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Tackling disadvantage through student centred learning – Exploring the ‘Worlds of Work’ in the Melbourne CBD

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Abstract

As the educational landscape increasingly mirrors deepening socio-economic cleavages within Australian society, the disparity in educational outcomes has been identified as one of the biggest challenges confronting secondary schooling. In contrast with most OECD countries, family background remains the most important determinant of educational achievement in Australia. More and more, schools are defined by location, reinforcing what has been dubbed the ‘circular pattern of disadvantage’. At the same time, recognition of strong links between outcomes, socio-economic status (SES) and location has elicited growing calls for systematic redefining of learning experiences and the public education framework. Focus on flexible, rigorous, community-oriented, person-centred learning opportunities has predicated multiple mentoring and youth schemes and has guided policy. Recognition of the need to re-engage Year 9 and 10 students underpinned development of VELs, for instance; it has also directed the programming priorities of the Education Foundation (now in alliance with The Foundation for Young Australians (FYA)).

This paper will discuss first, how schools perceive the programs have made a difference to both individual students and the curriculum offered in the schools, and second, how the experiences and activities provided through the program have changed the expectations and aspirations that many of the participants have in regard to how they perceive their future, their engagement with school and their careers. Both the City Centre (now know as Cityscape) and Worlds of Work (WOW) programs have received a very positive student response to real world activities that have demonstrably enhanced the development of reflective processes, interpersonal and social skills and social networks. Practical outcomes have included self-organised work experience, the development of mentor relationships and the re-engagement of some students with the schooling process. Interview data confirmed FYA’s

assessment that its programs have greatest impact when integrated into a school's curriculum rather than as 'stand alone' electives.

Introduction

At the beginning of the 21st century, the educational landscape increasingly reflects the deepening economic divide within Australia. At one end of the spectrum, our school students are reportedly performing as well as the best in the OECD (Black, 2006a). At the other end, there is strong evidence to indicate that educational outcomes are worsening for many young people and that significant numbers are either under-achieving or in danger of opting out of the schooling process. As the full panorama of 'work, family and community undergoes sweeping and fundamental change, Australia is becoming more and more a high performing and low equity country' (Black, 2006a:1, 2007a:8-11; Dusseldorp, 1999:3). In this paper we will outline the process and outcomes from two programs currently conducted by the Foundation for Young Australians at the City Learning Centre in the CBD in Melbourne. The two programs (Cityscape and Worlds of Work or WOW) are among a number of initiatives offered by FYA that seek to redress educational disadvantage through the provision of personalised learning experiences outside the school.

Historically, these programs have been offered to schools as stand-alone, individual programs. In the past, the repeat involvement of schools in these programs has been fairly low. Over the last three years there is a growing trend for schools to adopt a number of FYA programs on an increasingly long-term and committed basis. As schools continue to use the programs it is more likely that they will be integrated into the school curriculum in Years 9 and 10. As many of these schools are located in some of the most socio economically disadvantaged areas in Victoria with some of the lowest educational outcomes for students (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2008), we will discuss first, how schools perceive the programs have made a difference to both individual students and the curriculum offered in the schools, and second, how the experiences and activities provided through the programs have changed the expectations and aspirations that many of the participants have in regard to their future, their engagement with school and their careers.

This paper will use data collected from some of the schools which have accessed the two programs and which are located in some of the lowest socio economic area in Victoria as well as overall program data collected from participants and program staff. The data includes: interviews in 6 schools in metropolitan (4) and rural (2) Victoria conducted with principals (2), assistant principals (3), teachers (15) and students in Years 9 and 10 (38) up to six months after completing the programs; Interviews with WOW and Cityscape program staff; post program survey data from both programs (154 students surveyed for WOW in 2007 and 1668 students surveyed for the Cityscape program in 2008); written teacher and student reflections; recorded student feedback from all schools in the WOW program; and research notes from a half day reflective workshop on the WOW program, after the completion of the pilot, that was attended by students, teachers, workplace participants and facilitators.

