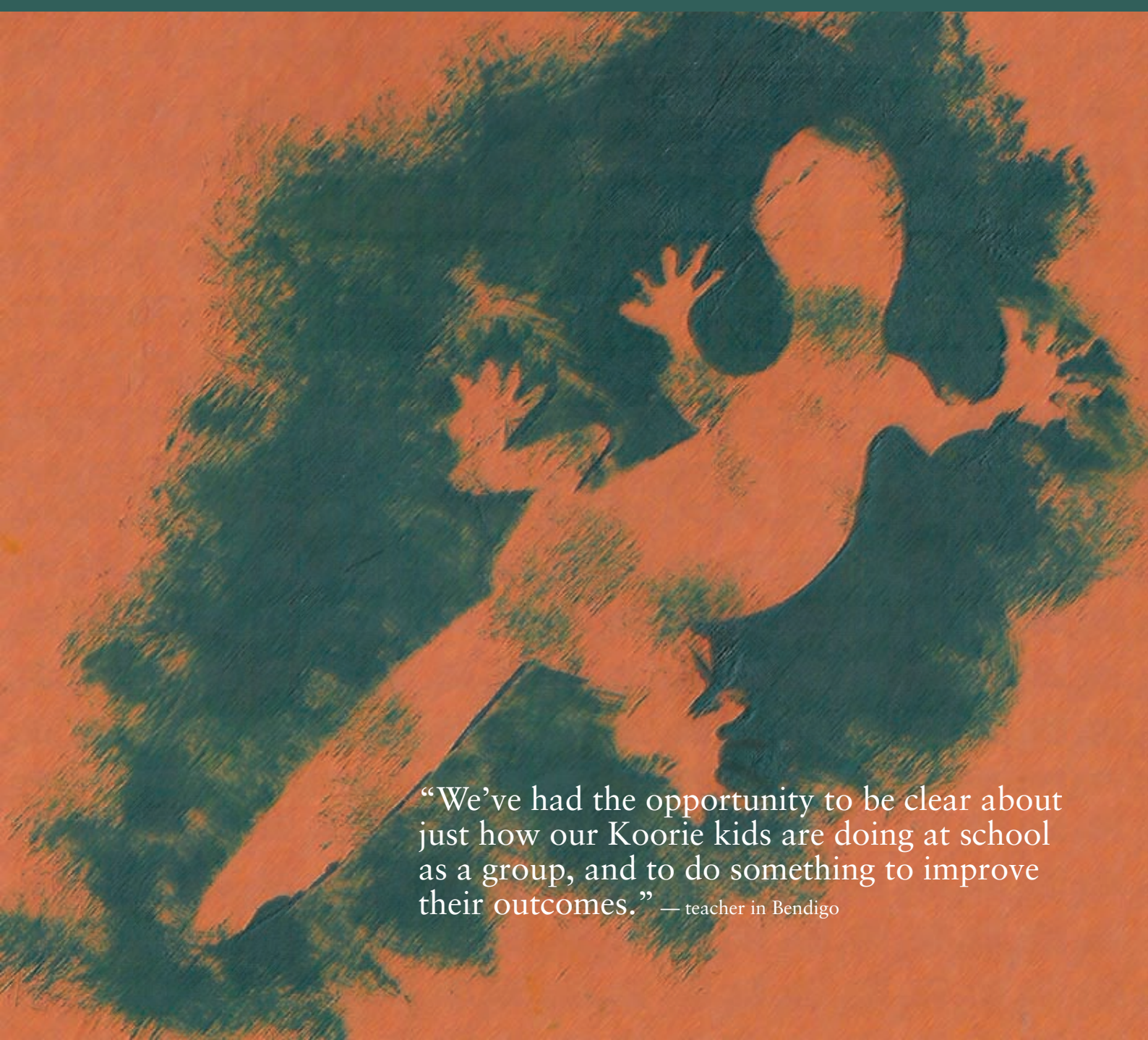


Snapshots of action

WHAT WORKS. IN THE LODDON MALLEE REGION OF VICTORIA IN 2008



“We’ve had the opportunity to be clear about just how our Koorie kids are doing at school as a group, and to do something to improve their outcomes.” — teacher in Bendigo

