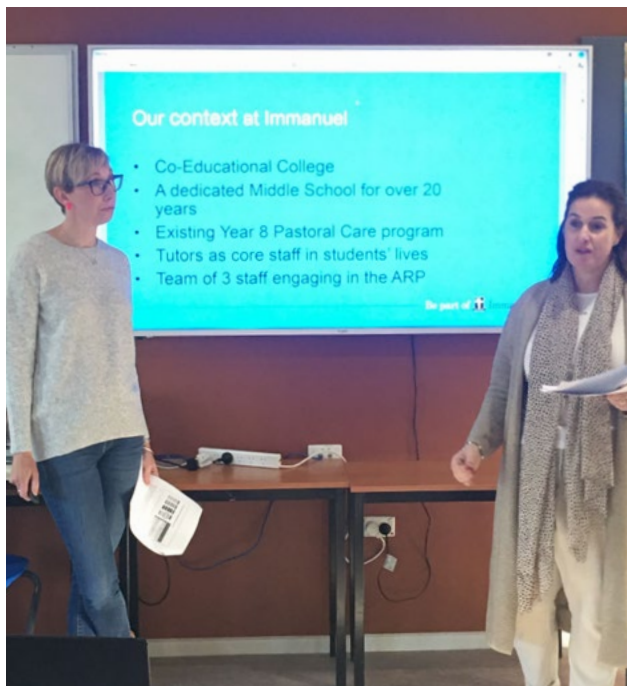
We endeavour to access impartial perspectives, including, if necessary, CCTV footage, written accounts from witnesses, or any online material if relevant. No stone is left unturned.

Once the facts have been collected, we proceed to a restorative meeting which follows the restorative practices method. As a part of the meeting, a restorative agreement is signed and stored in our learning management system.

We believe this focus on relationships management allows our Middle School culture to show that ‘we care’ and every student feels valued and their voice is heard.

Unity College has a culture of being a safe and grace place. We listen to each other and show grace so that all students feel safe... which in our community is very important to our students and their families.





Name: Louise Cottell

School: Immanuel College, SA

Venue for Presentation: Cornerstone College, SA

Email: lcottell@immanuel.sa.edu.au

Title: Using VIA Character Strengths to Improve Wellbeing in Year 8

Summary of presentation:

Three areas which we wanted to see improvement in Year 8 students were:

- engagement
- self-esteem
- perseverance

To develop these three areas, we began a more explicit focus on students' character strengths using results from the VIA Character Strengths for Youth survey, across our Pastoral Care programme.

Name: Jenny Knowles

School: Indooroopilly State High School, QLD

Venue for Presentation: Brigidine College, QLD

Email: jknow31@eq.edu.au

Title: Wellbeing Program at Indooroopilly State High School

Summary of presentation:

Through our partnership with Sentis Education, who have considerable expertise in this area, we support our school community to develop skills to increase their resilience in every facet of their lives – beyond the pastoral care program and beyond the classroom. Our purpose is to ensure that students are happy at school and have a sense of belonging. We acknowledge that there will be challenges and stresses and provide the foundations and support to enable students to respond positively to challenges and cope with stress.

We explicitly deliver a program via Connect (pastoral care) that is mapped Years 7-12, focusing on improved student resilience and wellbeing as well as provide wellbeing strategies for parents via newsletter articles, social media and information sessions, which are very well attended, particularly by Year 7 parents. We also further embed the program by providing training to all staff with more in-depth professional development for Wellbeing Committee faculty representatives who drive initiatives at a faculty level.

Wellbeing has always been important at this school, and the partnership with Sentis has enabled us to have a more consistent and deliberate approach to how we support our whole school community. Student voice is vital to ongoing engagement of students at Indooroopilly State High School. In an effort to extend the opportunities that students have to influence their experiences at school, we have formed a Student Wellbeing Committee, (made up of Junior and Senior student leaders, Guidance Officer, Head of Department - Student Life, Junior School Principal and Deputy Principal - Organisational Wellbeing) to maximise the student voice in our program. The Student Committee is currently working on a health check survey to obtain feedback from all students. Data will be collected by year level to enable us to address year level and junior/senior issues specifically.

Name: Rebecca Wheeler

School: Indooroopilly State High School, QLD

Venue for Presentation: Brigidine College, QLD

Email: bblac84@eq.edu.au

Title: Academic Conferencing, Junior Secondary Model

Summary of presentation:

The strength of our Junior School culture comes from providing effective transition from Primary school and maintaining strong communication with our school parent community.