Educational outcomes and SES

In voicing concern at the magnitude of the influence of social background on educational achievement in Australia, researchers have noted that the nexus between educational outcomes, socio-economic background and geography are more marked here than in many OECD countries. By contrast with the situation in Canada, Finland, Japan, Korea, Iceland or Sweden, family background remains the single most important determinant of academic achievement in Australia (McGaw in Black, 2007a:2; Black, 2006a & 2006b).

Recent studies of inequality in Australia confirm that young people from low socio-economic backgrounds consistently have the poorest educational outcomes and are the least likely to be involved in paid work (New South Wales Commission for Children and Youth, 2005) with the erosion of educational aspirations being ‘more common amongst young people from low SES families where parents have limited education and training than for students from homes with well-educated parents’ (Helme, Polesel, Teese, Tanya & Walstab, 2005:19). Young people from higher socio-economic backgrounds are able to respond to the increasing need for credentials by entering tertiary education pathways with young people from low socio-economic backgrounds half as likely to participate in higher education as their peers from medium or high socio-economic backgrounds (James, 2002).

The destinations data of school leavers in Victoria (Teese, Nicholas, Polesel, & Helme, 2006) confirms a strong correlation between socio-economic status of students and corresponding parental education levels with their school achievement and post school destinations. Nearly two thirds of all low achievers in Year 12 come from low to very low socio economic backgrounds while two thirds of high achievers are from high to very high socio economic backgrounds. Children of tertiary educated parents are more than twice as likely to enter university compared to children of parents who only completed primary or junior secondary schooling. Teese et al (2006) note, though, the role that education can play in reducing intergenerational disadvantage. It was found that “one quarter of the young people whose parents did not finish secondary school made a transition to higher education” and a further one fifth made a transition to higher level VET courses (Teese et al, 2006:21).

Rothman (2003:9) speaks of growing and worrying “socio-economic segmentation” in Australian schooling. Increasingly defined by location in an era of highly concentrated regional or district poverty, schools more and more reproduce and reinforce existing patterns of privilege and disadvantage. The so-called ‘circular pattern of disadvantage’ finds less affluent students “clustered in schools with poor educational outcomes located in economically depressed areas with low educational profiles”. Accordingly, “entrenched disadvantage is re-entrenched” (Black, 2007b:1; Koshland, 2006:1).

Keating and Lamb (2004) note that in both government and non-government systems, the schools facing the greatest hurdles are those with the lowest social and cultural capital to support them. While schools with high social capital can draw on parents with connections to business, industry and cultural organisations to facilitate enriching learning experiences, schools with low social capital have far more limited possibilities for partnership and resources to draw upon (Black, 2007).

Curriculum and Pedagogy

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There is general agreement that educational outcomes are affected by variables both external (i.e. geography, socio-economic background) and internal (curriculum and pedagogy) to school. As a result, middle years reform of what is taught and how it is taught has become a priority within Australian schools (Hill & Russell, 1999; Black, 2007a & 2007b; Department of Premier & Cabinet, 2005; Chadbourne, 2001).

Reducing the disparity in educational outcomes can, in part, be provided by redefining the learning experience along personalised or student centred lines (Bentley & Miller, 2004, Haberman, 1991). While revised pedagogy and curricula and improved teacher-student relationships can hardly be said to be the sole answer to the complex issue of entrenched disadvantage, still there is strong evidence that “changing the learning experience ... [can] ameliorate the effects of disadvantage and provide a way out of it” (Black, 2006b:1).

Cole (2006) notes that in regard to reforming teaching and learning at Year 9 there is a growing consensus that, to function effectively in the constantly changing information society, schools need to provide students with capacity and motivation to be: a community-builder; a team worker; intellectually curious; a problem-solver; self-regulating; reflective and independent, and flexible and adaptable. He notes that students respond positively to curriculum that links to lives outside as well as inside classroom what is often called authentic curriculum.