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Snapshots of Action. What Works. in the Loddon Mallee Region of Victoria in 2008

Edited by Geoff Ainsworth

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In 2007, the *What Works* team worked with a total of 22 schools in six clusters as part of the Loddon Mallee Region's Koorie Education Strategy. In 2008, a similar process took place, involving some schools that were not involved in 2007. The program took several months, was data-driven and focussed on planning, implementation and evaluation of strategic action in schools, using the *What Works* tools. Teacher time release was provided by the Loddon Mallee Region.

The descriptions in this publication are just a small sample of the initiatives taken at a variety of schools. They represent a snapshot of work in progress.

The program was based on these beliefs:

- Teams from schools working cooperatively and actively to plan action to improve educational outcomes for Koorie students is more likely to prove effective than approaching the task individually.
- Professional learning and the potential to influence positive educational outcomes for students is enhanced if teachers have dedicated time to reflect and work together and can build their learning, relationships and networks over time.
- The resourcing of professional learning, including materials, intellectual input, facilitation and program management, should be of a high standard and relevant to the purpose defined.





Supporting success in Years 11 and 12

ROBINVALE SECONDARY COLLEGE IS A 7 TO 10 SCHOOL OF 300 STUDENTS, OF WHOM ABOUT 40 ARE INDIGENOUS. IT HAS THREE FEEDER PRIMARY SCHOOLS, INCLUDING ONE ACROSS THE MURRAY RIVER IN NEW SOUTH WALES.



(From left) Janelle Ricker, Tess Sampson, Julie McMonnies

The *What Works* team in the school focussed on supporting a group of Year 11 students to continue with and succeed in their schooling.

Julie talks about the project

“This particular project came from a recognised need. The usual suggestion is to look at students who need support in the lower school, and we do a lot there, but we had just had a meeting of Year 11 teachers when Ray [*What Works* facilitator, Ray Bale] came and we realised the need at that level.

We have a group of six Indigenous girls at Year 11. Some of them were starting to have a problem with attendance and one or two wanted to pull out of subjects. They’re coming to the end of the year and we wanted to see whether we could support them so that they could go on with their schooling.

Our overall goal was to improve educational outcomes for our Koorie students but our short-term target was to improve the attendance of those Year 11 students by 20% this year. We wanted to support them to do that and to continue to Year 12 next year.

Probably the first thing we did in our action plan was let them know that we were all working to help them get through Year 11 and 12. And they were asked to identify a trusted staff member who could talk to them individually. Then we let our staff know if they had been identified by the student as a trusted person and asked them to make contact with the student and ask them how they were going.

We found out, for instance, that a particular student thought she was going to fail Maths,



Tess Sampson is a Koorie Educator who was born in Robinvale and went to school at St Mary’s. Currently, she also has a part-time role as laboratory technician but in 2009 will be full-time Koorie Educator. She has been at the school for 16 years.

Julie McMonnies is currently Assistant Principal, with teaching responsibilities as well as junior school management. She was also born in Robinvale and has been teaching there since 1981, with some periods of leave.

Janelle Ricker has lived in Robinvale for 33 years and has worked at the school for nine years. Currently, she is Koorie Home Liaison Officer (based as well at Robinvale Consolidated School) but in the past has also coordinated the homework centre, been a Koorie Educator and worked with the Koorie Literacy Links program.

and wanted to pull out of it, but when we sent to see her teacher he said it was just a matter of some catch up and she could pass. So we organised after school tutoring. It was acted on and followed up immediately. We also found out that they all were all quite serious about their ambitions and every single one of them wanted to go onto Year 12.