Our introduction of a Junior Secondary model of Academic Conferencing enabled us to offer yet another avenue for parents to be actively involved in their students' learning, successes and goal setting. Delivered through a positive, Growth Mindset approach, our goal is to build our students' capacity and confidence to not only identify their successes using their own data but reflect and discuss their progress and goals with their Connect teacher (pastoral care role) and parents. Our Junior Academic Conferencing program is coordinated by Guidance Officers, Deputy Principals and Heads of Department.

Through our pastoral care program, students are encouraged regularly to reflect on their progress and successes, both academic and personal, and to set both long- and short-term goals. Junior Academic Conferencing aims to formalise the process and build student confidence in their abilities. To ensure the program meets this purpose, our Connect teachers attend a workshop which equips them with the skills they need to guide their students, using a Growth Mindset, through Reflection strategies and SMART Goal setting.

With the support of their teacher, students prepare a script for their conference, which assists them with the language needed to communicate their successes and goals to their parents and models the types of conversations we encourage them to continue at home. We have run Academic Conferencing with our Junior students for two years now, and the feedback from parents is strong, in terms of the value they place on being able to have these conversations with their student, in a supportive setting. We review the program at its conclusion each year through a survey to school staff, parents and students. This enables us to enrich the program and strengthen its value for our diverse school community.

Name: Rebecca Forrest

School: Pembroke School, SA

Venue for Presentation: Cornerstone College, SA

Email: rforrest@pembroke.sa.edu.au

Title: A Holistic Approach to Consent Education

Summary of presentation:

To create widespread cultural change around notions of consent, education needs to begin before the middle school. By the end of the middle school years, our students need specific information about their rights and responsibilities around consent.

For this to be successfully communicated consent needs to be addressed directly but also needs to be woven into every aspect of relationships education from an early age and continue into the senior school. In this presentation, we will outline how we teach consent in the middle school and give some specific examples of resources and activities we utilise to delve deeply into this important topic during Sexual Health and Relationships lessons.

We will outline how consent fits with exploring power, vulnerability, and gender constraints in intimate relationships in the context of young people understanding what a respectful and disrespectful relationship looks and feels like. We will share how we teach the language of consent and how we reinforce the need for consent to be present before and throughout any intimate act.

We will explore how to illustrate the difference between consent, coercion, and abuse, along with highlighting the absence of consent in pornography.

We will outline how we weave the language of consent into all Sexual Health and Relationships lessons including contraception and STIs. As educators, we can positively influence a societal change that is long overdue. Our young people are ready to hear these messages and keen to play their part in creating a change for the better.

Name: Adam Stevens

School: Hills Christian Community School, SA

Venue for Presentation: Hills Christian Community School, SA

Email: astevens@hccs.sa.edu.au

Title: Learning Explorations - 'The journey so far'

Summary of presentation:

Learning Explorations at Hills Christian Community School Learning Explorations is a student-centred approach to education, enabling students to be involved in a unique program that aims to solve authentic problems and connect learning to the real world. Students use their knowledge and expertise from a variety of learning areas to develop skills that are recognised in the General Capabilities.

At Hills, we believe that the General Capabilities play an integral role in the development of the whole student. They reflect the skills needed for the future; therefore, we offer students this opportunity to choose a learning pathway from their interests. Students participate in smaller groups and lead their learning, while the teacher steps into the role of facilitator.

They can be involved in solving sustainability issues around the school, build structures for other students to use, or explore a variety of topics teaching them more about themselves and others.

Learning Explorations is in its second year of development at Hills, and 2020 caused some challenges for us! However, 2021 has brought much excitement with a newly completed purpose-built environment that fosters collaboration and creative thinking.

Learn about our journey and what Learning Explorations is all about.

Name: Alice Saltmarsh

School: Seymour College, SA

Venue for Presentation: Hills Christian Community School, SA

Email: asaltmarsh@seymour.sa.edu.au

Title: Developing Adolescents of Strength, Optimism and Justice at Year 8 and 9

Summary of presentation:

At Seymour College, we recognise that adolescents are negotiating their way through a rapidly changing world. Our SOJ (Strength, Optimism and Justice) program provides an environment where students can discuss issues and factors that impact upon their ability navigate setbacks, triumphs, hardships, and successes experienced along the way.

SOJ is guided by our GIRLbeing Framework, resulting in young women with strong hearts and minds. This Framework consists of nine domains: Principled Leadership, Courageous Advocacy, Spiritual Awareness, Authentic World View, Resilient Attitude, Balanced Outlook, Fierce Spirit, Creative Energy, and Healthy Habits.