In Victoria, The Middle Years Research and Design (MYRAD) research identified the need to embed a strong and pervasive thinking curriculum approach in schools as this appeared to offer the greatest promise for establishing schooling experiences that fully engage young adolescents. Teaching and learning processes for this included the need to: present authentic tasks that require complex thought and allow time for exploration; include processes involving co-operation, communication, negotiation and social competencies generally; and provide for individual differences in interest, achievement and learning styles (CAER, 2002).

Recognition of the need to motivate, challenge and re-engage Year 9 and 10 students has underpinned development of the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS) which emphasises opportunities for interaction with the real world, intellectual risk-taking and teamwork. The VELs were developed in 2005 response to providing a curriculum approach that addresses ‘the economic and social changes associated with the development of a global, knowledge based world and their implications for schools’. There is acknowledgement that while schools have a ‘key role to play in developing skilled, flexible, responsible and creative young people’, curriculum has been slow to respond to the demands that society places on young people and has not provided systemic support to ‘developing learners who can apply their knowledge beyond the classroom to new and different situations’ (VCAA, 2007:1).

The second part of this paper will look at two Foundation for Young Australians programs, Cityscape (previously the City Centre) and WOW, and the work that these programs are doing to respond to the challenges outlined in the VELs documents. Established in 1989, as a successor to the Small Change Foundation, the Education Foundation, now in alliance with The Foundation for Young Australians (FYA), has initiated numerous learning initiatives and community-based educational experiences,

with the aim to ensure educational excellence and equity for all young Australians, particularly those identified as facing disadvantage and educational disengagement. FYA is currently running programs that draw on the findings from the MYRAD program including the need to provide present authentic tasks that require complex thought and allow time for exploration and include processes involving co-operation, communication and negotiation.

Since 2004, FYA has offered middle year students in Victorian government schools a series of programs aimed at promoting school/community partnerships and providing hands-on exposure to the corporate diversity of the CBD. It does this through the City Learning Centre, currently located in a premises in the centre of the city in the Melbourne Central complex. An estimated 3,300 students from over 50 state secondary settings currently access the CBD via such programs as Cityscape, WOW, Beyond the Classroom and STEP UP.

Approximately 50 schools send either their Year 9 or 10 students to Cityscape. Some schools send their entire Year 9 cohort while others send a select group. After students have attended Cityscape, some schools then select a more limited number of students to undertake the WOW program, either later in Year 9 or in Year 10.

City Learning Centre

In 2004, FYA opened its City Learning Centre premises, as a non-traditional classroom without walls, located in the CBD. The aim of the Centre is to provide and facilitate access to meaningfully interactive, 'real world' learning experiences that: (a) make appropriate and innovative use of community resources, and (b) offer students opportunities to explore their own needs and interests beyond the classroom. It is financed annually through FYA's partnerships with a range of corporate and philanthropic organizations and through each student paying to attend. The Cityscape program is guided by the educational principles underlying VELS including: Learning for all; Pursuit of excellence; Engagement and effort; Respect for evidence; and Openness of mind.

In the lead-up to the five day Cityscape experience, students complete a preliminary sequence of class-based exercises and activities at school, provided by the City Learning Centre facilitators. These include: preparation of a research brief; selection of work teams and topic of interest; and development of a hypothesis to be tested during the course of the program.

While at the City Learning Centre, students take part in a range of educational and motivational workshops for which the Centre draws on the skills and support of the Reach Foundation, Urban Seed, The Collingwood Football Club's Lexus Centre and SYN FM Radio. Students have an opportunity to learn team-building and development of action research skills. Student teams are required to independently investigate a chosen topic/theme within context of the CBD through discussion, interview, observation, internet access and group/personal reflection. On return to school, in subjects such as Maths, English and SOSE, students reflect on personal and team outcomes of the week, and analyse the data collected prior to formally presenting their findings to peers, staff and parents.

The following survey results were gathered from 1668 students who have accessed Cityscape in 2008. The survey was completed at the end of the week at the City Learning Centre. It was found that 91% of students surveyed by FYA agreed that the program had added value to their education while a lesser number (67%) now felt more interested and motivated about learning.