I think we can say that at least a couple of students probably wouldn't have gone on to Year 12 without this support. It wasn't happening for them. There are some obstacles to their success at school and we're trying to overcome those obstacles.

The most effect we can have is by supporting them to have success at school.

Julie: "Our focus is to make learning happen at any cost and we think that we're succeeding. The school tries to provide whatever is needed. It's all about making sure the kids get to school and are in class. We're looking after the whole person here."

Tess talks about the issues facing the students

"There are always lots of questions that bother our kids. Like they're at school but their minds are cluttered with so much stuff from home life. It affects their learning but I think with us as a team of people working with them, we can pick up when things are not right, just from the body language or the tone of voice. So you can pick up on the mood, but then you bring it back to the learning focus.

When kids are not feeling happy at home they don't feel happy to come to school and they don't learn. But with someone like Janelle or me contacting them personally or even picking them up, you make it a little easier for them and then the learning comes more easily too.

Kids have jobs as well, and they have other responsibilities, like looking after younger brothers and sisters. So that makes it hard to do homework.

A lot of parents only went to a certain part of schooling in their lives and unfortunately their memory of school is not very good. They support their kids, they want them to do well but they don't always know how to encourage them and support them to do the kind of work you need to get through VCE.

Our kids do know how important education is and they know the struggle it is to get that certificate at Year 12. In a way, they think the future will always be a struggle but as professional people, we're here to work as a team to try and build their strengths, help them to believe in themselves and give them some direction. At the end of Year 11 they can give themselves a pat on the back because they're still here at school.

For some kids it's building that trust. The people at this school do genuinely care about the kids and their education, and we care as professional people and friends as well.

Tess: "I believe that you never stop learning and can always learn, and that's why I have a passion for kids to learn and I want to be a part of learning culture in the school. Kids here learn values that stay with them after they leave."

Janelle talks about working with students

"I liaise between parents and the school and basically support students in whatever they need. Parents often need someone to make them feel more comfortable coming to the school or letting the school know that there are things that they have concerns about.

This year I've used texting a lot. It's an easy way of getting a message to a student. It seems to work really well and they will nearly always answer. Often I send kids a text message to say good morning, see you at a school. They'll text me back and tell me what's going on. It's a good start to the morning and it just goes from there. And if during the day they're not at school, I can text and find out where they are and why they aren't at school. And often I can get them to come back.

Janelle: "I think it's the follow up caring that counts... it's not just one day and then it's forgotten."

Sometimes, a student might need to go to the doctor, so I'll pick them up for that, or find out what else is getting in the way of coming to school. It could be uniforms, getting to work placements, getting stuck if they miss the bus... lots of things.

I've probably contacted these students every single day.

And if they have appointments about jobs or scholarships or work experience I can help organise it and get them there, because sometimes that help isn't available at home.

Maybe life's not good at home at the moment for a particular student so I think it's the follow up caring that counts. Like it's not just one day and then it's forgotten. You are following up all the time, even on the weekend.

When we interviewed one particular student and went through all the things that were happening in her life, we could see it's no wonder she's not coming to school. With the right support she's now back at school but when you look at the big picture you can understand why it's hard. There's just so much happening.

ACTION PLANNING SHEET

STUDENT:

ACTION	CONTACT STAFF	START DATE	FINISH DATE	STAFF SUPERVISOR	COMPLETED
1. WHAT'S HAPPENING? (staff) List all the circumstances that we are aware of that are impacting on this student's performance at this stage.					
2. INTERVIEW STUDENT Explain the program. Get information from the student re: circumstances/ambitions/trusted staff					
3. LINK TO CAREERS TEACHER Find out pathway from present to achieving ambition					
4. CURRENT SCHOOL OUTCOMES Get information re: current achievement and requirements for each subject					
5. LINK TO TRUSTED PERSONNEL Get the trusted staff members to be advised of their place in the program					
6. DEVELOPMENT OF AN ACADEMIC REVISION (SURVIVAL) PLAN TO ACHIEVE REQUIRED OUTCOMES Individual teachers develop revision plan (survival plan) for each student					
7. MEETING WITH PARENT/CARER AND STUDENT TO EXPLAIN PROCESS To support this process parent/carers need to be informed and supported as well					
8. REGULAR FOLLOW UP MEETINGS WITH THE STUDENTS What is happening? What else has arisen? What can be done? What has worked well?					