Our primary focus is providing a space and time for adolescents to develop open communication channels between their peers and staff. This includes providing opportunities for students taking the lead with tackling issues within their cohort and developing social and emotional intelligence. They develop skills that encourage them to be more self-aware and considerate of those around them.

In turn, this enables students to enter the Senior School with a toolkit that can be drawn upon when adolescent milestones are reached.

Name: Fiona Hicks and Sharron Wood

School: Northside Christian College, QLD

Venue for Presentation: Northside Christian College, QLD

Email: fhicks@bne.catholic.edu.au

Title: Deepening Middle Years Students' Goal Setting and Feedback Capabilities through the use of The Learning Disposition Wheel

Summary of presentation:

The Learning Disposition Wheel is a diagnostic tool that represents the cognitive, intra and interpersonal competencies needed for self-regulated learning.

The Wheel is a way for students to talk about and focus on their own learning and to diagnose their own dispositions needed for self-regulation and self-direction. The Learning Disposition Wheel gives us a way to start talking about learning, design learning experiences and assessment and track student progress.

The Learning Disposition Wheel also allows us to refine teaching experiences with the emphasis on learning and not teaching and allows us to be responsive to student's individual needs and be flexible within the classroom.

Name: Emma Grave

School: Seymour College, SA

Venue for Presentation: Hills Christian Community School, SA

Email: egrave@seymour.sa.edu.au

Title: Coaching in the Middle School

Summary of presentation:

Conversations take place every day between teachers and students, teachers and teachers, and students and their peers.

A school that can successfully create a culture of coaching can improve the quality of the conversations that take place every day, and therefore, significantly impact on the overall academic performance of the students and the wellbeing of the community more broadly.

The two key intentions of a Coaching model are for students to have a greater self-awareness and meta-cognition of their learning and to take personal responsibility for their own ongoing development.

Coaching allows for authentic student agency and self-efficacy – two critical skills adolescents must develop to achieve at a high level.



Name: Nadine Grimshaw

School: Riverside Christian College, QLD

Venue for Presentation: Riverside Christian College, QLD

Title: Early Years Teacher in the Middle

Summary of presentation:

Examining my experience of working in early years environments for ten years, then six years within junior school classrooms, and how I have adapted and handled my first year as a middle school teacher.

What are the things that I have learnt in early years settings that have prepared me (or not) for teaching within the Middle context?



Name: Gaile Racey

School: St Georges Anglican Grammar School, WA

Venue for Presentation: Zoom

Email: gmracey@stgeorges.wa.edu.au

Title: Building the Bridge

Summary of presentation:

2020 witnessed the birth of a new innovative Year 7 programme at St Georges Anglican Grammar School. The programme focuses on the schooling that bridges the conventional primary/secondary divide with a view to responding more effectively to the specific needs of young adolescents with a 21st century approach to teaching and learning.

The new initiative includes:

- Designated Year 7 Learning Team
- Year 7 Learning Street that provides students with a sense of community and ownership
- New collaborative and modern learning spaces which see a combination of flexible learning hubs, quiet study spaces and breakout spaces. All which enhance the contemporary learning happening at St Georges
- The learning does not stop when the school day finishes, with the Year 7 Team offering weekly “Bootcamp Masterclasses” which attend to student individual needs
- 21st Century approach to education focusing on collaboration and interdisciplinary activities.

Examples include:

- Design solutions and Mathematics with “The Block 2020” project.
- Science and English with classrooms transformed into Hogwarts for students to demonstrate their skills in Taxonomy.
- Weekly “Starbucks Maths” sessions which allow students to extend their knowledge and understanding of different mathematical concepts in a real-life setting.
- Entrepreneurship projects – based on trans-discipline, inquiry teaching. Culminating in the annual Toy Expo event. In addition to the above the programme connections are made 12 months prior to all incoming Year 7 students through various platforms i.e., Edmodo and the Pen Pal programme to kick start and enhance their sense of belonging to the school community.

Name: David Webb

School: Cedar College, SA

Venue for Presentation: Hills Christian Community School, SA

Email: davidw@cedarcollege.sa.edu.au

Title: Year 7 Transition to Middle School at Cedar College

Summary of presentation:

Beginning Middle School incorporates a leap in skill sets; communication channels and platforms; and changing relationship dynamics and demands. Students commence the year in different starting places for each of the above areas.