Students then responded to some of the challenges outlined in the VELs documents. 87% of survey respondents felt that, as a result of attending Cityscape, they had learned to think with an open mind, accept people's differences and be open in new and unusual situations. 87% had faced challenges, solved problems and tried new things, staying positive and motivated and 83% were more likely to look for opportunities to learn by engaging in the world around them.

One of the problems of week-long programs that take students out of the classroom is the impact or lack of impact that these programs have on mainstream schooling overall. An example of how Cityscape has been integrated into the school curriculum, and has begun to impact on the delivery of curriculum in mainstream schooling, is provided through this brief case study of a large secondary school (1400 students) located in a low SES area in the outer south eastern suburbs of Melbourne. Prior to 2005, students had not been engaging with the traditional curriculum offered at Year 9 and non attendance had been a concern to the school. The Year 9 program was then rethought using a team-teaching approach to develop cross-curricular themes targeting numeracy, literacy, engagement, motivation, VELs dimensions and skill development in ICT. One of the teachers developing the new program described why they looked at FYA's Cityscape program (previously the City Centre). He commented:

We needed a program that was different., that challenged the kids and gave teachers ideas on different approaches to Year 9. We wanted everyone involved ... We heard about City Centre, and found it fitted in with our philosophy and [would be] a model for the staff involved.

The assistant principal commented further that after three years of attendance that:

City Centre has helped shape the Year 9 program. There are activities for two weeks prior to attending City Centre and then five weeks after. Teachers do familiarization for a couple of days to the City before starting the program. And also go to the local Shopping Centre with the students for the students to test their questions prior to heading to the program in the city. The kids now get greater benefit out of City Centre because they are well prepared. This is very evident this year.

There have been further changes in teacher practice that have now become apparent across other year levels in the school. The school has found that because groups of teachers are attending Cityscape and seeing the way that the facilitators encourage student responsibility and independence, they are also bringing back this way of teaching to the school. Because teachers teach at many year levels they are bring more discussion into the classroom, and as the assistant principal commented, '*being less of the teacher out the front*'. He also commented that in a recent staff forum of the 100 teachers at the school that there was recognition of the need to change the teaching philosophy of the school to focusing on students taking responsibility. He felt that

teachers now embraced the inquiry mode of teaching and learning. He commented that he didn't realize that involvement in Cityscape would have such a positive effect on the teachers at the school and that it had been an unexpected bonus that Cityscape had provided a practical model for teachers.

Although this was not the case in all schools in which teachers and school administration were interviewed, greater uptake at the mainstream curriculum level was identified when Cityscape and other FYA programs such as WOW were integrated as part of the year's program, at either Year 9 or 10; the school had been attending Cityscape for a few years; and there was support by school administration of Cityscape's philosophy in regard to teaching and learning

Another FYA initiative has been its Worlds of Work (WOW) Program, which was trialled as a pilot project in the second half of 2007. As an offshoot of the Cityscape and Welcome to My World programs, the WOW pilot sought to build, for young people facing disadvantage and a limited knowledge of what was possible, the capacity of its target population to participate in future global worlds of work. The students undertook personalised learning experiences to enhance this capacity. WOW staff facilitators and representatives of 14 workplaces across the CBD role modelled career satisfaction, authenticity and curiosity, emphasising that learning is (or can be) fun. The workplaces included large financial organisations, department stores, manufacturers, local government, state government departments and non government organisations.

Approximately 270 middle years students (approximately 25 from each school) and teachers (2 teachers from each school) participated in the pilot program. While in most cases they were selected from the Year 9 population of schools defined as facing disadvantage, program staff sought to sample a broader cross-section of the target population by including a country high school, schools in less socioeconomically disadvantaged areas and a Year 10 group from an inner city school with a more diverse socio-economic population mix. In some cases the WOW week was offered by the school as a one off 'stand alone' educational experience; in others, it was undertaken as a follow-up to an earlier Cityscape experience and was an integrated part of a school's careers syllabus.