Good practice and community



Huntly Primary School is on the outskirts of Bendigo. There are about 155 students, of whom 14 are Koorie, and that number is increasing. Most families in the area work in Bendigo, about 15 minutes away.



Craig Burnett is a Bendigo boy and Principal at Huntly PS. He taught at Rainbow, Charlton and Violet Street (Bendigo) before becoming Principal at Redesdale Primary School. He has been at Huntly for about eighteen months.

Craig talks about good practice and community

“When the Wannik strategy came out and we started with *What Works* we looked at how many Koorie kids we had and how they were going. I think some staff were surprised that nearly ten per cent are Koorie. But it was interesting that when we looked at achievement, our Koorie kids are doing as well as other kids and are up to state benchmarks. We were really pleased about that.

What we’re trying to do now is to improve kids’ learning from, in many cases, good to great. That’s the way we will use Individual Learning Programs.

I’m really lucky I’ve come to a place where teachers are prepared to try

lots of new things (and then talk about them), to cooperate with one another and to help one another out. And they continue to refine what they’re doing. They’re quite a tight-knit group, and most have been working together for a while now. We have good teachers and good teaching here.

There’s a community feel here as well. The community is supportive and wants good things to happen for their kids. People are saying there’s a nice feel to the place and the kids are safe and comfortable here.

We’re very strong on values and in a way we really only have two rules here: is what you’re doing safe, and is what you’re doing respectful? Probably a year ago some people didn’t have a very high opinion of behaviour in the yard and so on. So we’ve done a lot of work with restorative justice practice, talking to parents about behaviour and using the ‘Naming It’ strategy and it seems to have worked for us. We now have a set procedure for dealing with incidents. I think this approach is good for Koorie kids but really it’s good for all kids. It helps them take responsibility for their actions and fix things if they’ve done something wrong.



Working together, building relationships

Eaglehawk Secondary College is a 7 to 10 school in Bendigo which has over 600 students, of whom about 5% are Indigenous. The *What Works* team focussed on improved relationships between students, teachers and community, as a step towards improved educational outcomes for their Indigenous students.



Cecile Shanahan (left), Darrell Boschert and Bettina Bysouth.

This conversation begins with Bettina and Cecile talking about their experience of working together to implement the Indigenous Studies subject *Ngatta ee kian in*. (*Ngatta ee kian in* means ‘believe in yourself’ in the *Dja Dja Wrung* language.)

Bettina: “When Cecile took on the job helping coordinate *Ngatta ee kian in* it was a bit of a challenge to bring someone into a whole different world and help them understand. Because me being Aboriginal myself, I was trying to educate someone into that Aboriginal world. It was a huge challenge to build up trust and put those two different worlds together.

.....

Cecile: “When I heard the job was available I was really excited but I was going in blind and it’s been a huge learning curve. Maybe I thought I was going to change the world, which I quickly learnt I wasn’t, but Bettina helped me understand what the kids are all about. At the start I was really nervous about stepping on anybody’s toes or saying the wrong thing. So I probably made a lot of mistakes.

One problem was that I went in with my teacher hat on, when actually I was there to help Bettina teach about Aboriginal culture. So I really didn’t have the knowledge and the kids knew that I didn’t.

.....

Bettina: “The kids need a sense of belonging and they haven’t always had



Bettina Bysouth is a Koorie Educator at Eaglehawk Secondary College and at Comet Hill Primary School. She’s a Barkindji woman, whose people come from the Darling River region of New South Wales. Bettina completed her TAFE qualification while at the same time looking after her young children.