At Cedar College, we have a range of initiatives that help to support students and their parents as they transition to Middle School. Middle School Welcome Day during Term 4 provides an opportunity to meet other students in their cohort, work with key staff, orientate to the college grounds and experience four Middle School lessons. First day is always full of nervous anticipation and excitement. Year 7s have a reduced lesson load during the first two days to settle in and also meet the students in their vertical community.

During week 2, families have a shared BBQ and information night at the College. The following week students participate in a time management workshop to assist with student’s development of helpful routines to keep on top of their study demands and create time for effective learning outside of school. During 2021, Year 7s had no homework for the first 3 weeks and then over a 2-week period homework was introduced. Students and families responded well to this initiative as students were able to settle without the added pressure of homework to keep up with in the exhausting and very stimulating initial weeks of Middle School. A future focus is enhancing the College Get Ready Day.

Our aim is for families to have key information clearly presented to support student preparation and family expectations for the year to come.

Name: James Marsman

School: Bundaberg Christian College, QLD

Venue for Presentation: Riverside Christian College, QLD

Email: james.marsman@bcc.net.au

Title: Middle Years Culture

Summary of presentation:

Here at Bundaberg Christian College (BCC), we have been working very hard to deliberately develop the culture of the Middle School. We have intentionally created and developed our positive environments to foster our core R.I.S.E values (Respect, Integrity, Servanthood, Excellence).

We have achieved this by several programs and initiatives including developing a middle year’s leadership program, Tie Pin (badging) system, positive reinforcement initiatives, including sending postcards home from teachers to let students know of the good things teachers are seeing in the classroom, a restorative practice program, a peer mentor program involving Year 7 and Year 11, life skills units, Digital footprint programs and more.

Whilst the hardest, start-up work has passed, our next phase is to be continuing to develop these programs and initiatives. Furthermore, there is a need to guide and lead the good elements that are happening whilst responding appropriately to unforeseen elements. Several new initiatives have begun this year including a strengthened Year 7 program to help the many new students, entering at the beginning of a year, to become a part of the BCC community.

Middle years students will be developing the house spirit culture with the new initiative of a ‘BCC bucket drum core’. This drum core will be used to help strengthen the BCC house and BCC college spirit. It will further strengthen the house and college war cries.

Name: Ian Grice

School: Brisbane Grammar School, QLD

Venue for Presentation: Northside Christian College, QLD

Email: ian.grice@brisbanegrammar.com

Title: Applied Thinking - building meta-cognitive and self-regulatory capacity in Year 7 and 8 students

Summary of presentation:

A key area of development for Middle School students is the building of self-regulatory capacity. Skills and attitudes that enable metacognition are an important component of this agenda and require explicit attention. While some students already have well developed skills in these areas by the end of Year 6, many do not. At Brisbane Grammar School (BGS), some students have already spent two years at the School prior to Year 7, but a large number arrive in all shapes and sizes from many different primary schools.

Additionally, emotional and intellectual changes that begin to occur in early adolescence and changes in expectations of students in older year levels enable students to develop further in this area than they have previously. This makes Year 7 and 8 an ideal time for an explicit focus on these areas. From 2021, Year 7 and 8 students undertake a stand-alone subject we have named "Applied Thinking". It is assessed both formatively and summatively and reported on. It is closely tied to existing student wellbeing initiatives and learning experiences undertaken in regular disciplines. A key objective is to assist students to transfer their knowledge and skills across subjects and co-curricular experiences both horizontally and vertically.

The overarching objective of the course is to develop lifelong thinking and learning in students by helping them to -

- understand key elements that lead to learning
- operate as curious and inquiring learners
- develop capacities for self-regulation
- build a toolkit of supporting skills
- become meta-cognitive about learning in all contexts using a shared language of learning.

The course is in its infancy with a refining process expected to last until the end of 2022.

Name: David Wilcox

School: Highlands Christian College, QLD

Venue for Presentation: Highlands Christian College, QLD

Email: davidw@highlands.qld.edu.au

Title: The Adolescent Brain (and what to do with it in the classroom)

Summary of presentation:

The adolescent brain develops at a rate surpassed only by the first year of life. And the impact of this change on learning is equally significant.

Using the work of Barry Corbin and others, we will explore what educators can do to create learning activities which maximise engagement from our adolescent learners.



Name: Cassandra Jackson

School: Bellemere State School, QLD

Venue for Presentation: Northside Christian College, QLD

Email: cdrah4@eq.edu.au

Title: Using the UN Sustainability Goals to Create Global Citizens

Summary of presentation:

This presentation will cover what the UN Sustainability Goals are and how they have been effectively used as an innovative classroom resource throughout different units of work targeted at Year 5 and 6 students.