The program comprised a five day sequence of activities and workshops that were designed to enhance the participants' connectedness with the City of Melbourne, provide them with real-life opportunities to explore the theme of success in life and work, and help them recognise and develop skills and strengths needed to create their own pathways. Activities included communication and enterprise skills workshops, presentations by inspirational speakers, physical fitness activities, breakfasts, lunches and other sessions in boardrooms and workplaces across the Melbourne CBD, and street and precinct navigation exercises. The students learnt communication and networking skills in the workshops that they then utilized in the workplaces they visited and in the interviews that they conducted. In the workplaces and on the street students conducted interviews and networked with city workers while focussing on questions such as 'What is success?' and 'What is career?'

While the content was designed to challenge the students increasingly as the week progressed, so as to maximise their sense of achievement at the end of each program

segment, the facilitators were conscious of the importance of striking a balance between expanding possibilities and grounding young people in real life. The facilitators used some sessions to assist students to reflect on the learning that they had been undertaking although some teachers interviewed felt that these sessions could have been used to draw out more from the students with the facilitators moving too quickly to the next point of view from the students. The teachers concerned felt that this would have enhanced the depth of learning achieved by the students.

Outcomes of WOW

Many of the young people who attended the WOW pilot came from schools in areas that have a “circular pattern of disadvantage” (Black, 2007b:1) and where many students have low educational aspirations and attainment. A number of schools are located in the northern suburbs of Melbourne that has half of all secondary schools in the bottom 20% of State VCE (Year 12) performance and almost 40% of primary schools in the bottom 20% of standard literacy benchmarks (Tomazin, 2008). The schools in the program have the lowest levels of post school university enrolments in Victoria and high rates of post Year 12 students looking for work (DEECD, 2008). This correlates with earlier research that found that lower achieving students are more likely to experience unsuccessful transitions from school to employment (Lamb & McKenzie, 2001) and that students with the lowest academic achievement in the middle years had the lowest rates of participation in Year 12 and higher education (Marks, Fleming, Long & McMillan, 2000). Because the Cityscape and WOW programs have only been in operation for 3 and 1 year respectively, none of the initial participants have as yet reached Year 12. So at this stage a comparison in outcomes cannot be made. Despite this the schools are hopeful that the programs will make a difference to these students. As one assistant principal from a school in a low socio-economic area commented:

It's the standard thing – kids do apprenticeships, don't leave the local area. We're actively aware of the problem – kids won't travel to uni from here. Kids are offered places at unis but they knock them back because it is too far to travel and they are unsure. We wanted to broaden horizons.

Schools in general found that students were more willing to undertake the WOW program when it was integrated as part of the careers program and when it was used as a follow on activity to Cityscape. When students had previously completed Cityscape they were more familiar with the CBD environment and with the inquiry, independent mode of learning that was required.

While acknowledging that it only a one week experience, the WOW program provided activities throughout that week to develop the skills and confidence of these young people and their teachers to return to school with confidence to draw more from and enhance their educational experience. The activities developed are closely related to the VELS curriculum guidelines that emphasise opportunities for interaction with the real world, intellectual risk taking and teamwork.

Overall, student responses to the WOW program were very positive, with a number of participants saying this had been the best week of their school lives. In general teacher

and school administration feedback was very positive as well. Some concerns though were raised about the applicability of the program to all students as the worker experiences that the students encountered were mainly focussed on business and this was not the career direction that all students would follow. The teachers from rural schools while appreciating the opportunities that the city experience offered did not feel that the work place visits were as relevant to their students.

Much of the appeal of the WOW program to students lay in a different approach to teaching and learning than was happening for them at school. Many of the students interviewed agreed that the program was more conducive to learning than school. They found the program had the element of learning that they enjoyed most at school including more hands on activities and less writing and listening activities. As one teacher observed:

“In the classroom the students are told what to do”, [whereas] at WOW they were taught skills and a chance to use some of these skills such as leadership, team work, showing initiative and taking responsibility. It was a chance for the students to operationalise these”.