Cecile Shanahan has been at Eaglehawk for four years, with some time off in between to have children. Before that she taught in Kerang but originally trained as a journalist and came to teaching after a period working in public relations. In 2008 she has been Indigenous Education Coordinator.

Darrell Boschert has been teaching since 1980 and at Eaglehawk for six years. He is currently Teaching and Learning Coordinator and this year his job has also included supporting Cecile and Bettina in trying to ‘mainstream’ some of the programs for Aboriginal students.

that. If they've got a good relationship with the school and with teachers they'll learn. Support is the key for these kids and if they don't have that it they get lost. By this time in the year, they're fine with Cecile. The trust is there.

.....

Darrell: "A few years ago I started finding more Koorie kids in my classes and I began to see that the kids often needed a bit more support to feel that they really belonged. Then I wanted to be able to make more of a difference, so when *What Works* came along I found the sessions very useful. What's been happening this year is really about building relationships. The first step for us is to get kids really comfortable here and get the relationships right with them. Now that we're starting to do that we're in a position to help them improve their literacy and numeracy. If the kid doesn't have a relationship with you and trust you it doesn't matter what curriculum you have, they're not going to learn. That's the way it works.

.....

Cecile: "And I've seen that once you've developed that trust of the children, it flows on to having the trust of the parents at home.

.....

Bettina: "It doesn't just stop there. Like, we've got these Koorie kids who have non-Koorie friends and that trust they have for us has impacted on their non-Koorie friends. Now there's so much interest in doing Indigenous studies. And Karen [principal, Karen Roberts] is right behind us. We all want the kids to get the feel that education is the key to them having a better future.

That's why in *Ngatta ee kian in* we get in guest speakers from universities and Indigenous careers pathways people. We have community members come up as well, including some who are from stolen generations. And they have gone to an English class, so it was mostly non-Indigenous kids they were talking to.

.....

Darrell: "That's part of mainstreaming, and it was received well. I heard a non-Indigenous girl in another classroom telling her friends what a great experience it was to actually sit in and listen, and how sad it was. They were all very interested. So I think the impact of the talk is really spreading around the school.

.....

Bettina: "But when we do those talks we encourage kids to ask questions. What a lot of people don't realise is that those stolen generation people are in the process of healing and getting stuff off their chest helps them healing. So it can be huge. It is negative, a part of the negative life that they had, but the positive out of it is actually getting it off their chest.

.....

Cecile: "So part of our *What Works* project is to develop a day about cultural understanding or awareness for staff, so that they can see the context behind all of this. We hope to have a local Elder and some Koorie kids who have been through the school, maybe one who didn't have a good time here as well as one who did.

.....

Darrell: "What I see this program doing is actually helping **all** teachers to have a better relationship with those families. That's my hope in terms of mainstreaming it. I'd like to see teachers feeling really comfortable about ringing up parents and talking about the good things their kids have done, not just about the negative stuff."



The Daborra Koorie mentoring program

Echuca College has over 1,000 students from Years 7–12 and about 40 students are Indigenous.

The *Daborra*¹ Program is funded in 2008 through the WOSI [Whole of School Intervention] Program of the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

It came in part from work with *What Works* in 2007, but also built on the school's successful *Ngaikun*² program. Discussions at the beginning of 2008 established priority area in Koorie Education of:

- attendance
- literacy and numeracy
- retention from Year 10 to 12
- increased rate of Year 12 completion.



Anne Peace (on right in photo) taught in primary schools for many years, finishing in the small Murray River town of Gunbower. After 10 years of retirement she returned to Echuca College last year to run the *Ngaikun* program. [*Ngaikun* means 'connecting past and present' in the *Yorta Yorta* language.] In 2008 she continued as coordinator of the *Daborra* ['pathway'] mentoring initiative.

Kristy Lovett (on left in photo) has lived in Echuca for seven years. She worked as a cook for a period before becoming an aide at Moama Public School and, this year, a Koorie Educator at Echuca College.