By incorporating the UN Sustainability Goals into your unit planning, it provides students opportunities to explore the world as global citizens and find real world connections to the classroom. In my experience, I have seen that students are engaged and connected to their learning when they see relevance to what we are teaching them.

Middle year's students are capable of understanding the hardships across the globe and by using these goals; it can support students to build empathy for others, understand their global responsibilities and challenge their critical thinking skills to think outside the box of their classroom.

Name: Mitchell Johnson

School: Indooroopilly State High School, QLD

Venue for Presentation: Brigidine College, QLD

Email: mwjoho@eq.edu.au

Title: Student Clubs – Student Voice in Action

Summary of presentation:

Indooroopilly State High school has a multitude of different student interest clubs, the most popular being Dungeons and Dragon Club that boasts 60+ students attending each week. The club was initiated by two teachers in our Integrated Student Support department (S.E.P), who recognised the need for a program that allowed our neuro-diverse students to practice their social skills in a safe environment. Whilst initially facilitated by teachers, the goal was always to create a student led program. This year, most of the groups are lead (as the Dungeon Master) by students with the majority of groups consisting of both neuro-diverse and typical students.

The academic benefit that came from this club was first realised in the increase of school attendance of students who historically had high absenteeism. Secondly, teachers reported an increase in confidence in communication in class. Increased attendance and engagement naturally resulted in academic success. Teachers, recognising the opportunity to engage with their students started to modify assignments to allow students to research and analyse D&D. Parents and teachers were able to use D&D club as an extrinsic motivator for their students to complete schoolwork. Additionally, the club allowed students to develop their leadership capabilities, self-confidence, and their ability to work in a team, conflict resolution, problem solving and critical thinking skills all of which improve learning outcome in the classroom.

Name: Deidre Hall

School: Indooroopilly State High School, QLD

Venue for Presentation: Brigidine College, QLD

Email: dhall30@eq.edu.au

Title: Year 7 Transition Program

Summary of presentation:

An effective transition program which begins in the year prior to students beginning secondary school enables students and parents to feel welcome and comfortable in their new school. The key focus of the transition program is the student's social and emotional wellbeing. The Junior Secondary team conducts a program which involves visits to the Primary Schools of the Year 6 students, student participation in preparatory programs for students in Programs of Excellence, personalised enrolment interviews, transition visits for students with special needs and a Preview Morning. Students also participate in an Orientation Program at the beginning of Year 7.

The allocation of a class Peer Buddy provides additional social support when starting secondary school.

The school designates qualified staff with the expertise to plan, implement and evaluate the transition activities and programs for students and families as well as to train and support teachers in the delivery of these.

Name: Berni Sligar

School: Brigidine College, QLD

Venue for Presentation: Brigidine College, QLD

Email: sligarb@brigidine.qld.edu.au

Title: Bridging the year 9 Dip

Summary of presentation:

It is well documented that student engagement, motivation and behaviour can often take a dip in Year 9. While it has been attributed to the myriad of changes that are typical of adolescence, there is evidence that the dip could well be a symptom of feeling unloved, in a 'middle child syndrome' kind of way. Much of the current literature points to setting high expectations and ensuring there is something for everybody, as a way of combating the perception that Year 9 is the least important year level in the school.

With this in mind, the Middle School Leadership Program at Brigidine College provides opportunities for all students in Year 9 to engage in a range of leadership roles designed to reinforce the importance of their role within the middle school community. At the beginning of the school year, students are invited to join a team that aligns with their academic, wellbeing, sporting or cultural interests. These teams are responsible for leading the middle school blog, conducting middle school assemblies, running STEM & craft makerspace, creating study placemats and facilitating weekly sporting activities.

All leadership teams operate under the middle school theme for the year and promote the importance of a growth mindset. Whether it be speaking on assembly or working behind the scenes, our students have enjoyed the opportunity to share their unique gifts in a way they feel comfortable. The benefits have been positive and widespread.

With increased self-confidence, purpose and responsibility, we have seen their engagement, motivation and behaviour reflect the sense of importance they feel as leaders of our middle school.

Name: Roshanna Bull

School: Horizon Christian School, SA

Venue for Presentation: Cornerstone College, SA

Email: rbull@horizon.sa.edu.au

Title: Integrated Learning - Our Journey

Summary of presentation:

What is 9ILP?