Students responded with comments that underlined the importance they placed on their roles and responsibilities in their learning such as *“You were doing it yourself”, “I was able to do things my way”, “WOW opened up new thoughts and understandings about the workplace”*, and *“I felt I had more freedom”*.

One teacher from a school in a low SES area of Melbourne remarked:

“Our kids generally think they’re no good ... this Worlds of Work gives them confidence in being able to do anything”.

Teachers interviewed and/or surveyed after the WOW program expressed surprise and pleasure at the complex thinking, work capacity and development of reflective processes typically displayed by students over the course of the week. There was recognition by both students and teachers that some young people’s abilities had been insufficiently tested or challenged back at school and, in some cases, teachers acknowledged a need to modify their own preconceptions and increase their expectations of what students are able to achieve. Students interviewed expressed surprise at their own level of engagement, their capacities for application to tasks and at how the tasks enhanced their understanding of concepts such as work, career and success.

Responses from students interviewed indicated that students finished the WOW program with a renewed sense of the importance in achieving at school and of engaging with the schooling process. According to one participant interviewed six months after completing the program:

“You realise you have to have school ... it’s really, really important”.

According to another:

“WOW gave me a better attitude about school and what’s important... now I come home happier. Mum is pleased”.

This was reinforced by survey data in which it was stated that, as a result of WOW, 75% of students said they would work harder at school, 71% said they would stay longer at school and 78% of students now felt they took more responsibility for their learning than they would have done previously.

The program addresses a number of factors that impact on outcomes for the young people post Year 12 and provides skills training and other opportunities to address these factors. These include: developing interpersonal and social skills; developing social and work related networks and developing mentor relationships.

The data highlighted the great value of the week in nurturing the confidence of the young participants, in developing their interpersonal and social skills, and in expanding their social and work related networks. These social networks were both at school and out of school while the work related networks were out of school and out of their local area. Students, sometimes for the first time at some schools, began to broaden their locational horizons and develop the confidence to draw on networks that were outside of their previous, very local experiences. The visits to the workplaces gave students access to workplace networks that they (and some of the teachers) never knew existed. This was very important for students at those schools in Victoria that have the lowest rates of VCE performance, the lowest rates of post school study and highest rates of unemployment after finishing school.

From the survey conducted, the young people indicated as a result of their participation in WOW, a positive response to factors that could influence their post school choices. These included: 82% of students now thinking more about the type of work experience they would like to do; 79% now believing they have a clearer view of how they would like to work in the future; 77% feeling more confident about doing job interviews and 76% planning to do further or different studies after leaving school

Broadening networks outside school

A number of students who have completed the WOW program have made use of skills learned and contacts made at Cityscape to develop personal and work related networks. In the six months following participation in the pilot program, for example, some students have completed or arranged work experience with several of the city companies visited or at the City Learning Centre itself. In the case of one school, the student in question was among the first ever to attempt work experience outside the local area. Without the WOW program, she would not have been aware of the possibility or have had the necessary contacts. As one of the teachers commented:

“The most useful aspect of WOW was definitely the contacts”, “... Now [the kids] know they can ring the person whose number or e-mail they got. They would never have thought of work experience in the City before”.

Two students at another school developed their understanding of where they wanted to go in their career pathway at the WOW week after doing many of the pathways related activities. With the new sense of what was possible, they had the confidence to successfully approach larger workplaces, (a carpentry firm and the maintenance section of the airport) and arrange work experience in their chosen areas.

Students have also returned to some of the workplaces at the invitation of the workplaces to present to staff about their experiences. Others have done volunteer work at some of the aid organizations involved in the WOW program.

One careers teacher felt, though, that these possible networks and contacts needed to be provided for the students in a more structured way so that more students could make better use of them. He suggested that a data base of business contacts be developed and given to careers teachers in the schools involved.