A mentoring program was intended to support all the priority areas, but it was hoped to particularly influence retention and rates of school completion. Students from Years 7–12 have been involved. Another key aim was that all Koorie students have an electronic Individual Learning Plan.

Kristy: "I thought the idea was great because I think it's really important for our students to have contact with community members. Then they see that you can go through school and you can come out on the other side, and there's a job or a course there."

1. *Daborra* means 'pathway' in the *Yorta Yorta* language

2. *Ngaikun* means 'connecting past and present' in the *Yorta Yorta* language

The first step was to approach senior Elder, Auntie Melva Johnson. She approved of the proposal, and supported it. Then it was necessary to make contact with suitable mentors. Most were contacted through Koorie Educator Josh Wanganeen, whose family is very well known in the area. Once they were approached, most community members were happy to be mentors.

Then a mentor training day was organised and facilitated by Michael Rowland of the *What Works* team and the Loddon Mallee Regional Office. It concentrated on the role of the mentor and how mentors would fit into the classroom but was also about how to manage community visits and the fact that the young people didn't have to always be in the classrooms. This was also the time when the mentors were shown around the school, and introduced to the students.

THE ROLE OF THE MENTOR

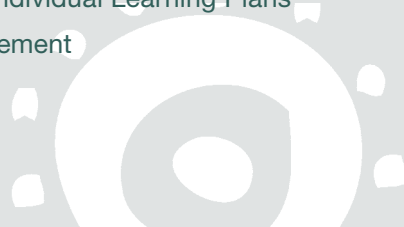
To work with a Koorie student on future pathways and Individual Learning Plans

To be an active listener and offer support and encouragement

To act as a positive role model

To constructively guide choices

To support community and workplace visits



Kristy: “Getting the right people to be mentors makes all the difference. We found a lot of them through Josh [Wanganeen, also a Koorie Educator] and his family and friends. They know everybody. We’ve got quite a few younger mentors – they’re people who have finished school and are probably going on to further study – but we wanted some older people as well. That’s more difficult because they are at work and we need them during working hours.

There were then appropriate police checks to be completed before the program could begin operation, as well as other administrative matters to be attended to, such as preparation of time sheets. Each mentor also received a folder including (among other things) proformas for Individual Learning Plans, lists of contacts and a diary in which to make notes about daily activities. Those folders are kept in a specific place and mentors collect them every morning.

Anne: “At 9 o’clock there’s half an hour when the kids are in home groups and we’ve got time to reshuffle if necessary because someone is away. It’s also a great time for meeting and talking and that’s been important.



Mentor, Sam Kirby.



Timetabling of mentors turned out to be quite difficult, because some of them had limited availability. Nevertheless, difficulties were overcome, and two weeks into the program the mentors met together again and were able to discuss their initial experiences.

Students have generally been pleased to have mentors. They are used to having Koorie Educators and there has definitely been a positive effect on attendance, with some students very keen not to miss sessions with mentors.

Other effects of mentoring take longer to be seen, but *Daborra* has made a promising start. Evidence from other parts of the country supports the notion that a larger Indigenous presence in schools promotes engagement and retention. Echuca College has an ongoing aim of building stronger links with community and has made substantial progress.

Anne: Certainly, the presence of mentors in the classroom is appreciated by students, but staff feedback is also very positive.





Establishing baseline data

Weeroona College is a P–10 school of about 800 students near Lake Weeroona in Bendigo. Historically, it was the only technical school in the area. About 3% of students identify as Indigenous.

The *What Works* team in the school began by collating useful data about the position of Indigenous students in the school. No targeted initiative can proceed without being clear about such data.

Baseline data

At the start of the *What Works* activity the team looked at how much they really knew about the achievement levels of the school’s Indigenous students and how that compared with the general population. There was a lot of anecdotal evidence but the available data had not been put together in an accessible form.