- Optional subject
- Integrated, provide more practical learning experiences
- Project Based
- Provide a wide range of learning experiences
- 2021- Design and Build a BMX track

Why did we do it?

- An increasing group of students disengaged with the curriculum
- Cater to a range of learning styles and needs
- Ignite a love of learning and inquiry

How did we do it?

- Long process...
- Started with Curriculum, particularly English, Mathematics, Design & Technology and General capabilities
- Found that Mathematics was harder to integrate
- Assessment tasks are based on the Design Process (Folio) and Oral Language (Video)

Student Participation Process

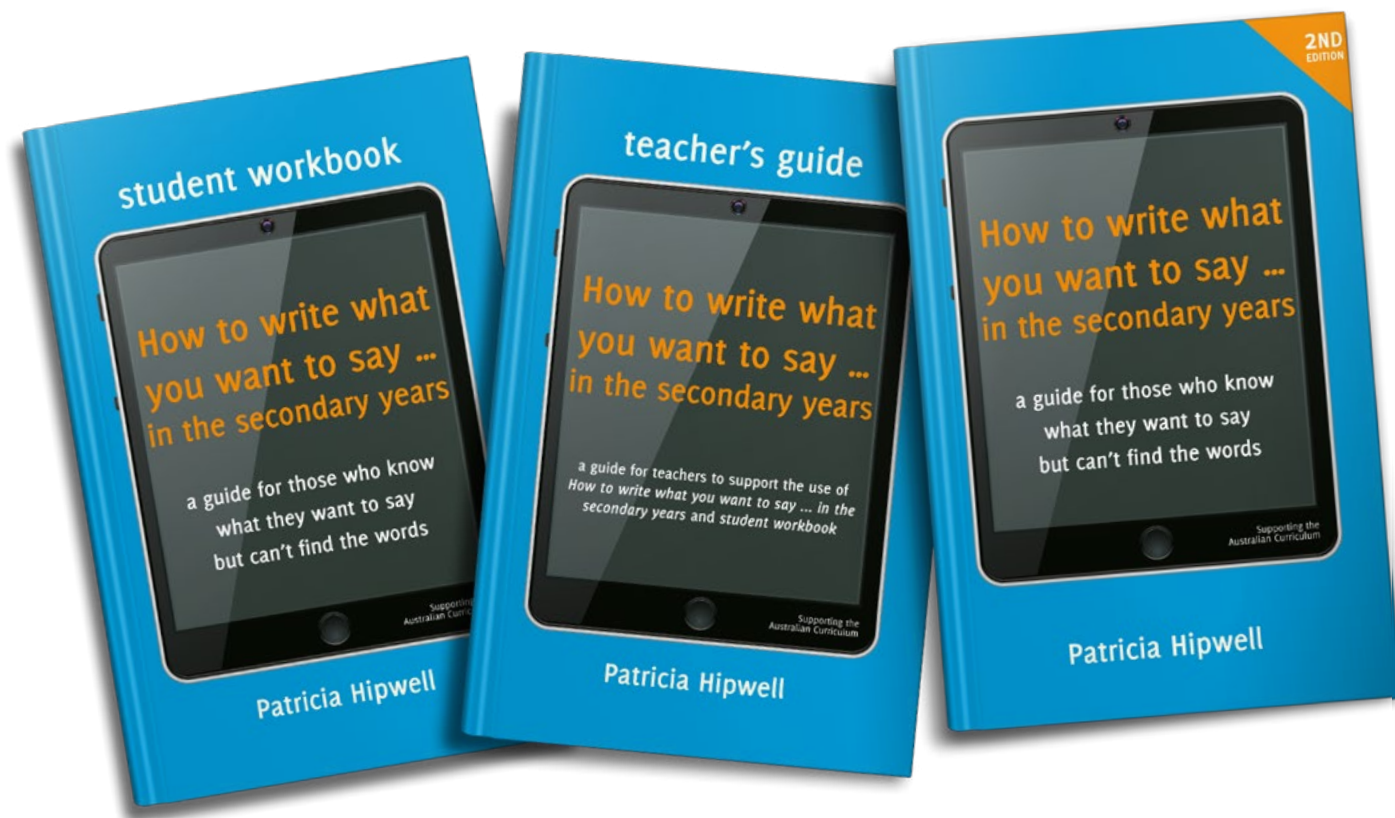
- Letter home to families and students expressed interest
- Students were interviewed
- Parents called to ensure they understood requirements
- 14 students in total currently involved

Experiences so far...

