



Esk Shire Learning network takes community approach

AN invitation from West Moreton Executive Director (Schools) Keith Hynes last year set the wheels in motion for the establishment of the Esk Shire Learning Network — a community-wide group helping senior phase students to achieve their goals and engage with the learning process.

Acting deputy principal at Lowood State High School and network facilitator Doug Hollywood said the group was committed to taking the broader reform agenda outlined in the Education and Training Reforms for the Future and applying it to the local area.

"We've got some unique problems with transport in the shire. We've got a high school at each end and limited opportunities in the middle in terms of educational support," Mr Hollywood said.

"So we wanted to try to coordinate and maximise the use of resources and opportunities for learning across the Esk Shire.

"In the Lowood area for example we identified that it was difficult to re-engage people who had disengaged from learning.

"We came up with the Lowood external campus concept to try to tap into those people who are disengaged from learning and try to get them into a setting where they can start learning again," he said.

Along with Teresa Randal, Mr Hollywood is leading the establishment of the Lowood State High School Alternative Campus to help build bridges

between local disengaged youth and education.

"We're developing programs that meet local needs and involve the whole community in the initiative," Mr Hollywood said.

"It's anticipated that the campus will commence operation in the second half of 2005.

"An enrolment contract will be negotiated with each student with curriculum options that include work-readiness skills, vocational education, work experience and health and life skills.

"Students' work will be self-paced and mentored for as long as it takes them to achieve their goals," he said.

As part of the Esk Shire Learning Network, Toogoolawah State High School chaplain Les Penrose has initiated a leadership and team building program for Year 11 boys to encourage them to stay at school.

"We identified that we needed to reach out to those students who came back to Year 11 rather unwillingly because they hadn't gotten a job over the holidays," Mr Penrose said.

"As a chaplain I've been involved with these students quite a bit and I thought we needed something that would improve their self-worth and self-esteem and give them the skills to integrate themselves back into the school community or look for a job."

Students are involved in adventure activities such as ropes courses and canoeing organised by the Police Citi-

zens Youth Club.

"It's had immediate effects. Teachers are reporting students are more involved in their learning and some are doing school-based apprenticeships that they would have been unlikely to get before," he said.

Mr Hollywood said the strength of the Esk Shire Learning Network was that it was made up of locals who talk about ideas and issues that link educational opportunities and share resources across the whole shire.

"A great example of this cooperation is the Esk Shire Service Integration Project being coordinated by Kathryn Gossow from the Esk Shire Council," he said.

"The aim of the project is to take a coordinated approach to engaging and supporting community members who are isolated from services and employment.

"Stage one of the project focuses on improving education, training and employment for young people.

"As a sounding board and think tank, agencies and community groups are welcome to become involved or consult the Esk Shire Learning Network about projects, programs, proposals in the local area," he said.

For more information about projects and events contact Doug Hollywood dholl42@eq.edu.au or visit the Education and Training Reforms for the Future leaders gateway for senior phase reforms at <http://www.learningplace.com.au/ea/etr>

Multi-age groupings find success at Clifton High

IMAGINE a Year 9 class not realising the lunch break had come until it was almost over.

That's what happened recently at Clifton State High School, where a new approach to teaching and learning in Years 8 and 9 is encouraging teaching staff to think of themselves as teachers of students, rather than of a particular subject.

This year the school has created multi-age groupings for Years 8 and 9, working on projects relating to themes that are common across the curriculum.

Principal Janice Schibrowski said the new student-centred approach has required teachers to individualise the curriculum for students from levels three to six in the one classroom, a process that is yielding benefits for the students as teachers incorporate extension, core and catch-up strategies.

Multi-age Years 8 and 9 groupings are being trialled with electives such as the arts and technology while students still split into year groups for Maths and English.

The changes to the Middle Phase of Learning in the school were based on a review last year gathering feedback from students, staff, parents and community representatives about what they wanted for the school.

Based on input from this process and an analysis of what staff decided were essential learnings for Clifton, teachers developed concepts for five units to be offered throughout the year, including an initial two-week unit which introduced the new way of learning by helping students develop a learner profile.

Ms Schibrowski said the student-focused approach to learning requires teachers to propose projects which will contribute to the shared goal for the term. Students choose to work on two projects that interest them, rather than choosing subjects as had been done in the past.

"Previously, we had trouble filling music classes despite having a great teacher," she said.

"Now we develop projects that cater to their interests but also make sure we cover the material they need to know," she said.

For example, Term One's "Survival" theme incorporated a week-long camp, and saw students develop a camp CD, make camp stools, devise menus, sew carry bags and design maps.

Ms Schibrowski said she offered staff two models of change to improve the school's approach to the Middle Phase of Learning — a staged model or a boots and all option.

"The staff said 'Let's do it', so we're doing it fast and planning on the run, but the change is still grounded in research and good practice about the Middle Phase of Learning," she said.

Ms Schibrowski said the trial of multi-age classes and concept-based learning would be broadened next year to go across the whole curriculum.

"We're getting great results in terms of student engagement and behaviour, where previously our biggest problem was disengagement in the Middle Phase of Learning," she said.

Look out for more information about Clifton State High's Middle Phase of Learning initiatives coming soon to the Curriculum Exchange Middle Phase of Learning Gateway, located at www.education.qld.gov.au/tal/curriculum_exchange/teachers/mpl/

Ashwell dam busters learn through play

ACTIVE learning, including purposeful play, is a powerful way for children in the Prep year to develop vital skills and a positive disposition towards learning.

A focus on active learning and using children's interests to support child-negotiated learning are important features of the combined Prep to Year 2 program at Ashwell State School.

Highlighting this investigative, active approach to learning, classroom teacher Mrs Maree Frederiksen used an outdoor play experience to develop an in-depth investigation of the features of dams and their functions with her Prep students.

"As part of a rural community located in the Lockyer Valley west of Ipswich, most of the Prep children live on acreage or larger properties," Mrs Frederiksen said.

"Consequently, dams, water and water conservation are popular topics of conversation and this led the Prep children to develop an interest in building dams in the sandpit during outdoor play.

"One day during outdoor play activities, the children made a dam and decided they needed to construct a sign to warn other children to take care because of the deep water. A large sign was attached to the sandpit saying 'Danger! Deep Water'.

"However, on their return at the lunch break the children were mystified to discover the dam water had disappeared.

"The children took the loss of the water in their stride, rebuilt and re-filled the dam, only to discover the water had disappeared again.

"Much problem-solving, discussion and cooperative play followed as the children experimented with ways to solve the problem of the disappearing water," she said.

The class sought assistance from P&C president and local property



Ashwell State School Prep students experiment with the water-holding capacity of the sandpit dam.

owner Mr Krebs, who had just built a new dam on land nearby.

Mrs Frederiksen said by contacting the property owner for permission to inspect his new dam, formulating questions to ask him and seeking advice about its construction, not only expanded the Prep children's knowledge of dam building, it also helped develop important communication and social skills.

Following their excursion to the nearby dam the class created new dam designs.

"With the help of some plastic lining and tubing to pump water in and out of the sandpit, the Prep children

succeeded in creating an effective dam," Mrs Frederiksen said.

"The Prep children then used digital photos taken of the dam construction, investigations in the sandpit and the excursion to co-construct a classroom book.

"This permanent reminder of a real-life experience documents children's understandings of how to sustain the environment through water conservation, and is now shared with parents and visitors to the classroom.

"The whole experience was a wonderful opportunity for experimentation, communication, cooperation and perseverance."

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