NSW SCHOOL TO WORK PROGRAM
SCHOOL CASE STUDY

TO TEACH OR NOT TO TEACH VOCATIONAL LEARNING

One of the priorities of the School to Work Program is the integration of vocational learning into classroom practice by providing a context and relevance for students to their life beyond school.

THE HENRY LAWSON HIGH SCHOOL

The Henry Lawson High School is a small, rural, isolated and CAP funded secondary school in Western NSW region. The majority of its students come from agricultural middle class anglo saxon backgrounds. The school currently has 30 staff members with a low staff turnover. Many staff also have an agricultural background and several have lived in the district all their lives. Staff, parents and students have a close association to the Grenfell community and its schools.

BACKGROUND

The Henry Lawson High School has consistently supported the career and transition needs of its students by:

- Encouraging Year 11 and 12 leavers to obtain a first aid certificate, a tax file number and complete a résumé.
- Supporting TAFE accreditation in at least one VET area for all exiting students. Currently five VET and many TVET subjects are offered to senior students. All Year 10 students are given the opportunity to undertake the OH&S course in Construction.
- Encouraging those students “at risk” of leaving school early to complete workplace learning activities which assist them to understand the relevance and importance of their schooling in preparation for work.

In 2004, The Henry Lawson High School welcomed a new careers adviser to the staff who emphasised the importance of these school to work initiatives and identified ways of building on them. It was decided that the focus areas for 2004 would be to strengthen the profile of the School to Work Planning Employment Related Skills Logbook across the school and begin to incorporate vocational learning into current teaching programs across all subject areas.

VOCATIONAL LEARNING IS NOTHING ‘NEW’

Teachers at The Henry Lawson High School quickly recognised that they have a key role to play in providing vocational learning opportunities in their classroom programs. The new careers adviser supported teachers as they embarked on this new direction.

Developing quality teaching and learning programs has become a key priority for the school and some teachers have recently developed some outstanding units of work that now fully engage students. Many staff have come to realise is that it is the vocational learning context for their new programs that is partially responsible for this increased engagement with learning.

Earlier in the year Year 7 students proudly showed the careers adviser a photo-diary they had completed as part of an English assignment. It included reflections of their childhood and primary school achievements and ended with a visualization of the career they would like to have in the future.
“Students were really proud of these diaries”, said their English teacher and their Year 7 adviser. “They were so engaged by the challenge to produce something personal which is so valued by them.”

Design and technology teachers at the school have developed a Year 7 unit of work focusing on vocational learning where students spend time in the computer room incorporating aspects of design into computer programs including Paint, Word and PowerPoint.

As a result students have invented their own travel company and developed a company logo that is attached to workplace documents. After researching the position vacant ads in newspapers, students advertised for their own staff by designing a professional ‘positions vacant’ advertisement and making a ‘job offer’ on their own company letterhead. The highlight of the unit is a PowerPoint company advertisement they presume will be screened at the local cinema. These slides are then reduced to form a z-card style business card to show to family and friends.

“Students had so much fun during this activity and said it just felt normal to be learning so many employment related skills,” says their design and technology teacher.

‘Developing employment related skills in the classroom’ is now everyday terminology for staff and students at The Henry Lawson High School. The careers adviser attended a P&C meeting to introduce parents to the logbook via the Logging on to the Future video clip, an excellent tool to promote discussion on the importance of the logbooks.

Armed with copies of the logbook, the careers adviser attends the Year 10 parent teacher night capturing this opportunity to discuss with parents the meaning of employment related skills, the integral nature of the logbook for developing a resume and the importance of school to work planning.

The HSIE Head Teacher has been very supportive of the work of the careers adviser and has invited her to speak with his staff on the value of teaching employment related skills in the classroom. “As a result of this, all of the HSIE teachers invited me into their Year 10 classes at the conclusion of a unit of work and together we ran brainstorming sessions where the topic was summarized and key employment related skills were documented”, said the Careers Adviser.

“Each session only took about fifteen or twenty minutes, but after that, students had a plethora of skills listed in their logbooks to draw upon later when they were writing their résumés”, she said.

Year 10 subject selection time was another opportunity the careers adviser seized to promote vocational learning across the curriculum. “I spoke to all head teachers about the Vocational Learning booklets for their subject areas after locating copies around the school and demonstrated how the information could be used to assist students to undertake their Year 11 and 12 courses.

Some head teachers produced handouts from the Vocational Learning booklets that outlined to students the related areas of study at university as well as credit transfer arrangements for TAFE and university. Some teachers used the booklets to discuss the employment related skills students would acquire in their senior courses in response to students asking why they should study their courses.

The English head teacher was so impressed with one unit of work he found in the his Vocational Learning booklet he approached the careers adviser in the playground saying “that unit of work is just what I was looking for to leave for my Year 11 boys when I’m away next week. Thanks.”