- Flying drones
- Excursion to visit existing tracks
- Playdough track
- Marking out track with marking paint
- Brainstorming
- Surveyed middle school students

Where to from here....?

- Hoping for it to continue with broader year levels
- Hoping for more students to be involved
- Review positives and negatives



Book Reviews

Patricia Hipwell

How to Write What You Want to Say ... in the secondary years (Second Edition)

How to Write What You Want to Say ... in the secondary years: teacher's guide

How to Write What You Want to Say ... in the secondary years: student workbook

*Reviewed by Adjunct Professor Val Klenowski
Queensland University of Technology*

This set of three books authored by Patricia Hipwell and entitled *How to Write What You Want to Say ... in the secondary years* constitutes a valuable resource for students, teachers, parents or carers. The books were written with the intention that they be used together. Originally, Patricia was concerned to help her own children find the words that they wanted to say. The dedication to her daughter suggests that the tried and true methods espoused in the books have been successful!

The second edition of the *How to Write What You Want to Say ... in the secondary years* develops the ideas introduced in the earlier edition with the inclusion of additional ideas and examples. There is further guidance to secondary students to help them develop their literacy and writing skills, through the clear, accessible examples and illustrations.

At the outset of this book there is a helpful list of definitions of some of the key terms such as 'task words', 'graphic organiser', 'sentence starter' and 'connectives'. The guide is structured using a two-page format for each writing skill of which there are twenty-five. The writing skills range from 'analysing', 'arguing', 'predicting', 'quoting' to 'synthesising'. Each skill is defined with a further elaboration which offers the student additional information about the skill. An example is then given to illustrate how the student could apply their understanding of the particular writing skill. Helpful sentence starters and connectives are also included.

To illustrate, with reference to the writing skill of 'discussing', first, a definition is given.

Discussing, meaning: Considering both or several sides of an issue or idea, without necessarily coming to a conclusion; supporting opinions or conclusions with evidence.

Second, information concerning the context for the use of the skill of 'discussing' follows, with a description of the skills required when using this skill in a written context. For example, reasoning and use of evidence to support the case or ideas being discussed, are skills required when using the skill of 'discussing.'

A very useful example is then provided, which demonstrates how a writer could discuss the topic of 'the role of migration in modern Australia.' The sentence starters for this skill are offered on the following page and include: "A further issue for the future is that it is ..., making it ..." or "The challenge will be to develop ... that can ...". Finally, some connecting ideas within and between sentences are listed such as: 'also', 'although', 'primarily' and 'to a large extent'.

How to Write What You Want to Say ... in the secondary years: teacher's guide is an instructive text with explicit teacher guidelines for the teaching of a writing skill using a didactic four-stage process. The first stage involves **deconstructing** a text that is representative of one of the twenty-five writing skills included in the other two books. This stage involves the identification of the text structure and the language used with specific reference to the sentence starters and connectives within and between sentences. The second stage involves **modelling** a text which is an example of the skill, followed by **jointly constructing** a text that exemplifies the skill.

The fourth and final stage, requires **independently constructing** a text that is an example of the skill.

The teacher's guide provides a list of the key terms and ideas at the outset together with a statement that makes it clear that the use of graphic organisers is an integral part of the teaching approach suggested. The graphic organisers provide note-making frameworks for the various stages of deconstructing a text, and planning templates for the joint and independent construction phases. The use of organisers is intended to help teachers to check the students' ideas and the structure of their writing prior to the drafting process.

The teaching sequence is logically presented at the beginning of the teacher's guide and is based on the **Gradual Release of Responsibility Model**. To help the teacher fully understand how to use the model, the actual words are given so that the teacher can use them with their own class. The teacher is informed that the following teaching sequence may take several lessons given the complexity of the particular writing skill. For each writing skill the following format is used:

1. the **learning goal** ('I do it') the suggested teacher words follow, "During this lesson, you will begin to develop the skill of ... (display on the board of screen.)"
2. **meaning** ('you do it') similarly the teacher is informed to: "Read the definition from How to Write What You Want to Say ... in the secondary years (Second Edition)"
3. **example** ('I do it') Teachers are asked to "Show students a real-world example of the skill and explain your thinking."

4. **tasks words that have similar intent to ...** ('I do it') It is explained that "Sometimes it is not clear from the question which writing skill is required. This is because some task words have similar meanings to others."

5. **question stems that have a similar intent to ...** ('I do it') Similarly, "Also, question stems may suggest a skill even though the skill word is not in the question." An example, with an explanation is given (p.2).