Mentor relationships

For many participants in WOW, a valuable aspect of the week was the opportunity to discuss career aspirations and possibilities with sympathetic and informed adult listeners. As one student observed:

“Our ideas about success changed over the week. Talks with the City Centre staff helped us along the way”.

A key objective of WOW was the provision of **role models** and a key outcome of the program was the development, through interactions with facilitators and workplace representatives, of **mentor relationships** that supplied students with contacts, awareness of options and sources of advice.

Integrating of the program into the school structure

School structure could play a major part in whether students were willing to undertake the WOW program. Where the WOW program was offered in isolation, i.e. as an elective rather than as an integrated part of the overall curriculum, there was less willingness on the part of students to undertake the program and the fear factor, in particular the fear of travel out of the local area and into the city, came into play. When it was an isolated program, parents were also less willing to either encourage or allow their children to travel into the city. Schools integrated the program into the curriculum in different ways. The most common approaches were either through an integrated Year 9 program in which Cityscape and WOW were part of the program or as part of career education in the school, generally in Year 10. WOW tends to be an optional extra for students in Years 9 or 10 while Cityscape is often provided for the entire Year 9 cohort.

The following two schools provide an example of how it is integrated in some schools. Both schools are in low socio economic locations. One secondary school has 1400 students and is located approximately one hour from the city by train while the other has approximately 400 students and is located 20 minutes from the city by train.

At the smaller secondary college, all Year 9 students had completed an integrated program called *Learning journeys* on the school site during terms 1 and 2. This program includes skills training, using similar approaches to that undertaken in Cityscape and the WOW program such as team-oriented activities, the construction of hypotheses and the presentation of research papers. Students then complete the week-long Cityscape program in Term 2 or 3 and then the WOW program in Term 4. As a

result of this year long process of orientation and skills development the teacher found that students (and their parents) tended to be much more “open” to the option of undertaking WOW in Term 4. She commented: *“Going into Melbourne Central [was already] built in, part of the culture”*, giving it a degree of legitimacy with students and parents.

At the larger secondary college, WOW was integrated into the semester -long careers education program in Year 10. As the assistant principal commented:

Everybody goes to City Centre in Year 9. When you say ‘Here’s the next stage’ (ie WOW), they’re on board. If it wasn’t for City Centre, we wouldn’t get the same level of interest or enthusiasm.

The school has found that because of the Cityscape experience, a number of students are willing to apply for WOW and can see that it will have benefits for them.

Conclusion

Both the Cityscape and WOW programs provide positive examples of learning experiences that go beyond the classroom. It was described by one teacher as learning by doing –explicitly teaching communication and networking skills and then giving the students opportunities to practice them in new environments that constantly challenged them to ‘step up’ with support from facilitators and teachers.

Strategies used in the programs, in particular the forging of school-community-corporate partnerships, the provision of wider work networks and delivery of coherent, relevant and personalised curriculum, provide an important start for the possibility of students in areas of socio economic disadvantage to leave school with the opportunities to engage with tertiary study and different employment options.

Both programs (in common with other FYA initiatives) provide participants with an awareness of possibilities through the provision of learning environments and ‘real world’ experiences that they previously had no access to or knowledge about. Experiencing success in this program has then encouraged the students to try other initiatives and open ended learning experiences offered by the school such as mentoring, attending conferences and working with the local community that continue to enhance their engagement with school.

While only one week programs in themselves, the integrating of the Cityscape and WOW programs into either the Year 9 program or the Year 10 careers education program greatly enhanced the extended learning opportunities for the students, both before attending the programs and on return to school. Integrating the programs into the curriculum then provided the possibility for change in other year levels as teachers brought back some of the teaching strategies that enhanced students taking responsibility for their learning and parent participation at the school. The presentations enabled parents to participate in their own and other children’s achievements.

As one assistant principal commented:

The kids presenting findings has been huge. We had never thought of it – City Centre taught us about having audiences beyond teachers. There has been a big improvement in parent participation.

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