So the first task was to assemble evidence. The team discussed a number of areas but data were compiled under the following headings:

VELS [Victorian Essential Learning Standards] levels

In brief, findings in English were that all but two students were behind expected levels to some extent, and that seven students were two years behind. Only one student was at above expected levels.

In Mathematics, findings were that six students were at expected levels while 14 students were behind expected levels to some extent. No student was above expected levels.

Attendance

It was found that although several students attended almost every day, over half the group averaged only about 80% attendance. In other words, they were missing about one whole day of school per week.



(From left) Tracey Lee, Jillian McKenzie and Linda Quarrier.

Linda Quarrier began teaching at Weeroona seven years ago, after managing a registered training organisation in Melbourne for five years. Before that she spent 13 years as a youth worker. Linda teaches Science and Computer Programming,



Tracey Lee has been teaching Mathematics and Humanities for nine years. For the first eight of those she worked at the junior campus of the Maryborough Regional College, and she is now completing her first year at Weeroona.

Jillian McKenzie first came to Weeroona in 1978, after periods working at Oakleigh Technical School, Waverley High School, Wycheproof and Kangaroo Flat. She teaches French and English and some of her current students are children of those she taught in the 1980s.

A pattern of selective attendance was also noted, with some students apparently ‘at school’ but not attending particular classes.

Referrals for behavioural incidents

It was found that although Indigenous students make up only 3% of the school community they incur 7% of referrals for behavioural incidents. Six Indigenous students have no entries at all but one student has 37 referrals up to November. The most common reasons for referral were ‘refusal to follow instructions’ and ‘no equipment brought to class’.

Involvement in extra-curricular or ‘special’ activities

Within the group of Indigenous students it was found that there were no members on the Student Representative Council and no members of Student Action Groups. As well, although the school has large annual drama productions, no Indigenous student had participated in the last six years. At the same time, though, one student is a member of the school orchestra and attended the alpine school for leadership development.

Only one Indigenous student had artwork displayed or awarded. There was also a pattern of lack of participation in work experience and camps, although participation levels were slightly higher in sporting teams.

Linda: “There is a misconception that students who aren’t doing very well academically might be heavily involved in other things. Our data show this isn’t true.”

The initial response

The *What Works* team noted that the last two of the points above really relate to student engagement. In other words, if students were better engaged in the teaching and learning process their outcomes were likely to improve.

Similarly, better attendance is likely to influence outcomes as well. Without attending a sequence of lessons it is much more difficult to improve skills.

Tracey: “If students have been asked to leave class, they’re obviously not engaged and something has gone wrong. We need to know what it is.”

Linda: “We need to get to the point of making an extra effort to engage the kids.”

So action is clearly required around attendance and engagement. But the team realised that although they now had accessible data, they needed to investigate the reasons behind lack of attendance and lack of engagement. To do this, a student survey was devised, to try to get the student point of view, but it was thought to be important to see what the positives were for students as well as the negatives. Questions asked were:

- What do you like about school?
- What don’t you like?

- What classes do you like and why?
- What do you do at lunch times?
- How do you feel when you come to school after being away for a while?
- Do you feel that you are bullied at school?
- Why do you think you need to come to school?

Jillian: “We wanted to find out what barriers students think they face.”

The surveys were to be informal and conversational, with each team member interviewing a group of students. It is hoped that the student opinion could influence further planning, by illuminating some of the reasons behind student behaviour.

The longer term

At the time of writing, survey results are unavailable, but one immediate action is to plan to address a staff meeting to outline data and findings.

Further planning will then take place to encourage greater involvement of Indigenous students in extra-curricular and ‘special’ activities. It is hoped that this will lead to greater engagement with other teaching and learning activities, followed by better attendance and better outcomes.

Linda: “This has been just a beginning. We have to go further to actually make a difference.”



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For further information on *What Works* contact National Curriculum Services on (03) 9415 1299 or visit www.whatworks.edu.au