6. **deconstructing a text** ('I do it', 'we do it', 'you do it') At this stage of the sequence teachers are asked to: "Prepare a whole-class reading activity for the text you have selected, again examples and explanations are provided."

7. **modelling a text** ('I do it') At this point, teachers are asked to "model the completion of the graphic organizer for the skill and show the students how to structure the writing using the most suitable language." Again a comprehensive explanation is given.

8. **jointly constructing a text** ('we do it') Teachers are directed to ensure that the students have sufficient background knowledge of the topic in the graphic organiser so that joint construction will not be difficult. During this stage the students practise writing information from the graphic organiser into full sentences using sentence starters and connectives from *How to Write What You Want to Say ... in the secondary years (Second Edition)*

9. **independently constructing a text** ('you do it') In this final stage of the sequence, "students independently complete a graphic organiser and write a text that demonstrates a skill."

After the preface, introduction, key terms/ideas and the suggested teaching sequence each of the skills are elaborated. Each writing skill follows the suggested format with plenty of illustrative material such as graphic organisers, useful prompts, activities for the teacher to use and apply.

How to Write What You Want to Say ... in the secondary years: student workbook is structured in much the same way as the other books. In addition, the workbook comprises many activities designed for the student to practise deconstructing and constructing texts that demonstrate writing skills. Students are provided with the opportunity to make use of graphic organisers and use sentence starters and language for connecting ideas within and between sentences.

In the introduction to the student workbook, the reader is told that the students are provided with opportunities to practise a writing skill and that for each skill students will follow the four stage process of deconstructing a text, of observing the teacher modelling an example of the skill, of jointly constructing a text and then finally independently constructing a text that is an example of the skill.

It is emphasized that graphic organisers are used throughout the book, to assist students to organize ideas and information for a writing skill, to contain the information to be included, to provide structure to the writing and to allow the student to focus on the writing and for the teacher to check the student work before writing commences.

In conclusion, Patricia Hipwell has developed these resources using a functional and guided approach which will enable students to say what they want to say and to know how to do so. Much thought and creativity are evident in the very helpful and well-structured set of resources that are well designed to help students achieve the goal of writing with confidence to achieve an intended purpose. I highly recommend these resources to teachers, their students, parents and carers.

Information for Contributors

Adolescent Success welcomes submissions for journal inclusion that reflect the aims of the Association and address issues relevant to the middle years of schooling. Possible topics include: the developmental needs and interests of young adolescents; family and community partnerships; varied approaches to teaching and learning integrated curriculum; authentic assessment; school leadership and organisational structures in the middle years; information and communication technologies and resources in the middle years; research findings and future developments in the middle years.

Contributions may take the form of:

- academic and research papers that make an original contribution of an empirical or theoretical nature
- literature reviews
- papers of a practical or applied nature
- reports
- viewpoints
- book reviews

Contributions

- The journal has two levels of acceptance of papers for publication: refereed and non refereed. Refereed papers will have two referees selected from relevant fields of study by the editor. Papers must clearly indicate if they wish to be considered for refereed status. Refereed articles will be included in a specific section of the journal.
- Contributions shall be submitted electronically via email to the MYSA email address, or on CD, as a Microsoft Word document. Articles must be double-spaced, without the use of styles, 12 point font Times New Roman. The submitted article and CD become the property of MYSA.
- All contributors need to complete an Author's agreement form to be submitted with the article.
- Papers should be between 700 and 5000 words in length.

- Each article should have a separate title page that contains the title, the names of all authors, their contact addresses, email addresses, and telephone and facsimile numbers. The names of the authors should not appear on the rest of the paper.
- An abstract of no more than 200 words must accompany each refereed article.
- All references should be placed at the end of text using APA (6th edition). For example:

Journal article

Rumble, P., & Aspland, T. (2010). The four tributes model of the middle school teacher. *Australian Journal of Middle Schooling*, 10(1), 4–15.

Book

Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Chapter in edited book

Ajsen, I. (1985). From intentions to actions: a theory of planned behaviour. In J. Kuhl & J. Beckman (Eds), *Action control. From cognition to behaviour* (pp. 11–40). Berlin: Springer-Verlag.

- Footnotes are not to be used.
- Figures and diagrams should be professionally prepared and submitted in a form suitable for reproduction, indicating preferred placement.
- Photographs should be

submitted separately (not included within the text). All student photographs, art work, poetry etc must be accompanied by copyright release forms, which are available on the website or from the editor.

- If the material has been published elsewhere, details must be included on the author's agreement form.
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